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Expanding Our Space: Stories of Mindful Practice

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EXPANDING OUR SPACE: STORIES OF MINDFUL PRACTICE

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation tells the story of a qualitative, narrated inquiry study on the narrated experiences of the students and teacher who participated in a mindfulness workshop, designed by the teacher-researcher, and learned within a classroom where the teacher-researcher used mindfulness techniques as a part of their classroom life. This study was designed as an inquiry into the question: How do the students and teacher narrate their experiences as members in a mindfulness workshop over the course of a year? The teacher-researcher collected audio recordings of interviews with participants and whole group discussions that occurred within the workshop and classroom. These discussions were then analyzed using a Constant-Comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) while the teacher-researcher rooted herself in methodological and epistemological theories around story and self-study. She then presented her findings as a narrative of the year together in the Findings & Discussion chapter. The dissertation closes with the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

PREFACE: STORIES AND CENTERS

Introduction: Stories and Centers

It was told to you forty years later by the ten-year old who heard it, along with her great-aunt, by the campfire, on a dark and starry night in California; and though it is, I believe, a Plains Indian story, she heard it told in English by an anthropologist of German antecedents. But by remembering it he made the story his; and insofar as I have remembered it, it is mine; and now, if you like, *it's yours*. In the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood. Take the tale in your teeth, then, bite till the blood runs, hoping it's not poison; and we will all come to the end together, and even to the beginning: living, as we do, *in the middle* (Le Guin, 1980).

Living in the Middle

In the span of our lives, we often sort time into past, present, and future. The middle category, the present, is the place where we can actually engage the business of living and taking action. In telling stories, narratologists might lead us to believe that the most conflictual and thrilling action occurs somewhere in the middle. In mindfulness philosophy, the path that involves living a mindful life is often referred to as The Middle Way. In my study, the middle is a space that I explored for the past year. I use this quote from Ursula LeGuin to help me take the first step of sharing that journey with you. Ursula LeGuin is an author to whom I was introduced by a friend of mine, Daniel, who

enjoys critiquing my intense focus on reading philosophy books. He reminds me often that all the learning I do from non-fiction reading in philosophy can be garnered even more thoroughly and with contextual integrity from a fiction story. Daniel spends a good part of his life reading and learning from fantasy, including Ursula LeGuin's work. Just as Daniel did for me, here LeGuin (1980) outlines why we as human beings might tell stories and how they, with an almost innate fitting, give shape to our lives.

In this piece, I offer you stories. Some of those stories are about my life experiences. Some are about the life experiences of others. Some are about how I lived my learning. Some are about my philosophical beliefs and some are about the logistics of my research. All are stories that I have taken "in my teeth" as I guide us (you, the reader, and me, the writer) to the end together. As we begin, I offer my gratitude for your willingness to listen.

Center Lines

"So when you get in the boat, you're gonna feel for your center line. Now... it's not an actual line," said the sprightly young kayak guide as he steadied the boat, inviting us to step inside.

It was a Sunday morning, and my friend Anna and I had decided to rent a kayak and spend the morning on a marsh. With our personal floatation devices snugly secured and our paddles appropriately height-adjusted, we listened carefully to his instructions. We learned how to orient the laminated map, paddle in response to the current as the tides changed, and how to most effectively employ the paddle blade in the water to make the boat go.

We decided on a tandem kayak - one boat with two seats in it. We set out, smiling to ourselves that our teenage buddy had just informed us that this line, by which we sought to keep ourselves balanced, was not actually a visible entity.

After a year of research in mindfulness with a group of children, I feel that I may have uncovered some things about the physical and/or sensory effects and even the existence of this figurative center line. The idea of a center line became an interesting physical concept for me to consider as just one more iteration of how we live in the middle. Navigating that middle played out often in our learning together. That Middle Way is the way between over-indulgence of sensory pleasures and self-effacing acts. Throughout our year together, mindfulness philosophies supported us navigating sometimes difficult binary-laden terrains. My students and I found ourselves considering binaries that implied a need for those considering them to side with one extreme or another. These appeared in the ways we learned together in the middle of political splits as we chose a new United States President in the fall of 2016, social splits as we tried to decide the best course of action with our friends, or ideological splits as we tried to determine the best way to act in situations involving personal ethics and responsibility. In thinking about the best way to approach these binaries as the teacher leading the learning, I also had to consider how I had handled them in my own life.

Binaries and Pendulums

Throughout my own life and learning, I often found myself chained to political, cultural, and social binaries – and felt obligated to pick a side, argue it, and act from it. I found solace in the like-minded people in my life, and I bolstered my arguments when I would engage in discussion with those people I saw as not like-minded. I formed my

identities and even my understandings of what an *identity* or a *self* was around the available identities that these social alliances provided me. This way of understanding identity and living into identities seemed to be a productive way for me to find personal integrity. I would decide the kind of person I wanted to be and surround myself with those kinds of people. However, I often found living life that way made it difficult to shift and change my own ways of being when I learned new things about the world or discovered new things about myself. I began feeling stuck.

I found that when I saw the world as split between two sides, my role became aligning *with* something or fighting *against* something. As a result, I used much of my energy toward understanding, figuring out, or getting a handle on the socio-politically *right* view of the world. When I saw myself only through the lens that an external or socially constructed identity provided me, no matter what that identity was, I began to wonder if I was limiting my personal possibility for growth. For example, if I identified as a Democrat, what did that necessitate for my understandings and actions in a political realm? What kinds of things might I be assuming about the world that limit what I am willing to notice about the world, given that world view? Through my work in mindfulness, I started to story these alliances I had been using to define myself as constricting and restrictive. Within my mindfulness practices, I directed attention toward the present moment and my experience, intentionally moving my attention away on all the things I had written, done, said, or even been in the past. I began moving my attention toward things like the experience of my body when certain thoughts happened or the physical sensations of the air on my skin. Over time, spending time in the present moment practicing the shifting of attention, the grip I used to hold those identities

softened and I began to feel freer. I started to revise the stories I had been telling myself about me. My character in my stories became dynamic and a little unpredictable. Who I was, right now, as I sat, breathed, and noticed my attention did not need to be a card-carrying member of anything. In the middle of practicing mindfulness, I was not answering to anyone or any socio-political structure, I could simply be. And what is more important is that I could listen without the things I heard having to mean anything immediately.

I dedicated myself, this year, to trying to listen well not just in my mindfulness practice when I sat for a meditation, but in my research into mindfulness with students and therefore into my teaching. To frame that listening, I wondered: What would I hear about others' experiences when I sought to see them through lenses other than the socio-political identity lenses I held so close to my sense of self before? What was possible when I allowed myself to listen openly for what could be, as opposed to seeing only the attempted solutions to problems I had seen before? What happened in situations with my students when we stopped chanting the rhetoric we heard on the news or at the dinner table, and practiced deeply listening to the news, our thoughts about it, and how we physically felt after hearing it? What would happen if we stopped to notice the visceral reactions to our experiences or those of people different from us as indicators of what is happening in a given moment? Could we determine our actions or stances around a given issue or topic by feeling for and finding that center line, then making a conscious choice from a place of presence, without the necessity of an already established rhetoric from an already established socio-political binary?

Swinging and Stepping

Often I envision social, political, or moral binaries existing in the path of a metaphorical pendulum. By definition, pendulums pause briefly on the extremities of their paths, and quickly swing in the other direction. As an example of my living within the binary, I had often attempted to assess the two poles of a political or social debate captured my attention. I worked to clearly see the two sides in order to align with the one that seemed right. The problem with this way of moving attention and inquiring into a debate is that the pendulum itself, and our collective social attention in this metaphor, moves a lot but goes nowhere: the binaries themselves stagnate us. We can locate the poles of a debate. We can even find where we fit within it, but how does that serve us or social progress? Living in a democracy requires that we participate actively in our culture and government, making sure that we share our perspectives, needs, and visions of the future, and we listen well to others' perspectives, needs, and visions of the future (Hyde and LaPrad, 2015). When we consider how these things take shape over disparate groups we realize that a “participatory democracy requires an engaged citizenry, working across communities of difference to examine and revise social arrangements,” (p. 2). I agree that acknowledging these differences is necessary. However, to dwell in them only serves to isolate and further divide us as a society.

What might happen if we carefully and thoughtfully listened to what another stakeholder is saying in light of our own experience and then take an action from that place of deep listening? Politics and greater social arenas are places where these binaries often play out, however, they exist in school, too. In school, binaries of good and bad, smart and dumb, high and low level, boy and girl, popular and social outcast, etc.

promote the same stagnation as those in the political realm. All the back and forth swinging left me wondering: What might happen if we were to break out of these redundant planes of reactive oscillation, listen carefully, and take a step in a different direction altogether?

Understanding Apprenticeships in Mindful Practice

I use the term *practice* (as a noun) to describe the engagement in a series of acts, repeated regularly in ways that evoke a set of beliefs or theories about the world and acting in it. Mindfulness is therefore a practice. I draw on Kabat-Zinn's (2011) work to define mindfulness as a personal practice that engages a way of being in the world and seeing the world that is rooted in present-moment, non-judgmental awareness. As an educator committed to inquiry, I rely on my own inquiry processes and practices to support my classroom teaching. For example, when I plan the learning engagements that happen in my classroom, I consider my own processes as an author or mathematician to help me decide what I say and do to teach writing or math. As outlined by the ways I draw on my own practices to teach others, I envision learning as an apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990). I do so because apprentice-type relationships are used to give shape to learning in so many ways, all around the world outside of school. When adults live their own personal practices around children, inviting and supporting them in doing the same, we provide the precise conditions within which our children learn. Much of the learning we do is so complex, so multifaceted, that it cannot be reduced to a set of directives. In living these real-life apprenticeships, we come to know not just how to do, but possible ways to be. These aspects of being are subtle, implicit, delicate, and necessary to the experience of learning (Gee, 2011; Dewey, 1938; Rogoff, 1990).

When I made the decision to bring mindfulness techniques and habits into the ways we live and learn each day in my classroom. I carefully considered the ways that I could employ an apprenticeship model, bringing some of my mindfulness practices into the classroom. Within an apprenticeship relationship, the more experienced party in the relationship keeps in mind what she sees in the practices of her apprentices to determine next steps. As we practiced mindfulness in our daily routines, I noticed shifts in how we engaged with one another, how we engaged the curriculum, and even how we engaged ourselves. I saw promise for these ways of being to permeate all learning and action in our world. These observations sparked my desire to study my students' experiences as early practitioners of mindfulness.

The purpose of my study was to support me in understanding how my participants experience this extension of the budding mindfulness apprenticeships I noticed in my classroom. My goal in this study was to learn about the ways that I am and my participants experience life while engaging in a school-year long mindfulness practice workshop.

Type of Study and Research Questions

I conducted a qualitative research study on my participants' life experiences across multiple contexts while they were engaging in a seven month-long mindfulness practice workshop after school and in my classroom during the school day. I used a compilation of techniques to make sense of the data. Some of these techniques drew on other qualitative researchers (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rosen, 1985), and some were ways of making sense that I derived from my theoretical frame of understanding this study. I outline those in detail in Chapter 3. I sought to understand how the students narrated their

experiences during the time they were participating in an afterschool mindfulness practice community at the Center for Inquiry, a public magnet elementary school of choice in a large suburban school district in the southeastern US.

Initially, my primary question was:

-How do my students and I narrate our experiences as members in a mindfulness workshop over the course of a year?

My initial subquestions were:

- In what ways do stories vary across school and life contexts?
- In what ways do stories vary among participants?
- In what ways do stories vary over time?
- What impact, if any, will participants' experience in the mindfulness workshop or classroom have on their ways of being across the contexts of their lives?

Significance of the Study

My mindfulness practices supported me in enhancing and deepening my reflection and learning. They have helped me make more conscious choices as a teacher, learner, and human being. Similarly, my reflections on my professional practice (Schon, 1983; Dewey, 1910; Peirce, 1877/1955) have helped me understand that it is vital for me to help my students engage in reflective practice so they also can make more conscious choices, and mindfulness may offer us an avenue for doing that deeply reflective work.

Researchers in mindfulness techniques in the spheres of medicine, psychology, and education have found that engaging these techniques improves awareness, emotional

regulation, self-compassion, and focus. Their use also reduces negative emotions and attitudes and increases positive emotions and attitudes, and learning capacity (Arthurson, 2015; Black & Ferando, 2014; Burrows, 2015; Coholic & Eys, 2016; Costello et al., 2014; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Frederickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Griggs & Tidwell, 2015; Hamel et al., 2013; Hoffman, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008; Linker, 2015; Mapel, 2012; Mendelson, Greenberg, Dariotis, Gould, Rhoades, & Leaf, 2010; Milligan, Baldi, & Spiroiu, 2015; Viafora, Mathiesen, & Unsworth, 2015; Moore, 2013; Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005; Wisner & Starzec, 2016). I intended to find and work within the intersections among the current findings in mindfulness research, my own practice as a learner, and the experiences of my participants and their/our actions toward a more peaceful, productive, and proactive curriculum.

Because I am a practitioner of mindfulness techniques, I sought to construct and enact curriculum that embodied my philosophy with integrity as opposed to my implementing a curricular program with fidelity. Though there are multiple mindfulness curricula I could have used, I did not adopt any, although I drew limited inspiration from the MindfulSchools curricula, which is closely associated with Kabat-Zinn's (1993) Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programs. I engaged Schon's (1983) ideas of reflective practice in order to facilitate the workshop itself. Doing so provided a contrast to much of the literature that I read around the use of mindfulness in institutional (medicine, schools, psychology, etc.) settings, given that the programs in those settings are often scripted and delivered in a standardized sequence, whereas my curriculum was neither of those. My study also stands in contrast to the research literature I found, which

conceptualizes mindfulness as an intervention that takes the shape of a set of isolated techniques brought to bear as relief for some kind of problem or struggle. In school-based research, for example, mindfulness is often studied as a solution for students' behaviors or attention in classrooms (Black & Ferando, 2014; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Huppert & Johnson, 2010).

However, I viewed mindfulness as a practice. The significance of my study exists in the way in which I chose to see mindfulness and research our experiences. By seeing mindfulness as a comprehensive personal practice, I shifted the curricular events happening in our workshop from 30-minute commercials on a breathing or attention-honing technique to the collective development of a way of being that sometimes involved intentional breath work or purposeful placement of attention. By engaging and featuring the stories of mindfulness practitioners in my findings, I sought to particularize experience as opposed to finding general patterns of effect in a large group

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CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Introduction: Life at the Poles

Prior to this study, I gathered definitions of ideas and juxtaposed them with other ideas in ways similar to William James' (1907/2000) inferentialist interpretations of a philosophical school called American Pragmatism. James (1907/2000) described *knowing* as seeing distinctions between things when he wrote, "If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle," (p. 194).

Following this line of thought in regard to political binaries, we find ourselves being told how one extreme view believes the world should be in terms of what the other does not. The arguments then continue as a matter of course. Polarized arguments like these can also be analogized as being two sides of one coin. The coin changes not by which side faces up. The coin itself is not defined by having a heads side or a tails side or defined even to which side it has been flipped. Charles Peirce (1877/1955, 1878/1955, 1896/1955), the founder of American Pragmatism, might see the coin differently. From Peircian (1878/1955) Pragmatic perspective, the coin could be defined by the sensible effects of using both sides together. It was helpful for me, in regard to my research, to move toward defining a centering philosophy of coming to know our world in a way that will help humankind actually employ a Pragmatic stance as currency toward a different future.

Post-Structural Pragmatism

I employ several theories to orient my learning, teaching, and research including post-structural theories (Butler, 1993; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Denzin, 2001; Zembylas, 2003) which seek to destabilize meaning as singular and to question monolithic representations of human experience. I draw primarily on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notions of the rhizome, smooth and striated spaces, and *becoming* to frame what I see as ontologically present in the world. In the past, I have generally resisted claiming an ontological stance because I believe that what we claim exists has to be known for us to claim it, and therefore I usually speak to the process of knowing (epistemology). However, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) provide an ontological view which honors new possibilities for understanding the relationships between what is and what we know of it when they describe what exists in the world. Epistemologically, I use American Pragmatism, as conceptualized by Charles Sanders Peirce (1877/1955, 1878/1955, 1896/1955, 1896/1955) and John Dewey (1910, 1916, 1938), to drive my understandings of learning and research. Pragmatism offered a lens on learning that helped me center my focus on how we come to understand in ways that promote action toward a more just and more peaceful world. Pragmatism served as an over-arching set of epistemological theories that framed my understandings as an educator and researcher.

Mindfulness as a complementary philosophical lens. Within those two philosophical systems, I noted and wrote through several connections to some Indian Philosophies: the traditions that gave rise to several of the mindfulness practices and theories that I explored in my research project. Though philosophical traditions are many and varied, Indian philosophical schools of thought are consistently brought to bear on

one another and change within and among themselves through formalized debate. I do not think it necessary for my readers to know specific facets of the distinct traditions. However, I do see it as vital that I make clear my treatment of these ideas in contrast to the typical categorizations of some of these Indian philosophical schools of thought as a religion. I define religion as a set of practices used to worship and demonstrate faith and belief in an often omniscient higher power. Indian philosophy, as I understand it, does not fit my definition of religion; it more closely resembles a philosophy or way of being. I define philosophy as a set of ideas that reflect a fundamental nature of reality, existence, and sense making and therefore influence ways of being in the world. There are religious treatments of some Indian schools of thought, and I am not drawing on the religious aspects of them. I draw on the aspects and practices that relate to philosophy. Mindfulness is one of those philosophical aspects. It is an aspect, a set of practices, a disposition, and a way of being that has been used in many institutional settings in the West, and has been determined to be an acceptable secular process and set of practices in school systems (Sedlock v. Baird, 2015). In this chapter I simply draw broad connections between philosophical bases of those Eastern and Western Philosophies.

My purpose in sharing connections among Post-structuralism, Pragmatism, and Indian Philosophy is to demonstrate the longevity and pathways for continuous growth through further research and in rhizomatic fashion (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) for all of these philosophical schools. Also, I sought to demonstrate the consistency of mindfulness philosophies with my theoretical orientation. In keeping with my understandings that we use story to make sense of the world, I find it productive to use passages from two fiction novels to illustrate and illuminate different concepts in my writing. I specifically

employed *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Pirsig (1974) and *Siddhartha* by Hesse (1922) because of their Peircian Pragmatic leanings on mindfulness philosophy.

To make the relationships among these three philosophical traditions:

Poststructuralism, Pragmatism, and Mindfulness, more clear, I think about them as aspects of a river. I constructed a diagram out of a photograph I took on a kayak trip down the Saluda River. In this photograph, I focus on three aspects of the river: Riverbank, riverbed, and river system; the flow of the water, and the trajectory and speed of that flow. The Riverbank, bed, and system represent the ontological system of Poststructuralism as outlined by Deleuze & Guattari (1987) in that these aspects of the river serve to provide space and structure for the river. The bank, bed, and river system also serve as connectors and separators in the ways that they manifest on a landscape. The flow of the water represents my epistemology of Pragmatism in that it is the processual medium housing the inner workings and the drive for the effects of the river: erosion, transportation, etc. Finally, the trajectory and speed serve to represent Mindfulness because they are the qualities of experience that we can have with a river when we interact with it. Depending on multiple factors, the trajectory and speed of a river determine how it feels to engage with it.

Ontology: On Centers and Centering

“He didn’t really see what was going on and was not interested enough to find out. He isn’t so interested in what things *mean* as in what they *are*. That’s quite important, that he sees things this way.” (Pirsig, 1974, p. 63)



Figure 1.1 River Diagram

To better understand concepts like binaries and the relationships between them, I ascribe to the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who employ a rhizomatic structure as a way to describe relationships and connections. This relational conception of existence helps me to explain my theoretical orientation to learning which guides how I research and how I teach. I make the distinction of what my theoretical orientation points me toward because these theories frame what I see in my teaching and research. Both are extensions and magnifications of learning.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) helped me better understand the function of accessing a rhizomatic structure by making the rhizome itself analogous to a *map* and contrasting it with a *tracing*, the difference being that a *tracing* is a reproduction and

something that comes “ready-made,” whereas a *map* is “entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real [and] does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious,” (p. 12). It is through employing the rhizome as an ontological structure full of potential that we come to identifying Pirsig’s “what things are,” and we realize and recognize through our epistemological structures, Pirsig’s “what things mean” (p. 63).

The rhizome. In botanical terms, the rhizome is the root structure of a plant. These tangled and anti-hierarchical pathways offer a nearly infinite multiplicity of access points for nutrients and water to enter the root network and just as many opportunities for places where new shoots might grow. I access this idea of a rhizome when I consider the process of centering. When I write about a centering philosophy, I am not intending to write about finding the center or suggesting even that there is such a thing as a center, given that within the rhizome “there is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or ‘return’ in the subject,” (p. 8). Instead, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) defined the rhizome as “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (p. 7) that have no origin or end, and are always existing and creating and reifying the in-between spaces. Taking a look at the rhizome of a given plant or community of plants, we could focus in on one root pathway, centering on it, because of the comprehensive ways these roots grow outward. Centers are only apparent because systems of power put them in place and keep them in place as tools to guide the ways that sense will be made of certain connections and relationships now and over time. I concede that in order to make sense of the

rhizomatic structures around us, we apply and continue to reify hierarchies and linearity that support existing ways of seeing and being. Therefore, I consider centering as a process that involves a *decentering* from the ways that systems of power have interpreted and hierarchically scaled the rhizome and *recentering* in such a way that promotes more of an acknowledgement of the equality of the relationships being discussed. The philosophies I draw from do *the action* of centering, situating a temporary center, in order to make sense of the rhizome in front of us, still knowing full well that through this process we will not have found the meaning, simply *a* meaning for the time being.

In the rhizome, all things and relationships are of equal standing, lacking inherent privilege or ideal. Using language as an example, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) noted, there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. ...There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity (p. 7).

From Indian philosophy, we see a view of the world that reflects this lack of inherence outside of relationships. As King (1999), an Indian philosophy scholar and professor at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, explained, “This means that what really exists are momentary qualities themselves (*dharmas*) with no substrata acting as the possessor or bearer of such qualities. There is no mysteriously abiding substance or self in which qualities inhere,” (p. 118). One specific Indian philosophical school takes this lack of substrata further in considering that even these qualities, anything we name, is, “merely a conceptual construct imputed by the mind which reifies momentary

perceptions and constructs unified entities out of the complex and dynamic series of mental and material dharmas,” (King, 1999, p. 118).

Smooth spaces. Pirsig (1974) gives us a distinction between what things are and what they mean. When we talk about anything at all, we are not talking about what it is; we are only talking about the meanings made. These meanings are “still in the sphere of a discourse implying particular modes of assemblage and types of social power” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 7). The rhizome itself is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call a smooth space; one that exists before we apply a code in order to make sense. Some Indian philosophies were seeking the same understandings of what existed “without slipping into the conventional discourse of persons, objects, and substances. Their notion was to develop a form of discourse based upon the notion of a *dharma*,” (p.116). The word *dharma* is used to mean multiple things throughout Indian languages and within Indian philosophies. In this case, it “denotes the primary level of reality -- what is really present (rather than imputed) in experience. As such, *dharmas* are the mental and material ‘micro-events’ that constitute reality as we know it.” These collections of dharmas are similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s smooth spaces contrasted with the striated spaces, spaces that “code and decode” enabling us to make sense of what we see (p. 353).

First codes: Poles & opposition. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) introduce the idea of smooth spaces by describing that though we may take for granted assumed poles:

their opposition is only relative; they function as a pair, in alternation, as though they expressed a division of the One...lacking a mythology of conflict...They are the principal elements of a State apparatus that proceeds by a One-Two,

distributes binary distinctions, and forms a milieu of interiority. It is a double articulation that makes the State apparatus into a stratum (p. 352).

This stratum helps us code and make sense of the smooth spaces around us. Possibility for moving forward, though, exists when we can understand the value in both sides of a debate not as anything more than a way to organize potential issues - as an understanding or concept in its growth. The smooth space exists, but the sense we make of it is optional. Jane Addams, a sociologist who founded the Hull House a neighborhood social support center in the late 1800s, was a contemporary of John Dewey's. In one of their conversations, she noted that she believed that, "antagonism was unnecessary" (Menand, 2001, p. 313). Addams worked during the time of the Pullman railroad strikes, and using the polarization surrounding those conflicts to provide context to her point about antagonism, she described them as "only a misunderstanding, a tension in the progress toward a common outcome," (Menand, 2001, p. 213). She seemed to see hints of Deleuzian smooth spaces underneath even the most heated debates.

Becoming. Definitions are not entirely representative of what things are. Definitions simply code and express in language that is linear, phenomena that may not, by nature, be linear. Things-as-they-are are not linear in trajectory or static in form. They are constantly becoming in ways that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) likened to "mimesis: either in the form of a chain of beings perpetually imitating one another, progressively and regressively, and tending toward the divine higher term they all imitate by graduated resemblance, as the model for and principle behind the series," (p.235). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used the term *series* to describe a set of connected resemblances, "a resembles b, b resembles c, etc.; all of these terms conform in varying degrees to a single,

eminent term perfection or quality as the principle behind the series,” (p. 234). They distinguished the process of becoming by contrasting it with the more linear and prescribed process of evolution: “becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance...Becoming is involutory, involution is creative,” (1987, p. 238). In being creative, there is no preset path or well defined descendance. Instead, “Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree...Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to appearing, being, equalling, or producing” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 23) which all point to an eventual end achievement (p. 235).

Identity. These two ideas of a rhizomatic web and Becoming as a process shifted my understandings of identity so that I came to understand it as fragile and tentative. Identities we hold help to build our beliefs and guide our behaviors and affiliations (Gee, 1999). Over time as a teacher and researcher, I have conceptualized identity as a combination of inner and outer worlds. As I explained in 2013,

when I use the word ‘identities’ I am talking about the ways that an individual acts, interacts, and understands (Smith, 2006) which are constructed by and enacted through (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, and Cain, 2003) discursive recognition, positioning, and affiliation of herself and others (Gee, 1999; Johnston, 2004 & 2012) in specific contexts (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; McCarthy, 1998)” (p. 13).

I now build from that definition of identity by characterizing it as the process of becoming and non-self. These contrasts help me to clarify what I now understand about

identity. I hold with an Indian philosophical conception of non-self, utilizing an understanding of identity as constructed and non-conceptual. The way that most clearly plays out in my classroom practice is the idea that I work to make sure that I am offering the same possibilities to everyone in the classroom. Seeing identity as non-conceptual allows me to support students toward trying out new things that may not fit the ways that they had seen themselves in the past, but offer them multiple and infinite directions in which to grow.

The Indian philosophical contrasts between the conception of self and non-self, is also helpful here. In some traditions, the self is conceptualized as “an underlying identity or essential self passing from one lifetime to another,” (King, 1999, p. 77). Whereas, in mindfulness traditions, which I see as more connected to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conceptions of Becoming, “there is a process of rebirth, but no substances or unchanging entities undergoing this process” (p. 77). The process of becoming itself describes identity. Indian philosophical analogies for identity “span a range of processual metaphors,” with an emphasis placed on “change and impermanence,” (King, 1999, p. 79). These metaphors include connections to fires burning, rivers flowing, or the way that “swinging a torch around at a rapid rate creates an illusion of a circle of light hanging in the air,” (p. 79).

The non-conceptual nature of what I now believe about identity mirrors Phaedrus’ (Pirsig’s [197]) main character) search for quality:

The present is our only reality...Any intellectually conceived object is always in the past and therefore unreal. Reality is always the moment of vision before the intellectualization takes place. There is no other reality. This preintellectual reality

is what Phaedrus felt he had properly identified as Quality. Since all intellectually identifiable things must emerge from this preintellectual reality, Quality is the parent, the source of all subjects and objects (p. 315).

In Pirsig's (1974) book, Phaedrus starts an endless search for the seemingly universal aspect of existence, finally naming it "Quality." In the excerpt above, he shares some of the understanding he's come to about the nature of this elusive aspect of life as not intellectually obtainable.

I have started to see my search for "identity" in parallel ways. I compare this pre-intellectual definition of identity or quality to how I see the interplay of the five aggregates. In revisiting the major metaphoric description of non-self, the five aggregates, King (1999) explained that the five elements of who we are are like to five bundles of fire sticks. They are the fodder of the emotion and thought flames that color our experiences and give us sensory input that allows us to extrapolate and infer that there is *something*, some core identity from which the fire originates. However, every fire is apparently consistent with all other fires (enough that we can name it a fire) and unique in its form, shape, origination, temperature, and a host of other aspects (enough that we know one fire from the next). The fire also changes the fodder at a chemical level in the process of existence. Therefore, these aggregates could be seen as sourcing the form, sensations, thoughts, dispositions, and consciousness of each of our life experiences, while still remaining uniquely individual aspects of experience but consistent with themselves in interconnected ways at the same time. While in the process of burning, or in this metaphor: living, the fodder changes minute by minute at a chemical or molecular

level, making the next forms, sensations, thoughts, dispositions, and consciousnesses we experience shift and become new every second that we exist.

The splits that we debate when discussing identity research (internal v. external, personal v. social, etc.) reflect the debates between concepts of self and the doctrine of non-self, characterized as the unique compilation and play of the five aggregates in other Indian philosophical systems (King, 1999). When we seek to define identity as any one of those aggregates alone or even the five bundles together, and not the effects of their relationships, we run the risk of holding too tightly to any aspect of experience, deciding with certitude that we *are* a given aspect of ourselves and therefore we must defend its solidity and existence in a world of impermanence. This presents a lose/lose impossibility and sets us up to live toward an illusion of control that will be at best, difficult to attain.

Ontological questions: What is? When we delve into the questions of ontology we explore what is -- what actually exists. The way Deleuze and Guattari describe it, what *is*, actually is not. What *is* are processes and relationships, trajectories ,and connections. To assume that these relationships imply static and unchanging poles shifts our focus from seeing the processes and movement at work that reify hegemony, divide people, and maintain oppression. The assumptions support the back and forth of the pendulum and the incessant flipping of the coin to understand it. Similarly, when we buy into these stratified, binary ways of understanding we spend our time creating political and social movements that simply react to the old way that came before; we run the risk of developing our “principles negatively rather than positively and constructively.” We take clues in practice from that which is rejected instead of from the constructive development of [our] own philosophy” (Dewey, 1938, p. 20).

Dewey (1938) argued that in schools a centering philosophy provided “positive direction to selection and organization of appropriate educational methods and materials,” and is what “is required by the attempt to give new direction to the work of the schools,” (Dewey, 1938, p. 30). The same is true for any political movement. When we have “positive direction” we can select and organize toward a goal, toward the conceivable sensible positive effects of those choices as opposed to simple identification with one of the poles.

If we are to support the development of a world that stops swinging like pendulums and flipping like coins and begins moving forward, we must be able to engage in centering ourselves in the midst of any set of apparent binaries in such a way that we acknowledge the illusion of anything but an eventual unity or absence of striation or hierarchy. I do not see these theories as necessarily discounting the experiences of those who have been oppressed by State apparatuses that created racism, heterosexism, gender bias, or social class. Each of these types of oppression are real and raw. They have to be acknowledged and worked through. Any hegemony dehumanizes and objectifies people at both poles, so to begin the work of centering, Deleuze and Guattari remind us that in order to understand binaries and differences, we can realize that by nature they do not *have* to be. We can see connections within the rhizome as equal and smooth space without striation, with the realization that hierarchy is something that humanity imposes in order to make sense.

Epistemology: How We Make Sense

Pragmatic maxim. American Pragmatism arose out of a quagmire of binary and dichotomous thought and politics that spawned and continued through the American

Civil War. Issues like race, slavery, states' rights, and regional economics all provided people of the late 1800s the opportunity to choose one extreme or the other within philosophical and political spectra on multiple issues. Pragmatism conversely provided a potential third way to know and think, rising above the divisiveness. Pragmatism was built on Peirce's (1878/1955) use of what he called the Pragmatic Maxim which states: "consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Peirce, 1878, p. 31).

I drew on Peirce's (1877/1955, 1878/1955, 1896/1955) theories to help me describe how I defined terms in my work, conceived of my ideas around the project itself and conducted my data collection and analysis. I used Peirce's (1878) maxim that brings to bear relationships between objects and effects as a starting point to begin the process of centering, recentering, and decentering. The aspects of Pragmatic thought and its intersections with narrative inquiry are those that also lead me to employ a Post-structuralist (Zembylas, 2003; Denzin, 2001; Butler, 1993) stance to acknowledge movement and fluidity within a narrative, its performative conceptions of self, and its opportunity for troubling monolithic dominant discourses and narratives.

Beyond the poles: Firsts, seconds, and thirds.

And so: he rejected the left horn. Quality is not objective, he said. It doesn't reside in the material world. Then: he rejected the right horn. Quality is not subjective, he said. It doesn't reside merely in the mind. And finally, Phaedrus, following a path that to his knowledge had never been taken before in the history of Western thought, went straight between the horns of the subjectivity-objectivity dilemma

and said Quality is a *third* entity...this means Quality is not just the result of a collision between subject and object. The very existence of subject and object themselves is deduced from the Quality event. The quality event is the cause of the subjects and the objects. (Pirsig, 1974, p. 213)

In this passage from Robert Pirsig's (1974) book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Phaedrus embarks on a search to understand what it means for something to have Quality. He wanted to know: what makes one thing, in his case a piece of writing, *better* than another? Along the way he found what appeared to be a dichotomous dilemma. Upon further observation, though, he begins to realize that changing his perspective on subject and object to see the relationship between subject, object, and Quality helps him to put the three in a relationship that makes each make more sense. Just as earlier, the heads side of the coin does not exist independently of the coin and the heads side does not make the coin by simply putting a tails side on it, the coin itself as a whole entity has a head and tail. This relationship serves as a skeleton on which we can flesh out and characterize to better understand a Pragmatist's semiotic categorization of what exists in the world.

In seeking an understanding of "the collective total of all that is," Peirce (1903/1955) organized the world into three categories: Firsts, Seconds, and Thirds. Firsts are potentials or qualities, they "are mere maybes, not necessarily realized" (Peirce, 1905/1955 p. 81). Seconds are the things that exist in reality that bring the potential into being, they provide "the element of struggle" because they oppose or contrast with the First. Thirdness is the meaning that provides wholeness as the origin and construction of Firsts and Seconds (Peirce, 1905/1955, p. 89). The correspondences in Indian

Philosophies also discuss universals and particulars. Though there are differences in the levels of inherence that come into question between the two schools of thought, both note a triadic structure that includes provisions for universals or class categories (Firsts), the particular that brings the universal into being (Seconds), and the word-based concept (Thirds). The Indian philosophical schools make note that the categories are not “intrinsic properties of entities but are, in contrast, conceptual constructs deriving their validity from conventional acceptance and past usage,” (King, 1999, p. 111).

The relationship among these three, regardless of what the schools of thought call them, is what I emphasize here. However, it is important to clarify Reality before setting it back in the context of its relationship. When Peirce (1877/1955) wrote about reality, he was not referring to the descriptions or re-presentations of what people see in the world that can be judged as true or false. This, I propose, is where the use of the word *real* becomes tricky because if we mean *reality* to be anyone’s account of the world, then we have already added layers of interpretation that allow for much circular talk with little substantial progress. Peirce (1877/1955) defined reality as he might define anything -- as answering the question: ‘What sensible effects does it produce when we interact with it? Pierce (1877/1955) concluded that “the only effect which real things have is to cause belief,” (p. 36).

Contextualizing these ideas of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness by using reality as an example is important, but realizing reality’s place in this constructive relationship is more so. We must situate this idea of a real thing that causes belief in a relationship within which it does just that. For example, take the coin. We have an object whose sensible effects cause belief when set in a relational construction. Look at the

concept of the coin backwards from Third to First. The Third, in this case, is the *concept* we have of a coin as an item of currency that fuels transaction. We know this is the Third because our interactions with coins revolve around their use in economic exchange for goods or services and the sensible effects of coins are that they result in an exchange. The *object* itself, as the Second, brings to life or makes kinetic the potential of that exchange. The *potential* of that exchange is what we call the First. Working backwards through this relationship is helpful because we are privileging the relationship. Understanding that colloquially, in the end and consequently in the beginning, what matters most is the relationship. The coin's potential or existence as a real object don't exist without that relationship.

Doubt and belief. Grounding ourselves, now, in the relationship between those three categories, it makes sense that, just as Peirce (1878/1955) noted, to make our ideas truly clear and distinct, we must operationalize the definition. We must define elements of our discussions in terms of their sensible effects when we interact with them. If we neglect to do so, say simply defining an idea by its syntactical connection to other words in a sentence, we run the risk of ignoring the relationship that an idea has with the world.

Through these multiple and multidimensional relationships of Firsts, Seconds, and Thirds, we engage in construction. When we work to understand our world and make meaning, we are constructing what Peirce (1877/1955) terms *beliefs*. Belief construction takes on the role of lifting the lines of the rhizome in such a way that a hierarchy of sense-making appears. He wrote about belief as the resolution of doubt or place where thought pauses. He described belief as a rule from which we develop habits and take action. Peirce (1877/1955) worked to organize the ways that we come to fixate our

beliefs as well. He offered four ways that people form beliefs. He argued that we come to believe because someone told us something is true (authority); because we want to believe it (tenacity); because an idea is congruous with a colloquial logic or progression of thought (a priori); or through investigating into whether an idea holds true in practice or not (scientific method).

When we employ authority, tenacity, or a priori to fixate beliefs, we can develop beliefs that feel firmer and more foundational; we feel certain, sure, and settled. These are attractive feelings, but their conceivable sensible effects may set us up to act in ways that are predicated on falsehood. In contrast, the scientific method never stops. The driving force for continuous inquiry happens when we open the door to doubt what we believe.

Within the scientific method we always make room for *doubt*, “the uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into a state of belief” (Peirce, 1877/1955, p. 10). When we allow ourselves to feel doubt, we acknowledge that even our long standing beliefs are tentative, ever changing, and possibly wrong. When we understand that the philosophical ground we thought we stood on is more like water, life can feel a little shaky. The irritation and uneasiness we allow in to our minds when we open to the scientific method are the spurs that serve as the “immediate motive for the struggle to attain a belief” (Peirce, 1877/1955, p. 10). Doubt is the catalyst that keeps scientific inquiry flowing. That fuel and evidence of constant process is the distinction between the scientific method and the other three ways of fixating beliefs. I draw on these theories of how beliefs are formed in ways that privilege integrity, and not “truthfulness of sense perceptions,” as Indian philosophers would. Therefore, as I see it, our central concern in education and research should not be *what* we know, but *how* we have come

to know it, and how we reflect upon it to facilitate further, generative, scientific inquiry. Both Peirce (1877/1955) and Dewey (1910) speak to the centrality of scientific method in education and generative states of mind that support noticing and following doubt in order to engage a line of inquiry. As Peirce (1877/1955) explained:

But above all, let it be considered that what is more wholesome than any particular belief is *integrity of belief*, and that to avoid looking into the support of any belief from a fear that it may turn out rotten is quite as immoral as it is disadvantageous. The person who confesses that there is such a thing as truth, which is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it should, on full consideration, carry us to the point we aim at and not astray, and then, though convinced of this, dares not know the truth and seeks to avoid it, is in a sorry state of mind indeed (p. 21).

When we work to consider what inquiry-based education can do to support students in meeting the needs of a changing world with already diverse requirements, we must bring about a revolution that will move us away from figuring out what specific nuggets of content will be necessary for a student to learn and toward how to learn the nuggets that matter most to the student in her particular context. However, though the content matters to an extent, process needs to be emphasized over product for two reasons. First, individual pieces of information may prove useless given the circumstance, so insisting that all children learn certain things at certain times is an exercise in futility. Secondarily, just as Menand (2001) quoted Oliver Wendell Holmes as believing that “certitude leads to violence,” (p. 61), Peirce (1896/1955) argued that it was dangerous to

engage in a practice of lauding certain bits of information as the truth that all learned people know:

That we can be sure of nothing in science is an ancient truth. The Academy taught it. Yet science has been infested with the over-confident assertion, especially on the part of the third-rate and fourth-rate men, who have been more concerned with teaching than with learning, at all times (p. 55).

If integrated belief comes from investigating our own real doubt, which happens in the seam of what we believe and what we see, then scientific inquiry is the major process on which educational system should focus. Teaching and learning exist only in a relationship with one another that gives rise to them both. When we concern ourselves more with the teaching than with understanding and living learning, we worry about *what* someone else will come to believe, when we should be concerned with providing the conditions within which the *how* of learning can flourish.

Rhizomatically connecting. It is important to describe *why* we should organize ourselves in the name of promoting education widely and *how* we should take steps to do so. We should do so because meanings are socially constructed and we should do so using mindful inquiry.

Social construction. As Peirce (1877/1955) noted “truth” is what we call the findings of a given inquiry upon which all those carrying out the scientific method of inquiry agree. This necessitates a turn toward construction as a social process. We come to know together and we often develop our doubts in conversation and discourse with others (Vygotsky, 1978; Gee, 1999). Because construction is an idea-based process, the transactions necessary for construction happen between an individual and others (Prawat,

1999). These transactions make and expand space for the possible development that exists beyond that which a learner can do alone (Rosenblatt, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). This space of possibility is what Vygotsky (1978) calls the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). When two or more learners collaborate, they create and expand possibilities for learning that would not exist within the learner, independent of the interaction. This potential energy that the ZPD harbors becomes kinetic in transaction and allows for learners' growth "into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). What is learned is dependent upon the experience of the learner, the nature of the problem, and the "quality of this person's interaction with others" (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000, p. 2). Our uniquely human abilities and predispositions (Dewey, 1910; Vygotsky, 1978) to connect with one another around constructed ideas lay the groundwork for creating representations that further communication and learning.

Much is made in Indian philosophical schools about whether or not perceptions of the world can be trusted. Peirce (1878/1955) made provisions for checking the validity of perception only so far as oneself and the other inquirers in a scientific community would be able to verify what he defines as "Truth." Peirce (1878/1955) grounded his definitions of processes of inquiry and construction in real world experience, in which some Indian philosophical thinkers rely upon and of which philosophers from other Indian philosophical schools' stances are skeptical (King, 1999, p. 116). Peirce (1877/1955) does not ever make claim, like James (1907/2000), that we are indeed developing a theory of truth with these statements. We are, only and importantly so, working on making our ideas clear. There is the possibility that we are ever approaching a sense of what could be, but to Peirce (1877/1955) it seems to matter not when engaging in the

processes of coming to know. Dewey (1910) took the position, however, that we infer consistently and constantly to make sense of our world, but “the mere fact that an inference in general is an invaluable function does not guarantee, nor does it even help out the correctness of a particular inference,” (Dewey, 1910, p. 23).

Doubt and inquiry. To Dewey (1910), the process of inquiry consists of noting uncertainty or doubt, framing a question, investigating the question and gathering evidence along the way, hypothesizing, and testing the hypothesis toward forming a conclusion that can facilitate continuous inquiry through its doubt-generating potential. For us to engage in this process in ways that would promote communication, we must understand the elements that happen within the process. The one that serves us to discuss now in education is that of hypothesizing. When we form hypotheses, we are engaging in a process of abduction, a type of inference that connects ideas in potentially explanatory ways and allows us to test them. Peirce (1903/1955) explained out the abductive “form of inference”

“The surprising fact, C, is observed;

But if A were true, C would be a matter of course,

Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true” (p.151).

The most important words in this statement “reason to suspect” (p.151) for this makes distinct the process of abduction from induction and deduction. There is no direct descendance or ascendance from one observation to a given, assumed, or certain fact. Abduction provides us space for inquiry because we simply have “reason to suspect,” (p. 151). We are not tied directly to any “particular belief” (Peirce, 1877/1955, p. 21), and we have room to continue seeking “integrity of belief,” (p. 21). Though Dewey (1910)

situates hypothesis formation within a method of inquiry Peirce (1877/1955) terms *scientific*, implying formality, the abductive inference that serves as the crux of the scientific method is one that is found in many more informal forms of inquiry.

King (1999) situates epistemology solidly in the philosophical traditions of holding formal debate, rooted in rules established to continuously check validity. Whether rooted in “authoritative testimony of Vedic scripture,” verbal testimony, or sense perception itself, the debate played out in ways that involves the transformational interplay of theses and deductive or inductive paths to reach them. King (1999) referenced a philosopher, Nagarjuna, when he wrote on the critiques of these methods of arriving at truth. Nagarjuna’s main argument was one of ontological flavor, noting that nothing exists independently, as all exists in relationship to other things, just as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explained in their work with the rhizome.

Dewey’s (1910) writing on reflection at the beginning of his book *How We Think* provides us the necessary fuel used to drive scientific inquiry when he writes, “in other cases, the ground or basis for a belief is deliberately sought and its adequacy to support the belief examined. This process is called reflective thought; it alone is truly educative in value...” (p. 3). Dewey (1910) privileged experiences that are educative; it would serve us well to consider what makes a process *educative*. Dewey (1938) clarified the concept of an experience being educative when he juxtaposed it against the idea of an experience being mis-educative as one that “has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25).

How: Mindfully grounded, inquiry-based engagement. In keeping with Dewey’s (1938) juxtaposition and our clarifying through operationalization, if an experience is to

be educative, its sensible effect will be to foster continued inquiry. It seems important here to make the connection between *education* and something having an *educative* quality. When I write about education, I am referring to the enterprise of continuing inquiries so that the results or “conceivable sensible effects” of education are intellectually educated individuals who are practiced in the processes of scientific inquiry. Education can serve as, then, a way to help us develop ways to make abductive inferences that reflect more than a self-assured predisposition for guesses that are unfounded, but reflect an “open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded,” in reality’s experiential evidence (Dewey, 1910, p. 23). In sum, we need a system to promote education to help us inquire and abductively reason in ways that are skillful, discerning and will continue to foster further inquiries.

These generative, educative, inquiry-based experiences happen regularly at schools like the Center for Inquiry, in Columbia, SC. Heidi Mills and Louise Jennings (2009) presented findings from a five-year ethnographic study of the language and interactions of the teachers and students at the Center for Inquiry. For five years, they analyzed the interactions of teachers and students at my school, The Center for Inquiry, using two sets of data. The first data set included recordings of classroom practices (discussions, engagements, etc.) across all six classrooms in the school across a five-year period. The second data set followed one grade level cohort of children across those same five years. Mills and Jennings (2009) developed multiple thematic codes from the types of interactions and engagement that occurred. They named reflexivity, social action, democratic, agency, posing questions, observation, interpretation, shifting perspectives, collaboration, and skillfulness of inquiry as patterns in their data. They then synthesized

these codes to develop and characterize six interacting practices of inquiry as “dynamic and dialogic; attentive, probing, and thoughtful, agentive and socially responsible, relational and compassionate; reflective and reflexive; and valuing multiple & multidisciplinary perspectives” (Jennings & Mills, 2009, p. 1592). In the Review of Related Literature that follow, I connect directly what they found in their codes to the types of educative experiences that can bolster our democracy and root us in a foundation of mindfulness practices.

Conclusion

Post-structuralism as rooted in Deleuze and Guattari (1987); Pragmatism as rooted in Peirce (1877/1955, 1878/1955, 1896/1955, 1903/1955, 1903/1955, 1905/1955,) and Dewey (1910, 1938); and Indian Philosophies as described by King (1999) are ways of thinking that I weave in and out of one another in service of making sense of multiple sets of potential connections in the section of the rhizome where I sit.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Structure of the Review of Related Literature

For this project, I engaged in two distinct acts. First, I sought to study my participants' stories of their experiences related to our mindfulness work together. Secondly, to accomplish studying participants' stories, I developed a mindfulness afterschool workshop and infused mindfulness practices into my teaching during the school day. When compiling the literature for this study, I looked at studies of people who had studied mindfulness before, and then I considered some conceptual literature around creating curriculum. I include both here because both types of literature influenced parts of my study.

In my research on mindfulness and learning, I sorted my readings into groups depending on the way they were characterizing mindfulness: as a practice or as an intervention. I distinguish between practice and intervention, in that a practice is engaged in by a practitioner by choice, repeatedly over time as a means of enriching that person's lived experience. An intervention is generally imposed upon a person with the goal of solving a problem. I realized that those distinctions between practice and intervention were useful in characterizing curriculum development as well.

In this chapter, I offer an overview of the studies I found about mindfulness and learning, then I provide some context for the groupings of the studies I found by explaining what I mean about mindfulness being intervention or practice. There is a

section on my understanding of Mindfulness as an Intervention including the studies that I put in that category. Then there is a section on my understanding of Mindfulness as a Practice including the studies that I put in that category. Within those categories, I also found it helpful for my understanding to group these studies based on the general purpose of the study outlined by its authors: emotions, behavior, empathy, or cognition. I then include a section that outlines some conceptual literature on how we can view curriculum through the lens of intervention or practice, including some of the conceptual literature that helped me to frame my curricular choices as reflective of a practice mindset, as well.

Overview of Studies on the Effects of Mindfulness in Learning Settings

When searching the field using search terms that included ‘mindfulness and learning,’ ‘mindfulness and education,’ and ‘mindfulness and schools,’ I found 19 articles that addressed some aspect of mindfulness in contexts that would inform my study. Fifteen of those studies addressed mindfulness as an intervention. Four of those 19 studies addressed mindfulness as a practice. These studies' contexts ranged from laboratory studies to classrooms and spanned multiple fields.

Within the studies that address mindfulness as an intervention, I found nine studies that referenced specific emotional benefits of an intervention; six that referenced emotions generally (Arthurson, 2015; Costello et.al., 2014; Frederickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Mapel, 2012; Mendelson, Greenberg, Dariotis, Gould, Rhoades, & Leaf, 2010; Viafora, Mathiesen, & Unsworth, 2015) and three that referenced emotions as they translate behaviorally for students and teachers in classroom settings (Black & Ferando, 2014; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Huppert & Johnson, 2010). I also found five studies that referenced empathy or self-awareness as the main

result of a mindfulness intervention (Burrows, 2015; Coholic & Eys, 2016; Hoffman, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011; Milligan, Baldi, & Spiroiu, 2015; Wisner & Starzec, 2016) and one study that addressed cognitive results of mindfulness (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005).

Within the four studies that characterized mindfulness as a practice, three of them served to demonstrate the effects of mindfulness on empathy (Hamel et al., 2013; Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008; Griggs & Tidwell, 2015), and one that demonstrated the effects of mindfulness on cognition (Moore, 2013).

Framing Mindfulness

The body of research on mindfulness applications in the western world is growing, finding multiple directions and trajectories, offering us different ways to see our world and mindfulness itself (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In one of the most well-known cases of mindfulness being brought to the U.S., Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) began working at the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine in 1976 utilizing techniques from his studies in mindfulness with patients. Kabat-Zinn (1994) was a mindfulness practitioner himself, and he saw potential to use the mindfulness techniques that he had been studying to support patients who were dealing with stress, chronic pain, and other long-term conditions. He created the Stress Reduction Clinic, and by the 1990s, he began to term the techniques they were using in this clinic: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). He had transformed his mindfulness practice into an intervention to “relieve suffering and catalyze greater compassion and wisdom in our culture,” (p. 285).

Mindfulness as intervention. Kabat-Zinn’s work is now a part of a burgeoning tradition of Westernized, secularized applications of mindfulness and research on it in the

United States and other countries in the Western World. The studies that I have uncovered were developed to measure the effectiveness of mindfulness as an intervention. These interventions are extensions and reductions of centuries old practices that characterize Indian philosophy. When westernized for use in school settings, these practices and processes are often decontextualized and purposefully utilized as behavioral or academic interventions. My mentioning this serves two purposes, first, to emphasize a secular turn within the trajectory of these techniques and secondly, to demonstrate how within this research literature, I saw reflections and effects of data-driven culture of schooling in the United States (Altwerger, 2005).

Studies reflecting mindfulness as an intervention. Fifteen of the 19 studies I compiled reflected mindfulness as an intervention. The researchers that conducted these studies all worked to demonstrate the effectiveness of a certain mindfulness intervention. I grouped these studies further into categories about what kinds of benefits they provided the participants.

Emotional benefits. Arthurson (2015) conducted a study in Adelaide, Australia that served as an independent evaluation of a nine week mindfulness program in a class of 30 children. The teenagers in this study participated in a program that covered mindfulness content about neuroplasticity of the brain, progressive muscle relaxation, body scans and making stress balls, souls of the feet meditation, mindful eating, and mindful movement. The researchers explored whether or not the program would be useful for the children, whether the activities were age appropriate, whether the children would use the activities introduced in the program in their everyday lives, and what activities were best for the classroom. They measured these elements of the program with

a self-report questionnaire. Through this questionnaire, Arthurson (2015) found that participants experienced a self-reported decrease in anger, benefit from the breathing exercises, usefulness of the skills that would help them in the future, and techniques to help them cope with bullying behavior. Some of the concerns that Arthurson addresses include making sure that everyone can access the material so teachers should consider providing multiple activities that would invite students into the curriculum in multiple ways. She also addresses that the activities should be age appropriate and rooted in choice. The majority of the issues that students had included discomfort with the activities themselves and not the content or processes of mindfulness

In Viafora, Mathiesen, and Unsworth's (2015) quasi-experimental design study, they were seeking to evaluate the application of an eight week mindfulness course for students in a traditional school and students who attended a school designed for students who were homeless. The mindfulness intervention in this case was designed as a "universal prevention program" based on the theory that self-awareness can help students "manage feelings of anger, sadness, or impulse," (p. 1180). The researchers hypothesized that students would gain psychological acceptance, self-compassion, and psychological inflexibility that was consistent with improved wellbeing. They used three scales to measure mindfulness, emotional wellbeing, and self-compassion: Child Acceptance and Mindfulness Measure, Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire, and the Self-Compassion Scale for Children. They found that in the school for homeless students there was no significant improvement on any of the three scales. For the traditional school, there was some improvement on the CAMM in the pre/post comparison. The qualitative results demonstrated a self-reported increase in positive mental states, increase in strategies to

deal with anger and other difficult emotions at home or school. Students also reported feeling less stressed and 70% (in the traditional school) and 87% (in the school for children who are homeless) shared that they practice some at home.

In the context of a Mindfulness Martial Arts Course for Adolescents, Milligan, Baldi, and Spiroiu (2015) conducted an exploratory qualitative study to determine the effectiveness of the Integra Mindfulness Martial Arts program for students with learning disabilities. The students participated in 20 weekly one and a half hour sessions that combined mindfulness, cognitive therapy, and behavior modification and activation with martial arts. After completing these 20 weeks, 29 youths between ages 12-17, and 17 of their parents, completed a post-treatment questionnaire. Seven of those youths also participated in in-depth interviews. Both of these data collection methods sought to determine “youth goals for MMA, perceptions of the program components and delivery, outcomes associated with participation, and challenging or negative aspects of the program,” (p. 562). The researchers used an exploratory thematic analysis to code transcripts. The results were split between those in the beginner sessions of the MMA program, those youths in the advanced sessions, and parents. The beginners’ goals related to improving martial arts, improving their relationships, and completing homework, and all but one reported being successful in achieving their goals. The advanced participants’ goals centered on emotional regulation, healthy relationships, and specific aspects of martial arts (i.e., getting “better at fight, flight, or freeze”) all reported success. The parents’ goals for their children involved improving at sports or school and fostering healthy relationships. When the participants rated the components they liked best, many liked all the components, but and those components that were not appreciated were

mostly related to home practice. The researchers found themes across participant interviews including: increasing calmness, thinking before acting, increased self-understanding and communication, and tolerating and accepting discomfort. The researchers employ Carol Dweck's (2006) work on mindsets to further describe how the results of their study could imply possibility for moving out of fixed mindsets and toward personal and academic change in the lives of students with learning disabilities when using mindfulness techniques.

Costello and Lawler (2014) conducted a study to better understand the experiences of mindfulness in the lives children from lower socio-economic backgrounds as they deal with stress. Sixty-three 11 and 12 year old children who were "at risk of social exclusion," in Dublin, Ireland, participated in the study (p.21). These children attended two schools that were at risk of economic seclusion. Four teachers delivered the five-week mindfulness curriculum, and two of those teachers participated in interviews. The researchers employed thematic analysis to the interviews and employed a Likert scale when designing the surveys. They identified five themes including the conceptualization of stress, awareness, self-regulation, classroom regulation, and addressing future stress. In addressing the findings, the researchers suggested that mindfulness could be supportive in "empowering children to address the stress in their lives" and increase their participation in school.

Mendelson et al (2010) conducted a pilot randomized controlled trial to determine the feasibility, acceptability, and to assess the effects of a mindfulness and yoga program with urban youth in fourth and fifth grade. Participants attended a mindfulness program at their schools for 45 minutes a week across 12 weeks. The researchers collected data

through pre and post intervention assessments and focus group interviews with the students and teachers who participated in the program. These assessments included the Responses to Stress, The Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire - Child Version, the Emotion Profile Inventory, and the People In My Life assessment. They found that mindfulness interventions are likely to be feasible and attractive to students, teachers, and administrators and that there is promise in using mindfulness interventions to reduce problematic physiological and cognitive patterns of response to stress in the lives of youth.

Mapel (2012) conducted a study to explore the experiences of students who are learning mindfulness techniques in a tertiary classroom in New Zealand. Using a questionnaire to collect data, he analyzed 49 student responses using quantitative and qualitative methods. The students included in the study ranged from under 20 years of age to students in their fifties. The first three questions asked the students if they found the class helpful, difficult, and whether or not it had affected their studies. Other questions included: Have you used mindfulness in other areas of your life? Did you have any previous experience of similar activities before in your life? Given the choice would you like to have a few minutes of mindfulness before the start of classes? Those who found it helpful focused on the peacefulness and relaxed feelings they experienced. Those who did not find it helpful characterized their experiences as boredom, sleepiness, and daydreaming. Over all, the majority of the students found the mindfulness teaching and practice time helpful and as having a positive impact on their lives.

Behavioral benefits. Within emotions, I found three studies that addressed emotions in the context of student and teacher behaviors in classroom settings.

Flook, Goldberg, and Pinger (2013) conducted a study to better understand the effects of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) on teachers' "ability to cope with the demands of the classroom," toward better classroom management (p. 2). The researchers conducted a randomized control study, employing two groups: one who received mindfulness training and the other who served as a "wait-list control group." In the group who received mindfulness training there was a significant improvement in the areas of reducing attentional bias, reducing burnout, increase in effective teaching behaviors, and increases in self-compassion. The researchers also measured cortisol levels with saliva tests as cortisol levels are associated with levels of stress. There were slight differences in the cortisol levels for both the control and experimental groups over the course of the year.

Black and Fernando (2014) conducted a field intervention trial to evaluate the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based curriculum in a public elementary school with 17 teachers who were teaching 409 children, of whom 85% were a part of the free or reduced pay lunch program and 95% were in a racial or ethnic minority group. The intervention was carried out over the span of five weeks, once a week for 15 minutes each time. To determine effectiveness, they chose to attend to teacher ratings of student behavior in Kindergarten through 6th grade classrooms. They took survey data before the intervention, immediately following the intervention, and seven weeks after the intervention had finished. Black and Fernando (2014) were attending to four criteria to learn about teacher perceptions of student behavior: paying attention, self-control, care and respect for others, and participation in activities. In the first two data collection cycles, teachers saw improvement in all four indicator areas. In the last data collection

cycle, the only indicator that continued to increase was attention, all the other areas flattened by the seven-week post-intervention data collection.

Huppert and Johnson (2010) conducted a controlled-variable study of the effectiveness of a program of mindfulness training with 14 and 15-year-old boys who were chosen because they were not labeled by the school system in any way (learning or behaviorally disabled) in a private classroom setting. The mindfulness training was classroom based and rooted in the MBSR work of Jon Kabat-Zinn (2011). The researchers used the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale to measure mindfulness, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale to measure well-being, the Ego-Resiliency Scale to measure resiliency, and to the Big-Five Personality Dimensions to measure personality. In a final follow up interview, participants were asked about how often they used mindfulness techniques at home. Based on the measures they used, the two groups had no significant overall differences between the two groups. However, the results that were significant involved a positive association between mindfulness technique use outside of the classroom and increased well-being and mindfulness.

Empathy. Wisner and Starzec (2016) conducted a qualitative study to learn about the experiences of 14, 10th grade students in an alternative school in a predominantly rural area of the Northeastern US as they participated in a mindfulness skills program. The program occurred over seven months within the school day, and the data collected included journal entries they wrote as a part of the program and initial and final questionnaires about their experiences in the program. Researchers found themes that fit into categories of interpersonal (building relationships and learning to trust) and intrapersonal (self-awareness and self-regulation) benefit to the students. The researchers

suggest that these findings be employed as teachers plan mindfulness interventions in schools.

Burrows (2015) conducted a study to explore the experience of mindfulness and reflection as teachers employ them in self-identified difficult relational situations with others. The study took place in Australia in the context of a series of professional development seminars with teachers over the course of six weeks where participants were asked to identify a relational dilemma and were given mindfulness tools to support them in dealing with the problem. The researchers employed a relational research approach (Finlay & Evans, 2009) where they described the research as happening *with* the participants instead of *to* them. They collected data in the way of face to face interviews and some online email communication. Burrows (2015) found themes within the data including: “consciously experiencing sensory phenomena, shifts in thinking and behavior, tapping into inner wisdom, feeling a sense of openness and refinement, and experiencing non-dual mindfulness” (p. 131). Burrows suggests that this study could continue to a movement toward grounding teachers’ professional development within self-study and self-awareness.

Frederickson et. al. (2008) conducted a quantitative study in the form of a field experiment within a work-based wellness program. The authors rooted their work in Frederickson’s (1998) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions stating that peoples’ daily experiences of positive emotions “compound over time to build a variety of consequential personal resources” (p.1). The authors offered a meditation workshop in the context of a work based wellness program and over a seven-week period. To begin the study the authors invited employees of a business software and information

technology service company out of Detroit, Michigan. Two hundred two employees chose to participate by showing up to the information session before the study began. One hundred two of these employees were assigned to the Loving Kindness Meditation workshop, and the remaining 100 participants were assigned to a waitlist group that served as the control for the experiment. Participants completed an initial survey prior to the workshop beginning that “assessed their life satisfaction, depressive symptoms, and status on a range of personal resources” (p. 5). For nine weeks (one week before and after), participants completed daily reports of their emotions and meditation experiences. After the experience ended, participants completed a final survey that mirrored the initial survey in content. The authors analyzed these reports using multiple scales to account for the resources they sought to measure including measures that assess: cognitive resources (Mindfulness and Awareness scale, Agency thinking and Pathways thinking, and Savoring Beliefs Inventory); psychological resources (Life Orientation Test, Ego-resilience, and Psychological well-being); social resources (Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Positive relations with others); physical resources (Illness symptoms and Sleep duration); outcome measures (Satisfaction with life scale and Center for Epidemiological Studies -- Depression Measure). The daily experience reports also included completion of the Modified Differential Emotions Scale that allows respondents to report on the intensity of amusement, anger, awe, compassion, contempt, contentment, disgust, embarrassment, gratitude, hope, joy, interest, love, pride, guilt, sadness, shame, fear, and surprise. The authors found that the daily experiences of positive emotions that loving-kindness meditation offers builds over time. These increases produced several personal resources

including (mindfulness, purpose in life, social support, and decreased illness symptoms) and decreases in depressive symptoms.

Coholic and Eys (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental mixed methods study to explore the benefits and effectiveness of a 12-week arts based mindfulness program delivered to a group of “vulnerable” children who were referred to the program by a local mental health agency. The authors define “vulnerable” as “children who were involved with the child welfare or mental health systems and experienced a variety of challenges,” (p. 1). The authors hypothesized that the participants would have improved resilience and self-concept after the program. They conducted post-program interviews individually with the participants (children) and their guardians. They also employed the Resilience Scales for Children and Adolescents as a formal measure of resilience. They found through interpretive thematic qualitative analysis that the group perceived themselves to have improved in emotion regulation, mood, coping or social skills, confidence and self-esteem, empathy, and attention/focus. The original hypothesis about becoming more resilient was not confirmed, but the hypothesis about improved self-concept was confirmed.

Cognitive benefits. Napoli, Krech, Holley (2005) conducted a formative evaluation of the impact of a mindfulness training program on the attention of first, second, and third grade students. The students participated in a 24-week training that focused on breath work, movement, body scanning, and sensorimotor awareness. The authors used rating scales that measured attention, hyperactivity, social skills, oppositional behavior, and test anxiety. They also employed the Test of Everyday Attention for Children. The authors employed three different attentional measures for

their data collection and analysis, and with those they found significant differences between those who participated in the training and those who did not.

Mindfulness as practice. I structured my workshop as scheduled time for participants to practice mindfulness, an act that I see in contrast to how mindfulness was used by Kabat-Zinn (1994) as an intervention with patients who struggled with chronic illness. Mindfulness as a practice involves dedicating oneself to intentionally exercising one's attention in repeated ways most probably outside of a context that would require the use of mindfulness or mindful attention. For me, mindfulness practice often looks like my making a choice to sit still and focus on my breath, eat and focus simply on my senses, or walk and focus simply on the rhythm of my steps. When I become distracted or my attention moves from these acts, I bring it back to the act without actively engaging a sense of negativity or feeling of frustration for losing my focus. I approach that experience of distraction non-judgmentally; I work to just bring my attention back to the act at hand. These techniques that I call *practice* could be called an *intervention* except for the expectation I engage around them. If I were using these mindfulness techniques as an *intervention* for myself, I would be heavily attached to a direct and expected outcome of the experience. Most probably, I would be exercising my attention toward some goal-type change in my behavior. However, as a *practice*, I engage these techniques with a soft expectation that I will strengthen my focus over time. I see fruits of a practice being less direct and more like shifts in my ways of being and seeing than those of an intervention. In a practice, the root of engaging these techniques is also more about enriching experience, not solving some sort of problem within or around me.

Studies reflecting mindfulness as practice. Four of the 19 studies I compiled reflected mindfulness as practice: Hutcherson, Griggs, Moore, and Hamel. These studies differed from the earlier group in that they were seeking to understand something about practitioners of mindfulness who engaged in mindfulness techniques by choice, regularly, as opposed to the direct effects of learning about mindfulness and mindfulness techniques in workshops and classes.

Hutcherson, Seppala, and Gross (2008) conducted a study with young adult (mean age 23.6 years) volunteers who did not report meditating more than 30 minutes per day. The authors examined the effects of Loving Kindness Meditation techniques on positive and negative mood of one group by assessing responses to several photographs before and after four minutes of instruction in Loving Kindness Meditation and then a follow up session directing feelings of compassion toward photographs. The second group participated in an experiment that involved participants imagining acquaintances and focusing on their physical appearance, as opposed to sending compassion. Then the authors conducted mood probes and evaluation measures. The study's results demonstrate that loving kindness meditation significantly impacts participants' positive feelings toward neutral strangers.

Griggs and Tidwell (2015) conducted a self-study partnership. They conducted self-study research on Tom Griggs' (first author) work as a teacher educator. Tom was a mindfulness meditation practitioner who brought his practice into his work with pre-service teachers. The article shared their individual stories of what led them to this study. They outlined the context of the study and the grounding theory of Howard's (2006) White identity development. The data sources they used for this study included course

materials (syllabi and online discussion board quotes) and Tom's language as a course instructor in response to students on an online discussion board. They analyzed the data initially looking for "global meaning" and "language connecting practice to issues related to teaching in multicultural contexts." The authors then attended to possible purposes of language used and finally drew again on Howard's model of White identity transformation. In the discussion, it is clear that Tom was seeking the places in his work where he was being mindful and using mindful attention when conversing with students. In the end, he found that much of his work sought to develop empathy in his students in ways that reflected the theories in which he grounded his work. He also fostered this by being empathetic to student needs. At the end of the study, he determined that his mindfulness practice had impacted his work with pre-service educators.

Moore (2013) conducted a study to determine correlations between cognitive flexibility and flow disposition as outlined by Csikszentmihayli (1990). Flow disposition is a term used to describe the state of "enthralment and ordered experience," found in activities that people characterize as having intrinsic rewards that make the participation in the activity generative (p. 319). Participants in this study were undergraduate college students from a mid-sized university in the U.S. They were invited to complete a survey that contained the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale, Cognitive Flexibility Scale, and Dispositional Flow Scale. These measures were assessing mindfulness history in these students, considering mindfulness as a quality or disposition, to see if it was positively correlated with flow. Moore (2013) performed a hierarchical regression analysis to determine predictability of flow position from mindfulness and cognitive skill. He found that there was a high correlation of mindfulness and flow disposition and that

mindfulness and cognitive skill were significant predictors of flow disposition. The levels of mindfulness as measured by the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale, however, did not correlate with a mindfulness practice. The levels of having a history of a mindfulness practice did correlate with cognitive flexibility.

Hamel, Shaw, and Taylor (2013) conducted a study group as teachers where they explored utilizing home and community literacies in the classroom, using mindful reflection as a tool to uncover aspects of their work with literacies. They used qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data they took over 11 months. Data included transcripts of study conversations, classroom observations, student work samples, teachers' anecdotal notes, and journal entries written by each member of the group. All group members were involved in data collection and analysis. During this time, they read professional literature on home and community literacies and held conversations. Through their conversations, they uncovered that many of their own biases and predispositions toward the literacies of people who were different from them needed to be considered before they could construct curriculum or make space in their classrooms for home and community literacies. All of their work was toward being more mindful of one specific thing they wanted to accomplish in their classrooms. The self-work that arose out of it informs my work with social action and mindfulness as well.

Framing Curriculum

Debates around different understandings of curricula in education can be used as a window into stakeholders' beliefs about what the chief purposes of school are and beliefs about who students and teachers should be in these contexts (Apple, 2012; Mills, 2014). I employed these two conceptions of curriculum to illustrate further differences between

intervention and practice as they exist in the context of school. I then mapped connections I found between mindfulness and inquiry in order to further illustrate the alignment of my choices as a teacher and researcher with my philosophical foundation. As an extension of these beliefs I hold around fixation of belief, I sought to honor connections between social action and mindfulness practice as important to my work as a teacher.

Curriculum as intervention. As an example of a curricular intervention, within reading instruction there are conceptions of curriculum as pre-packaged and prescribed materials that list behaviors for students to do, and of instruction as the modeling, directing, and policing of those behaviors in a classroom. *Open Court Reading* (2017) is one of the reading curricula that exemplifies curriculum as an intervention. On the website associated with the curriculum and authored by the creators, they describe the product as, “an explicit, systematic approach to teaching... In addition, instructional routines are taught and modeled, establishing predictable patterns for students so they know what is expected of them and how to perform on their own.” The emphasis within this curriculum is that the materials exist to support students who do not yet know how to perform on their own by telling them exactly how to perform specific behaviors. The curriculum is designed to fix the problem of a deficit of knowledge about reading.

Curriculum as development of a practice. There are also conceptions of curriculum as a student/family/teacher co-construction and of instruction as the guiding of a practice toward use in a student’s daily living in the real world (Mills, 2014; Miller, 2009). Mills (2014) in her book *Learning for Real* outlines the ways and words of teachers and students at the Center for Inquiry, my school, the site for this study and a

place where the teachers seek to create curriculum that support students in building their practices as readers, writers, scientists, mathematicians, historians, and citizens each day. Donna Miller (2009) wrote a book called *The Book Whisperer* that tells her story of teaching readers in middle grades classrooms by sharing her own personal practice as a reader with the children she taught.

The five-year ethnography that Jennings and Mills (2009) presented sheds light on some of the differences between *inquiry as practice* and *inquiry as curricular intervention*. What they uncovered in their reading of the data was that the inquiry-based education happening at the Center for Inquiry was more of a *practice*, or way of being that the teachers, students, community collaborators, parents, and administrators lived together, day in and day out. Inquiry was the way of being, the content, and the curriculum all at once. The patterns they found could not be translated into a pre-packaged curricular *intervention* because they characterize the things people engaged in as on-going, situationally relevant, personally reflective and reflexive, and occurring in a social space. In their article, Mills and Jennings (2009) they instead tried to make visible “the possibilities created” (p. 1613) within an inquiry-based practice by continually engaging in a “discourse of inquiry” (p.1583) in order to provide the reader with generative pathways to understand inquiry and living an inquiry-based curriculum.

Connecting mindfulness practice & inquiry practice. I see connections between mindfulness as a practice and inquiry as a practice both in the discourse and in ways of being they evoke. In my teaching practice, I teach who I am (Palmer, 1998). My mindfulness practice permeates all that I do in my inquiry-based classroom. I engage my own practices of self-awareness and non-judgment to operationalize the characterization

of inquiry as relational and compassionate. I engage my own practices of focused attention to operationalize the characterizations of inquiry as probing and, thoughtful, reflective and reflexive. I engage my own practices of present-moment awareness and compassion for all to operationalize inquiry as dynamic and dialogic, agentive and socially responsible, and as valuing multiple and multidisciplinary perspectives. For this study and for my teaching at the Center for Inquiry each day, these intersections between inquiry-based education and mindfulness are more than cursory. They are foundational.

Social action as the outward expression of mindfulness practice.

Social change requires working with others and is usually thought of as some tangible, external action. Yet changing beliefs—a necessary requisite for social change against systemic injustice—requires work on the self. Understanding injustice involves cognitive, emotional, relational, embodied, and spiritual domains. These are the domains that are attended to in mindfulness practices, whereas even instructional practices that are democratic-dialogic can get caught up in being cognitive exercises, alone. Those of us involved in social justice education understand that information about injustice is not enough to create action toward change. Information itself does not change us until it becomes incorporated into our world views. (Hyde & LaPrad, 2015, p. 6)

Mills and Jennings (1994) characterize inquiry as supporting students in being, “agentive and socially responsible” (p.10). This is consistent with Dewey’s (1916) claim that the aim of education is to purvey a “critically participatory” democracy where the democracy “holds its own current practices open to revision based on the needs of society as it changes” (p. 2). Nearly a century later, Hyde and LaPrad (2015) cite Dewey’s (1938)

privileging of human interaction as a cornerstone of all democratic processes. The authors then take a step that few other researchers have: they connect the aims and ends of mindfulness to democracy and a democratic process. As they explain, development of mindfulness in a person is not a public end in itself; it is a criterion of democratic education and democratic ways of being, which implies a social and moral way of being” (p. 4). From this perspective mindfulness requires an ethical component compatible with a Freirian democratic philosophy or critical pedagogy: plurality, equity, patient attention (listening), critical revision, and care for the self and others with an aim toward reducing oppression, injustice, and suffering. The starting point for this is in uncovering our own “oppressive thoughts toward ourselves and working toward releasing them,” (p. 3). Hyde and LaPrad (2015) asserted that democracy requires continued conversation over time between opposing groups and that this process is never finished. Dewey’s (1938) definitions of education do the same in noting that education should serve psychological and social ends in balanced and non-dichotomized ways.

There is also a link to mindfulness in Linker’s (2015) *Intellectual Empathy*. She asserted that for social justice work to happen we must employ a sense of intellectual empathy, which she defines as “combined effort to focus both widely and narrowly on social identity and social difference,” (p. 7). Linker’s (2015) theory of empathy presents one way of providing this balance to our inner social identities and those around us who live or think differently than we do. When we attend to our own identities, we attend to “more than just knowing information or knowing the kinds of things we are good at doing. It requires self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-reflexivity. It also requires

understanding the institutions and social systems that contribute to shaping our beliefs and our language” (p. 8).

These kinds of inner and outer awareness are hallmark goals, practices, and results of mindfulness. Consider Brown, Ryan, and Creswell’s (2007) list of mindfulness characteristics including clarity of awareness, non-conceptual/non-discriminatory awareness, flexibility of awareness and attention, empirical stance toward reality, present oriented consciousness, and stability/continuity of attention and awareness. Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007) also note that one of the most recent branches of research on mindfulness in the western world involves mindfulness in social interaction and relationships. I see this piece of the mindfulness research puzzle as complimentary to what Linker (2015) calls for in regard to supporting a social justice that helps us move forward as opposed to getting caught in polemic argument with the “other side.” Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007) sum up the benefits of mindfulness with several categories, but the ones that resonate with my commitment to social justice include willing exposure, non-attachment, and insight. When they use the phrase *willing exposure*, they are addressing the idea of mindfulness being something that “requires voluntary exposure to unpleasant or challenging events,” (p. 226). When they use the word *non-attachment* they are referencing a traditionally Indian philosophical concept that the concept of suffering is directly a result of what we desire to be different in our lives than it actually is. When they use the word *insight*, they are specifically addressing a non-judgmental type of insight that involves a framing of internal and personal responses as “insubstantial in nature; thoughts become ‘just thoughts’, feelings become ‘just feelings,’ rather than necessarily accurate reflections of reality” (p. 226). I see each of these as potentially

serving a function in supporting productive social action because of the opportunities they open for intellectual and emotional empathy in ways that can encourage listening to, considering, and inquiring into different perspectives.

Translating Mindfulness into Curriculum in My Setting

What I did in my study was to create a space within which early practitioners in a school environment can tell their stories of experience. This parallels the necessity of storytelling and deep listening that characterize my beliefs as a teacher embedded in Linker's (2015) theory of intellectual empathy, Dewey's (1938) and Freire's (1970) conceptions of reflexive democracy and the types of awareness that Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007) reference. In my classroom teaching and mindfulness afterschool workshop, I sought to create a space where practice, story, and deep listening flourished toward my students manifesting their own personal agency toward a more peaceful, responsible, and responsive world.

Mindfulness theory and research helped me structure my teaching and helped me to structure the way in which I collected and analyzed data. I am an educator dedicated to providing inquiry-based conditions for learning and providing the space, support, and access needed to understand social issues and take an informed stance and skillful action toward a better world. I privilege inquiry, or Peirce's (1877/1955) scientific method, as my primary educational philosophy because of my alignment with Peirce (1877/1955) that use of the scientific method provides for the greatest integrity of belief. My teaching at an inquiry-based school, as a professional choice I made, influences how I sought to see and teach mindfulness as well. I view mindfulness as a practice and not an

intervention and sociopolitical awareness and thoughtful action as manifestations of mindfulness practice.

In this study, I intended to teach mindfulness techniques along the way as we develop a mindfulness *practice*, in similar ways to the work that Mills and Jennings (2009) highlighted about the ways the teachers and students at the Center for Inquiry lived and learned together toward developing reading, writing, math, etc. practices. By *develop a practice* I mean consistently creating and maintaining a habit of action, thought, and consistent engagement around a process that provides sets of resources and a foundation for making choices. I intended to develop what Wenger and Lave (1998) call a community of practice, “a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” (p. 5). I will be conducting research on a set of workshops that frame mindfulness as a practice, not as an intervention.

This Study

The majority of the studies I found fit the description of mindfulness as an intervention. My study fills a gap in the research literature by conceptualizing mindfulness as a practice within a community of learners. All of the studies I found are also seeking to demonstrate some sort of effectiveness around any application of mindfulness. My study also fills a gap in this body of literature in that instead of seeking effectiveness, I am seeking to understand the narration of experience.

We did this kind of storyline...well, life isn't really a story... last year, but it feels different now. I think different things will happen.

Sam, fifth grader attending our mindfulness workshop

Sam, was describing the mindfulness club that I held in the spring, prior to the fall when I began this study. He characterized our work together as a storyline, one that can have varying events, but that seems to hang together as what he would consider a story. He characterized our work together in mindfulness as a story. Throughout my study, I collected stories, those of my own and those of my students (Bruner, 2002; Rosen, 1985) honoring the way that we make sense of experience in the first place.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Context for the Study

I teach fourth and fifth graders at the Center for Inquiry, a K-5 public magnet school in a suburban, public school district in the Southeastern United States, close to a major public university. When the school was first created, the University and the Center formed a partnership: The University provides professional development opportunities through a University Liaison who leads the faculty in multiple forms of collaborative, capacity building professional development. The school serves as a site for student teaching and practicum opportunities for University students from the College of Education.

At the time that I conducted this study, I was in my fourth year teaching at this school and in my eleventh year of teaching. The previous seven years, I taught in a suburban school district on another side of the town. At the Center for Inquiry, we loop with our children; I teach fourth graders one year, and the next year I teach the same class of students in fifth grade. At the time of this study, I was teaching my students as fourth graders and they and some fifth graders and second graders participated in the study. Two years before moving to the Center to teach, I completed my Masters Degree in Language and Literacy from the nearby university and shortly thereafter started a doctoral program there. The philosophies that ground these graduate programs are consistent with those of our school.

Mindfulness in the classroom. I also used mindfulness techniques in my fourth grade classroom during a structure we called Mindfulness 10; during Morning Meeting and, transitions between curricular structures; and to support us through conflicts with friends.

Mindfulness 10. During the school day, I intentionally brought aspects of my mindfulness practice into the ways we lived together. At the beginning of every school year, I create a predictable schedule of curricular structures. During the year I collected data, from 8:30-9:00 we had a morning meeting, a time when we watched a news program together for discussion, discussed the events of the day or what we were considering as a classroom family or a school, and listened to any classroom or school news. Then from 9:00-9:55 we had math workshop where we learned about math, practiced it, and reflect on what we did during our practice time. Throughout the day, we lived through readers', writers', and content area (science and social studies) workshops. In each of these workshops, I found myself discussing mindfulness technique with the class and expecting them to discuss it with me, but not giving the students a consistent practice time during the school day. So, around the middle of the year, I instituted an additional workshop where we studied mindfulness. During the first 10 minutes before morning meeting, I provided the students different activities including: reading, writing, drawing, coloring mandalas, origami, painting, stretching, playing chess, building with Lego bricks, breathing, and asked them to work to bring their attention back to the activity they had chosen. I considered this a mindfulness practice.

Morning meeting. After implementing Mindfulness 10, our Morning Meeting discussions became a time we could reflect on those 10 minutes of practice time. We

discussed things like how we held our attention on one activity, what the experience was like, and how we might use this same process in other times of the day. We also had discussions around how mindfulness related to aspects of the news that we shared together.

Transitions between curricular structures. In between the 10 minutes of mindfulness practice and morning meeting, we moved from one physical space in the classroom to another and sometimes we needed different materials. That same type of transition from one curricular structure to another happened between 8 and 12 more times during the school day. For each and every transition, I asked the whole class to stand up, put down all materials they were using, and face me. We breathed in and out together once. I told them everything they would need for the next curricular structure. We breathed in together again, and we moved as we exhaled. When we moved during these transitions, we would also work to remain silent until we successfully completed our tasks of cleaning up our last curricular structure's materials and get out our next curricular structure's materials. If we needed to communicate, we would do our best to limit our communication to what we could signal to each other or we waited until we finished our task during the transition. All of this attention to detail during each transition was something I instituted in the name of all of us trying to do only one thing at a time, which is an aspect of my personal mindfulness practice.

Solving conflicts between friends. Also, as would be expected in any "crowded place," (Peterson, 1994) sometimes conflicts transpired between classroom family members. Many times, my work in supporting students through those conflicts involved helping them to employ mindfulness techniques to find and expand mental and emotional

space to make a choice that benefited themselves and demonstrated care for the other person, if that is what they sought to do. In many cases, I found myself advising students into how to best listen to friends and communicate in order to resolve or prevent misunderstandings and assumptions. We would practice techniques such as: taking time away from a friendship in order to give ourselves space to notice how we are feeling, breathing before discussing a tense situation with a friend, attending to our words before we spoke, or even writing down what we wanted to say.

Mindfulness after school. From October through April, I held mindfulness workshop on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:15 to 3:55 during the school year. I originally only invited 4th and 5th grade students to the workshop. However, in December, a colleague who taught second grade told me that she had some students who might benefit from working with us after school. Three of those students started attending workshop in January.

During our first few months, we spent the first 10 minutes of our sessions engaging in a seated, guided breathing practice either guided by me or a track from an iPhone application called *Headspace*. We would then have a discussion for between 10 and 20 minutes about what we experienced during that first 10 minutes. Sometimes we talked about a theoretical concept within mindfulness philosophy; other times we talked about ways my students had used mindfulness in their lives. During the last several minutes, we would use some type of activity or game that would highlight a mindfulness principle. After a few weeks of this, I began reflecting on the feel of the workshop itself, and realized that if I shifted the way we practiced, it would allow us to explore different aspects of mindfulness practice and its effects. By December, I had opened the practice

portion of the workshop (first 10 minutes of the workshop) up to those same practices I used during the Mindfulness 10 block in the classroom (writing, reading, drawing, etc.). We still spent the next 10-20 minutes talking about mindfulness ideas or practice; we also debated about whether or not certain activities should count as mindfulness practice. The last few minutes were either more practice time with the activities above or a group game that supported us in practicing a concept. For example, one of the games we played was called Human Knot. In Human Knot, the students form small groups, and they join hands across the small group in such a way that creates a human *knot*. The students then work together to make only one move at a time to untangle the knot. When we get the knots untangled, or the game stops being interesting, we talk together about the experience of having used the mindfulness concept of only doing one thing at a time. The specific content we addressed were all centered around student experience and how those experiences might relate and be informed by mindfulness principles. These principles/practices included:

- breathing techniques
 - alternating nostril breathing (using fingers to plug one nostril at a time, inhaling through one and exhaling through the other)
 - belly breathing (allowing the abdomen to be soft while inhaling and using the muscles of the abdomen to exhale strongly)
 - inhaling through the nostrils and exhaling through the mouth
 - attending to natural breath
 - breathing loudly enough to hear and use hearing to attend to our breath

- mindful movement
 - walking, running, moving arms, and opening and closing palms
- placing attention
 - tensing and relaxing muscles in our arms and legs
 - using our senses individually and in tandem to notice what is happening around us
 - noticing where our attention goes when we sit still
 - noticing our thoughts
 - noticing our emotions
- mindfulness in conflict with friends and family members
- using mindfulness to support us through difficult emotions
- noticing patterns and phenomena in life around us examples of these include:
 - when we got so excited, we sometimes made a mistake that caused a problem for us
 - when we stretched for more than a few minutes, we feel calmer
 - how we felt when we want to continue doing an activity (ex. reading) and we have to stop for some external reason
 - why we use the word being and why we use the word doing
 - how we felt when we were kind to a person or thought kind thoughts about a person
 - why certain things counted to us individually as mindfulness practice and why some don't
 - how to handle distractions

- the results we had seen in our lives of acting mindfully

Methodological Stance: Making Meaning Through Story

In Bruner's (2002) commentary *Making Stories: Law, Literature, and Life*, he argued that stories help us to do many things in our social landscapes. They are, effectively, tools. They open up space - for those of us telling and those of us listening - to interact and connect. Rosen (1985/2017) wrote about how those of us telling stories access memory to create autobiographical stories of experience, we appraise life-experience (Rosen, 1985 in Richmond, Kindle Location 8805). I intended for my project to be a way for us to define and document our experiences. Our stories became counter stories to those available in current research about the effectiveness of mindfulness as embedded in programs. They allowed us to story ourselves in ways that countered current socio-cultural and political binaries and promoted dialogue. I see these stories as a way to honor the contextualized complexity of how a mindfulness practice can impact learning and life. Stories help us to reach aspects of self that simple and direct tellings of facts or even units of learning seem to ignore. They emphasize the connective and entirely human aspects and affects of our experience.

How I define story. From a Peircean perspective, defining stories operationally requires us to address what conceivable effects stories enact in the world when we tell and listen to them. I find defining *story* difficult unless we define *story* as Labov, or our English literature courses would, as a piece of writing or oral speech that includes certain attributes that are in traditional conceptions of story (character, setting, plot, conflict, etc.). In contrast, and more in keeping with the way I see story, Barthes (1975) (in Rosen,

1985/2017) characterizes one text in relation to the sensible effects it has on all the other texts that exist when he wrote:

...the one text is not an (inductive) access to a model but entrance into a network with a thousand entrances: to take this entrance is to aim, ultimately, not at a legal structure of norms and departures but at a perspective (of fragments, of voices from other texts, other codes) ... each (single) text is the very theory of this difference. (Rosen, 1985 in Richmond, Kindle Locations 9238-9240)

It is this distinction between a *perspective on a network* and *norms and departures from a category* that I choose to employ in helping me define story as the rhizome of relationships between any set of existing events or implied events that someone has used to order or make sense of experience, lived or otherwise (Rosen, 1985/2017; Bruner, 2002, Barthes, 1975).

Bruner (2002) and Riessman (1993) all teach us about how stories are often used as cultural currency of understanding in our daily lives. When telling and listening to stories, we acknowledge some things and ignore others. We structure and organize life with story. We employ stories to help us better remember and to intentionally forget. We use stories for their unifying quality; they take disparate pieces of information and help us find context and make sense (Riessman, 1993). Stories, though, are interesting in the ways they function as breeding other stories in multiple ways. Story is generative.

My use of story. I chose story as my unit of analysis. As I analyzed my data, I did not consider individual utterances or singular words, phrases, or clauses as much as I did whole stories we told. I narrated my findings as story. In these ways, I provided my participants and myself the opportunity to do the thought-generating work that Stephen,

one of my participants, noted about telling stories: “Like when I talk about them [his experiences related to mindfulness], I feel like more thoughts are coming to my head of what I’m doing.” By focusing on stories, my participants and I had the opportunity to engage our internal experiences with the external world.

I employed story as my unit of analysis and form of presentation because of the way that *story* reflects the impermanence in the world; stories shift and change with each retelling. I also used story because its form provided me the chance to make sense of my data in the way that humans naturally make sense (Rosen, 1985/2017; Bruner, 2002). With my research, I sought to provide a departure point for more thought and more questioning on mindfulness and human experience. I wanted my story to generate more inquiry and further storytelling. Rosen (1985/2017) comments on how stories are dissimilar to other forms of language and reflect the ever-moving nature of the world in that stories are continually generative when he wrote, “Let the story grammarians beware. Sentences end with full stops. Stories do not. That is the guarantee that not only do we learn from the making but that the process continues beyond the end as the seed of another story readies itself for germination” (Rosen, 1985/2017, Kindle Locations 9338-9340).

Just as any other tool, stories can be used as active agents. Storytellers wield them with intention toward some goal. There are reasons for telling and not telling whole stories, for including or not including parts of stories as well. When we use stories, skeptical listeners’ “suspicion is justified, stories are surely not innocent: they always have a message, most often so well concealed that even the teller knows not what ax he may be grinding,” (Bruner, 2002). Though Bruner (2002) applied a strong metaphor by

using a lack of innocence and an ax to describe the powerful agency of a story and its teller, the reason that such tacit strength is possible within a story is because of what visions of the world and people every story takes for granted or brings to bear in order to exist. Those worlds encase assumptions of how things are and how they should be. There are assumptions embedded in every story of how the world is and how it should be.

In my work, I employed the stories that my students and I told throughout the year in a way that demonstrated my understandings of the nature of reality as impermanent and ever-flowing. I sought to use story to reflect human experience as a broad, multidimensional, and interpreted space with layers of possible conceptions and revisions embedded in it. Reciprocally, I also sought “to regard a story as stereographic space;” one charged with the energy of multiple voices and generating resistance against seeing story itself “as simply linear, however serpentine or meandering – the story line, as we say” (Rosen, 1985/2017, Kindle Locations 9254-9255).

Stories and storytelling.

We might be disposed to take stories much more seriously if we perceived them first and foremost as a product of the predisposition of the human mind to narratize experience and to transform it into findings which as social beings we may share and compare with those of others. (Rosen, 1985, Kindle Location 8847)

Story composition & storytelling. Over my school year, I lived, heard, and intended to present my story built of other stories. Story-colored lenses are also reflective of the teachings from the ancient mindfulness philosophical traditions where mindfulness ideas originated.

I present them thus, not as true representations of an actual events, but as the artifacts that resulted from the process of storytelling within a tradition that holds story as a central tenet of meaning making and communicating. Rosen (1985/2017) also suggested that narrative is the form for human thought,

for we dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future (Kindle Location 8857).

I discuss sense-making as an actively created process for myself and equally as creative for my readers. The way you read my story and re-narrate it to yourself in each reading matters to the meaning made just as much as my retellings of my memories, reflections, and data. In this way, we work together to decide what this story of my year is about. Using my experiences and my students' experiences as the *text* I read, in this piece, I am telling my story of that *text*.

The same way that Rosenblatt (1983) writes about past experience in life and with texts and readers' personal ways of being contributing meaning made of text, many aspects of my life contribute to the how I made meaning of my year and of what I wrote, re-presenting that meaning in this chapter. My Year's Story is built of my students' stories, my understandings of mindfulness philosophy and its legacy of stories that impart wisdom and function, the stories told within the research of other mindfulness researchers, the stories I find within the theories that resonate most with me, the stories I tell about my experiences with mindfulness, and those stories of who I am in and out of the context of school in regard to mindfulness. To acknowledge each of those lenses with

as much awareness as I can, I included connections to them and pieces of them throughout each story. Those connections among aspects of my life and experience that I'm drawing from and students' offerings are where the meaning exists. In keeping with Peircian (1897/1955) semiotic understandings, meaning is found in the relationships between and among concepts and possibilities. The connections I made and relationships I developed between ideas, themes, people, and places in students' and my accounts of our experiences with mindfulness were as the meaning made.

Story as a tool. The meaning that a reader or a writer makes of a story does not necessarily speak to the purposes or uses of the stories told, and that, to me, is where things get interesting. Harold Rosen (1985/2017) wrote about the greater autobiographical context and purpose of stories:

Many of the devices of storytellers (suspense is the one most often mentioned) are part of the act of seduction of the audience so that their attention is won for the real point and purpose of the tale. Every personal anecdote is a fragment of autobiography and to set about a full autobiography is to propose a meaning of life itself, to offer it to others. To engage intimately with others is to invite their stories, for it is via our stories that we present ourselves to each other. It is an interesting feature of personal storytelling that it usually sets in motion a sequence of stories (Kindle Location 11634).

When I tell stories, I am aware that I am sometimes trying to find the story of an event or time in my life that will serve me in a particular way. In this text, I used story to particularize my students' and my experiences in mindfulness, giving the landscape of research around mindfulness more color and shape, especially the uses of it in schools

with students. I draw my hope for using stories this way from Rosen (1985/2017) who addressed the way that schools are driven by (and I argue that by proxy, academia is driven by) what he termed “authoritative discourse” and proposed that we draw from Bakhtin’s (1981) “internally persuasive discourse” or story telling as the primary curriculum for schools. Rosen (1985/2017) argued that it can provide us a foundation for change “because it is within the narrative zone that there exists most promise for the alternative.” He continued:

Not that narrative is without its inert texts. It is only that in the making of narrative we can most easily elude the magisterial, and engage in the ‘play of boundaries’. Because when we are striving to retell, this is ‘no simple act of reproduction but rather a further creative development of another’s discourse in a new context and under new conditions. (Rosen, 1985/2017, Kindle Location 9805).

When I read and re-read my interview and discussion data for patterns, I saw connections between my students’ experience and teachings from mindfulness philosophy. I organized the stories in a way that helped me communicate these larger connections. Consistent with storytelling and teaching in these traditions, many of the things I learned are couched within conversation which is couched within a given social context. Like LeGuin (1980), I constructed my data analysis in a way that allowed me to “speak in many voices..., for a while...(a) habit of ventriloquy” (p. 196).

What stories can do: Storied selves.

A self is probably the most impressive work of art we ever produce, surely the most intricate. For we create not just one self-making story but many of them...it

is not just who and what we are that we want to get straight but who and what we might have been, given constraints that memory and culture impose on us, constraints of which we are often unaware. (Bruner, 2002, p. 14)

What we can accomplish with the sense-making power of story extends inward, within ourselves, and outward, into our world. In his writings on ideas of self, Pragmatist George Herbert Mead (1934/2000), wrote about the self with a linguistic distinction between the internal or personal self and the external or social self. He wrote about how the *I* exists as a reference in language for a self that exists, where as a *me* comes in to play as we talk about ourselves as the linguistic object of a clause or phrase, othering the *I* in a way that helps us name and externalize an agent in our world. Mead (1934/2000) sheds more light on how the *I* and *me* originate by addressing how time plays a role in the ways that we understand and make sense of ourselves: “(I)f you ask, then, where directly in your own experience the “I” comes in, the answer is that it comes in as an historical figure. It is what you were a second ago that is the “I” of the “me,” (Mead, 1934/2000, p. 590). Mead’s revealing of self through language maps on to Bruner’s (2002) understanding of self as a story, including the idea of the self, existing as subject and object as we:

construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, past and our hopes and fears for the future. Telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what’s happened, and why we’re doing what we’re doing (p.64).

As we narrate our world, we situate ourselves as characters within our stories of what happens around us, within us, and between ourselves and others. As characters in

our own stories, we begin to exist and develop according to the events that take place in these narrations.

A natural aspect, then, of my research was to specifically attend to the self as constructed through story. Within educational research, Self-study has become more prominent as an extension of naturalistic and qualitative research. The Reconceptualist movement in education in which proponents believed that “one always teaches the self,” included educational researchers drawing narrative work within the humanities, and a turn toward action research, (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) outlined potential issues and corresponding guidelines for quality within Self-study research in writing:

such study does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in. There is always a tension between those two elements, self and the arena of practice, between self in relation to practice and the others in the setting (p.15).

Theoretical Trajectory Toward *Narrated Inquiry*

Though I am theoretically grounded in story as a way of making sense, I did not use a form of Narrative Inquiry. Researchers in the field of Narrative Inquiry (Labov, 1997; Denzin, 2001; Clandinin, 2013; Zembylas, 2003) each root themselves in different frames for understanding Narrative Inquiry and narrative itself, and seek to make sense of events with a type of analysis that parses the story in order to understand through the lens of a specific definition of a story. I simply used story as my unit of analysis, presentation method, and as an organizational tool for my representation of data. For my primary analysis, I employed Constant Comparative approach, drawing on Grounded Theory

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The groups of codes I constructed were connected to concepts of narrative, in that they dealt with characterizations of Mindfulness itself. I call my representational approach Narrated Inquiry - drawing on aspects of story to demonstrate the sense I made of the findings.

Participants

Attending my Mindfulness Club workshop was a choice offered to the students in grades four and five at my school. Students could come to a workshop for as long as they wanted during a given session, and they could leave whenever they chose. This played out in multiple forms. Some students joined us on Thursdays but not Tuesdays because they had more homework at the beginning of the week. Some students joined us only if there was nothing exciting happening in aftercare. I planned three, two-week interview windows during the school year: one in October, one in February, and one in May. I invited all students who attended my workshop during those time periods to participate in those interviews. Each week, I invited all students who attended the workshop to participate in our reflective discussions. I audio taped both the interviews and the discussions.

Because I also collected data in the classroom, and classroom attendance was not a choice, I make a distinction between the workshop and the classroom. However, students and their families had to offer their informed consent for me to use their data in this study. So, whether they participated in the classroom or workshop, they were not obligated to participate in this study and could withdraw their involvement in my data set at any point.

I considered myself a participant in this study. By telling stories about the students, I constructed myself within my representation of data as a character and narrator. I also told stories about myself, I used my words and my student's words to tell about topics and events that rang true to me, that based on data analysis, I felt were worth telling. The stories I told are not generalizable; they are particular stories of particular participants, organized around patterns I constructed from the data. Because of this aspect of my involvement in the study, I also consider my analysis and representation of data to include elements of self-study research as well (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Via email, I recruited participants by explaining the study to families who had students interested in the mindfulness workshop in grades four and five, and of all the students in my class. I explained the purpose of the study, basic data collection and data analysis. This email included the opportunity for parents and caregivers to ask questions and participate in the workshop themselves. When individuals volunteered to participate, I sent them a letter that included the consent form. I provided the students participating in the study with assent forms, as well. As the workshop developed throughout the year, one second grade teacher had three students she thought might benefit from being a part of our workshop. I offered their families the same information and consent opportunities at that time.

Data Collection Methods

I collected data from myself and my participants. To document my experience, I began the year by writing my own history of my experience with mindfulness and education. After mindfulness sessions, I wrote in a journal about significant events in my experience of those sessions. I also used the journal for my personal reflections and

epiphanies at other times. To collect data from my participants, I audio taped our discussions during our sessions at least once each week of our Tuesday and Thursday meetings. I conducted three phases of more formalized data collection in October, February, and May. During these three phases, I conducted semi-structured interview-type conversations with 19 of my participants. I offered the interviews to every participant who was present during those windows of time; those 19 children were the ones who volunteered to be interviewed.

Organization of Data

I organized my data first in collected audio files on a password protected internet server (GoogleDrive). I transcribed selected discussions from the workshop and from my morning meeting, and the interviews I collected with participants. I saved those transcriptions on my password protected GoogleDrive account as well.

Data Analysis

I drew on constant comparative methods in order to develop grounded theories and relevant codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) from the data I collected. I used those codes to help me determine which discussions I analyzed. If codes showed up frequently in a discussion or if it featured critical incidents in my story of our year, I analyzed it. For example, at a certain point in the school year, I introduced stretching as a mindfulness practice and one of our discussions began with an epiphany that connected mind and body for one student. I saw this as a critical incident because after that point in the year, I had not been seeing mindfulness practice that way. I had conceptualized mindfulness practice as a more physically passive activity, but this stretching helped me to see how

experiencing a physical or bodily aspect of the practice could make it more accessible to people who may have not been easily inclined to practice with a still body.

Grouping codes: Beginning to narrate inquiry. Once I had these interviews and discussions coded, I took the codes I had and began grouping them. I grouped them in a few different ways before settling on my final organization. I grouped them first by what codes seemed to fit together conceptually. This allowed me to collapse and eliminate some codes. In order to construct the cohesive narrative that I envisioned as representative of my findings, I needed a more categorical structure than simply collapsing codes would provide I sorted through different possibilities for how I might organize the findings and provide examples of the codes and student stories themselves at that point including organizing the stories by child, chronologically, or by major theme. I decided to use major themes or larger groups of codes, so that I could highlight the multiplicity of experience and the similarities of experience for all participants. As I grouped my codes and their stories, I knew I wanted these categories to reflect the language participants used in their stories and how they were narrating their experiences, while at the same time provide some historical, theoretical, philosophical and content-based contextual grounding in the kinds of things that we discussed in Mindfulness Club and my classroom. I chose categories that first reflected characterizations of Mindfulness that students evoked in their storytelling about their experiences. To illustrate and illuminate those characterizations, I borrowed from the foundational philosophical texts surrounding mindfulness philosophy.

I predicted that including the philosophical backgrounds of the categories themselves would provide a natural and necessary backdrop for the stories my students

and I told that would give context to my readers for meaning making. This format of writing and analytical thought reflected the conversational and conceptual frames that mindfulness philosophy employs as well. Within mindfulness philosophy, respected teachers tell dharma talks, or lectures that illuminate a topic in the philosophical school. These talks are rooted in illustrative mindfulness stories or similes. Kabat-Zinn (1994) wrote in similar ways in his book *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. I borrowed inspiration from dharma talks given by mindfulness teachers and quotes from Kabat-Zinn's (1994) work to help me frame my findings. Because I sought to reflect the storytelling aspects of mindfulness philosophy, discourse, and practice in my analysis and re-presentation of my findings, I grouped the codes with these mindfulness philosophy topics and organized my story and my students' stories thusly.

Once I had my codes grouped under their mindfulness categories, I began writing my story. I further organized these categories as sections of my larger story of our school year together. The choices I made about the order of the story were rooted in my authorial decisions about what topics connected conceptually to the last section and what would lead well to the sections to come. In effect, my organization is a crucial step in how I made sense of my data. I count the creation of that story and the organization of its sections as a part of my analysis, not simply the reporting of it. I do so primarily because I see the construction of story not only as a production, but as a process of what Rosen (1985/2017) terms "discovery learning" (Kindle Location 9280). I see the authoring of my story as a vital piece of the meaning making process. Aspects of this process include but are not limited to the ordering of the mini-chapters, the emphasis I place on certain

things over others, and the connections I make to dharma talks I have heard, mindfulness philosophy texts I have read, and commentary on those philosophy texts.

Trustworthiness, Triangulation, and Member Checking

Because I wrote through the summer, during the school break, when we got back to school, I invited students to read through the stories that pertained to them and respond with written feedback. I changed the names of my participants in the story. I made final decisions about what to include after discussing the stories with my participants. I did not reveal any students' pseudonyms to students or families. I consider this move to serve as a vital piece of the co-authoring.

Another vital piece of my process of storying involves also offering the story to others as a way of triangulating what I was seeing in my data with others. I offer my story as mine, but for everyone to read and interpret, and potentially retell as their own. With this in mind, I offered my findings to a local artist and friend, Tony, and asked him to read, interpret, and then take photos or connect photos he has already taken to illustrate the stories within my story. I employed these photos as touchstones for those who read the text and attended my dissertation defense. I invited them, to reconstruct their own text in a piece of art I created, again doing the work of making it their own, remembering it, physically putting it back together. I saw this choice as even further enhancing the "stereographic space" that Rosen (1985/2017) used to characterized multi-voice stories.

Subjectivity/Positionality

Subjectivities and their potential effects. In keeping with my post-structural philosophical foundations, I too, see that "binary opposition, objective/subjective, is no

longer useful because no person can get rid of the subjective and thereby achieve objectivity,” (Glesne, 2011, p. 151-152). With that in mind, I describe here some of the “autobiographical, emotional states that are [were] engaged by different research situations,” (p. 152) and that informed my interpretations in this study. When addressing my subjectivities, I draw on Peshkin’s (1998) “subjective I’s” to describe those states within and around me that engage in different aspects of this research. Because this research is rooted in and will cyclically facilitate growth in my classroom teaching practice, I share some of my personal and academic history to contextualize the engagement of my “subjective I’s.” Given that the research itself is fully contextualized within my classroom practice, the subjectivities I engage are directly related to classroom practice as well.

“School Success Story I.” I grew up in an upper-middle class community about 10 miles from the center of the closest city. I am White, a woman, and grew up as the daughter of a small-business owner. My family attended church, and I was active in my church and school communities. As I began a career as a teacher in an elementary school, I came to know students who had backgrounds that did not align with mine in many ways. With these new relationships came a dissonance between what I thought counted as learning and what I was coming to understand as learning through my students’ experiences. My students did not all reflect the White, upper-middle class, heterosexual, Christian values that permeate the social structures in public schools in the United States. They may not have all achieved by school standards, but they all learned every day. As I came care and learn about my students, I began to see that learning could be about more than just doing the right behaviors and achieving the right accolades as defined by

dominant groups. My school success affected my research in this project because of how it served as a juxtaposition to my developing beliefs about learning.

“Learning-As-A-Process I.” In my third-year teaching, I started a master’s program in Language and Literacy at the nearby university. Through the readings, my writing, and our discussion, I began to find words for what I was feeling about my disconnect between achievement and learning. I learned about inquiry-based instructional methods, workshop-related classroom structures, meaning-focused understandings of reading and some of the theory behind them. I shifted my teaching focus and learning framework from working to get things right and avoiding being wrong toward reflecting on experience and coming to know myself, a process. Throughout this time, I found parallels in the yoga, mindfulness, and insight meditation practices I was developing. Through mindfulness, a practice and disposition that permeates the work of both yoga and meditation, I saw the importance of continually engaging in a process of action and reflection (Schon, 1983) in ways that were generative and informative to me spiritually, physically, and academically. My work in mindfulness helped me to see connections between the dedication to process I was developing and my own personal learning. I found that in reflecting on experience and honoring the learning that resulted as a process, I became more active, engaged, and agentive in my own learning process and therefore learned more. My believing that learning is a process changed my approach to this project and my participants in that I do not see our work together as having only the goal of gaining specific bits of knowledge together about mindfulness. I believed that we would come to learn and grow through a process of inquiring into ourselves and our practices, and that the process of inquiry might require that we make slight changes based

on our reflections to the mindfulness workshop or my research into our experiences in the workshop.

“Empathy-As-Central I.” My experience in the generative discussions in my Language and Literacy work also contributed to my understandings of mindfulness, identities, and learning as social constructions. Their social nature implies the necessity for attending to the politics, positioning, and privilege-related aspects of learning, achievement, and being. Though I enact and see myself as a part of the dominant culture through my Whiteness, middle class status, and history in a mainstream Christian church, I also came to see how important it was for my personal and professional life to acknowledge the oppression I experienced in relation to my gender, sexual orientation, and my religious questioning of my beliefs in light of experience. Mindfully engaging all of my subjectivities supported me in more fully engaging the intellectual empathy necessary to take conscious action in an ever-evolving socio-political arena (Linker, 2015).

The dominant and oppressed identities I enact are both equal parts of who I am and therefore, provide me multiple lenses through which to understand the world. For those of us with identities that reflect dominance, it is crucial that we re-humanize our spaces in ways that make empathy possible, easily accessible, and eventually a cultural norm. Mindfulness comes into play in how I navigate positioning and encouraging empathy within my classroom and school. When I am reflecting on my role in given situations in light of politics, social forces, or positioning, I will often draw on my mindfulness practice to help me to settle emotionally, see more clearly, and engage my empathy more fully in the same ways that recent research has demonstrated (Burrows,

2015; Coholic & Eys, 2016; Hamel et al., 2013; Hoffman, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011; Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008; Griggs & Tidwell, 2015; Milligan, Baldi, & Spiroiu, 2015; Wisner & Starzec, 2016).

I anticipated that there would be times when I would specifically connect what we did to examples of systemic oppression and discrimination that we see in the world around us. I also intended to be working to continually hone the messages I sent about mindfulness to ensure that I was communicating its place in my life as a personal practice and not simply a behavioral adjustment tool, in the ways that it has been used in some curricula and research (Black & Ferando, 2014; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Huppert & Johnson, 2010).

“Stories Matter I.” The reading of research on identities and experience and attending to my own help me to see identities as fluid foundations from which people make choices and construct understandings that further contribute to how they see themselves and others. I describe these fluid foundations as stories or narratives. We are our stories, familiarly structured and newly enacted with every telling (Bruner, 2002). I believe narrative to be the currency of the process of sense making; it fuels the movements toward understanding. Because of my experiences as a learner, a teacher, and mindfulness practitioner, I wanted to know more about how my participants would narrate their experiences and themselves in light of some time spent in a mindfulness workshop. I situated this line of inquiry in the service of better understanding the experiences of people. My “Stories Matter I” was engaged in this project through the ways that I structured my data collection and analysis. I also believed that this subjectivity would affect the way that I planned the activities of the workshop

themselves. Because I believed stories matter, I incorporated opportunities for participants to tell their stories.

In regard to this research and my work with my students, my “School Success Story I”, “Learning-As-A-Process I”, “Empathy-As-Central I”, and “Stories Matter I” informed and influenced my teaching practice daily. These subjectivities also, equally, informed the research that I did within my teaching practice.

Positionalities and their potential effects. Equally as much, my positionalities play a role in my work as a teacher, practitioner, and researcher. I am a teacher at the school I used for a research site: I have worked there for three years. In regard to the practitioners who are students at my school, I hold a position of power, institutionally and culturally because they have known me as a fourth or fifth grade teacher for most of their school careers. I taught several students who chose to participate in this afterschool workshop. I have engaged with their families more than others in the workshop. With those I have taught, I have already built relationships. I built relationships with those that I did not yet know well, I believed that it was just as important for me to communicate my intended positioning for this study to my participants and their families as it was to communicate them to the IRB or any audience to whom I write. My position as a White, middle class female could change the way that students are willing to engage when I am present. Whether they are affiliated with me on those levels or not, our race, gender, and class similarities or differences inhibited or promoted certain kinds of interactions. Holding dual positions as teacher and researcher, I worked hard to collect and analyze my data without dismissing those pieces of data that appeared insignificant or painted my participants or teaching practice in either a negative or positive light.

My position as a practitioner of mindfulness aligned with some of the families or school personnel involved in the study. In those cases, I had a common language from which to build the relationships I mentioned earlier. However, cultural language of a mindfulness practice was something for me to attend to as we engaged with a mindfulness practice in the workshop. I was ready to carefully teach the language and reveal the more subtle aspects of a mindfulness practice that might not be readily apparent to the newest practitioners among us. My status as a practitioner potentially positioned me as an outsider simply because of my experience with something that felt new to some of my participants. It was important for me to note any possible effects of my position as a practitioner in my workshop engagement and data collection.

Monitoring strategies. I engaged in discussions and interviews with my participants and kept weekly reflections on the workshop and data collection and analysis to help me continually note my positionality and how it may be affecting my perception of participants' stories and the next steps in our workshop. It was important to take note of my race, gender, and class affiliations or differences in relation to participants as these could have influencee their choices in discussions. I shared my work throughout the project with colleagues within and outside of my field and other doctoral students to discuss aspects of my work that I might not have perceived. While I kept all names and identities of participants confidential throughout the process, the discussions I had with this group of supportive colleagues around what collected and found helped me monitor how my subjectivities and positionality could be affecting my selections and interpretations of the data.

Ethical Issues

Ethically, I had to consider that I am a researcher and a teacher at the school. Though I put safeguards in place to protect my participants against institutional pressure such as making this workshop an after-school choice for students, parents, and school personnel, I still had to take into account the potential for my status and positionality as a teacher to affect the choices of my participants. I also implemented a measure within the workshop that participants did not have to attend every session that they were able to attend. Moving in and out of the workshop allowed them the freedom to choose when they engaged and when they did not. I will keep track of participants' engagement as we moved forward throughout the year.

There were minimal risks involved in the actual study, though there have been accounts in research and pop-culture articles of student practitioners' frustrations and struggles within the practice (Brown, 2014; Booth, 2014; Wisner & Starzec, 2016) the mindfulness work in which we engaged was designed to directly address feelings of frustration and struggle. The tools that participants developed through their mindfulness practices can support their continued learning, dispositions toward inquiry, emotional resilience, and intellectual empathy (Arthurson, 2015; Black & Ferando, 2014; Burrows, 2015; Coholic & Eys, 2016; Costello et.al., 2014; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Frederickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Griggs & Tidwell, 2015; Hamel et al., 2013; Hoffman, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008; Linker, 2015; Mapel, 2012; Mendelson, Greenberg, Dariotis, Gould, Rhoades, & Leaf, 2010; Milligan, Baldi, & Spiroiu, 2015;

Viafora, Mathiesen, & Unsworth, 2015; Moore, 2013; Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005; Wisner & Starzec, 2016).

As a practitioner, teacher, and researcher this workshop benefitted me simply because I developed a community of practice and research structure that required me to reflect on my own mindfulness practices. This research will guide my practices as a teacher and leader of the mindfulness workshop going forward because the reflections that facilitated shifts in my teaching and programming (Schon, 1983). The project served to be mutually beneficial to both participants and myself in the ways I expounded upon in my review of literature and referenced again in the paragraph above. I checked in during interviews, and periodically within the workshop itself, to ensure that the engagements we shared during our time together were continually beneficial to all stakeholders.

Limitations/Considerations

The nature of narrative and qualitative research is such that with it we do not arrive at generalizable theory or fact, we, instead, highlight the particulars of human experience. We choose to develop and share the stories that might serve to counter the narratives that arise out of some status-quo supporting and mainstream readings of quantitative research (Noblitt, 1999). I can understand this as being a limitation to my research, if I intend to support the use of mindfulness in classrooms in certain arenas. Though I see this as a strength of my research project, I was very clear about the goals of my research when I communicated about it to others. Because I worked with participants who were engaging in a voluntary workshop, I did not have mandated attendance and was at the mercy of others' schedules. I could see this uncertainty of participation as a limitation because of the possible inconsistency it might imply. However, because my

data also included interviews, I kept participants' attendance in mind as a consideration for discussion within the interviews and as important parts of the experience of practicing mindfulness. Choosing to show up or not, mentally and physically, is an important part of the practice. My narrative construction work took place with children and adults, students, parents, and teachers, so I needed to keep in consideration the differences in the ways that we may interact or tell our story of the mindfulness workshop together. This served as a limitation given the comfort level of students, families, and colleagues, given my positionality.

Conclusion

In one of our recent current events discussions, several students weighed in on their opinions of the recent Brexit controversy happening as Britain begins taking steps to leave the EU. It became apparent to me that within this discussion, the students who participated out loud in the discussion were sympathetic to immigrants and refugees who are central to the debate of whether or not Britain should stay in the EU. They worked to understand why anyone would not be okay with immigrants moving in to Britain, and I worked to help them see that there were multiple factors that people were accessing when voting on this issue. I hoped to help them round out their stances and initial understandings as incomplete and simply someone else's story of someone else's opinions and choices. I came to understand during that discussion how very important it is that my students and anyone participating in a democracy sees the matrix of multiplicity that characterizes every debate. I have accessed my mindfulness practice in order to see those colors of multiplicity get brighter. I intended the same for my participants. Our workshop facilitated opening those windows to widening sight for those

who participated. In many ways, this research project enhanced and challenged my understandings of mindfulness, inquiry-based education, and teaching into responsible socio-political critique and action, and their intersections. It helped me to find the spaces where I have dichotomized issues, flipping my own coins to make decisions and swinging pendulums to explain away change. I held hope that this research project would challenge my views and shift my foundations in ways that changed my practice in the classroom. Though hope is often colored by overtones of emotion and even passivity, throughout this project I refused to count this hope as anything less than an active catalyst toward more peaceful living. Through living my experiences and storying them I found a deep sense of hope, and its effects for me proved far from pointless. I see now that the hope I found may even be necessary -- necessary to stop the swinging, necessary to stop the flipping, and necessary to my practice and our practice breaking free from the chains of a binary, pulled taut, to take a necessary step forward.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Prologue: Practice First, Teach Next

“Wherever you are is the perfect place to awaken...You have all the ingredients to breathe and find freedom just where you are” (Kornfield, 2015).

Jack Kornfield (2015), a teacher of mindfulness concepts, made this point in a recent online article he wrote about how he changes from year to year and specifically how he changes his mind. In the article, he lists many different geographical places people travel seeking enlightenment, but ends with the idea that the only requirement for awakening is that you are there. That perfect place for my waking up to possibility as a 4th grade teacher happened in what seemed like the least perfect of places.

We were about to independently read as a part of our readers’ workshop. As in most classrooms, there is a settling in period, like the last of the storm before the calm. Ours was always a little longer and louder than some others. The yelling was what I noticed first. Vincent was mad at Deanna again. Though from completely different neighborhoods, the two fought like siblings. Then I noticed the movements. Rashawn crawled under desk after desk to try to find a place to read his book on the Illuminati, and Bailey had just finished her reading log. In the intermission between adding this last book entry into the log and putting it back in her folder, Bailey glanced at the spat from across the room and was poised to spring to Deanna’s aid. Strangely enough, the others in the room were reading quietly ignoring the hallmarks of this too familiar dispute. What I

noticed next is what startled me the most: before I moved to settle the argument, really before I even looked hard at the situation, I took a breath.

It wasn't intentional. Not at all. In fact, the breath was enough of an impulse that I was taken aback. Something had shifted in me, and in response to stress, I paused. I had taken yoga classes for close to a year. Pausing to breathe in the midst of stress is something that the yoga teachers had often encouraged, and I had tried to do it. However, this was the first day I noticed it happening without my trying to do it. What was even more astounding was what I chose to do after that breath. Instead of focusing on verbally muscling the yelling to stop, I listened.

And for the first time, I heard and noted some of the subtext of the yelling. It was like a scene from a movie where time slows and actions around a protagonist are more apparent. Vincent was feeling unappreciated and angry. He had tried once again to be a friend to Deanna by handing her books for independent reading to her, and she hadn't thanked him. Deanna hadn't realized how much this meant to Vincent and was feeling accused of being mean when she did not intend to be. I walked over to them, and interrupted. I told each of them what I heard them saying, and with an apprehension that could only be attributed to the significant shifts they were noticing in my in behavior, they looked up at me somewhat stunned and nodded. I instructed them both that the best time for an apology was when something happened or some hurt was had that was not intentional. Deanna obliged a cautious apology and Vincent calmed. They retreated to their spots to read, and I stood there gobsmacked.

Trusting the path. It was after a series of those moments and over the course of many months that I began to realize that the growth I was feeling as a classroom

manager, as a provider of emotional and academic support for my kids, and as a curriculum planner was mirroring my growth as a yoga student. The patterns I noticed in my responses to the discomfort of a difficult yoga pose that my hamstrings were unwilling to perform were the same patterns that I noticed in response to the discomfort of a student asking a question that presented a political conundrum. It wasn't like I suddenly had answers to the gamut of classroom enigmas, but for the first time I felt like I could trust myself to determine a plausible path of what I might do next in the face of a tricky teaching and learning situation.

As I became more aware of myself, I started extending my awareness out to situations involving my students. I watched them get stuck on math problems, stuck in friendship situations, stuck in trouble with teachers or parents, and react. When asked about why they did what they did in a given situation or how they made a choice, they described a chain of cause and effect that bound them to actions they did not want to take. Once I moved beyond seeking to control them, I began instead to empathize.

I knew how frustrating it was to feel like the only thing I could think to do in a difficult situation was so clearly not working. However, with time and a dedicated yoga practice, I felt myself slowly unwinding and breaking the links of those cause and effect chains that had kept me stuck. I felt compelled to consider how the practices I was engaging with yoga might support my kids in finding more awareness, more possibility, and more efficacy in the choices they made.

Breathing into possibility. Time passed and I practiced more yoga. I studied yogic philosophy and began meditating on my own. I continued progressively seeing more clearly and trusting myself in the face of the choices I had to make in life and at

school. The realization that my practices could be beneficial to kids did not directly translate into an action plan in the classroom. I knew that my experience happened as a result of practices I took on by choice and that I was not yet comfortable teaching others. However, what I was comfortable doing was sharing with students how I might breathe into, notice, listen, and make a choice in a situation like the one in which they were stuck. I also realized that each time I engaged in these types of practices, I learned more about myself and became better equipped to bring to bear what I knew about myself and trust my decisions in all kinds of settings. I got the sense that these new states of being could be beneficial to my kids as well.

Sharing my ways of understanding conflict as a place for growth potential seemed to shift situations in the classroom that previously caused disruption. Supporting students in replaying and acting out situations where they felt pigeon-holed into only having one option seemed to help them see possibility. Dealing with the stress of difficult academic topics by trusting my students to take a break from the classroom to run an errand, get water, or visit the library, seemed to remove the tension in situations before they devolved into a problem. Each of these techniques related to processes for handling difficulty were ones that I derived from my yoga and meditation practices.

As I learned more about eastern philosophies, mindfulness became the word I used to describe the kinds of ways of being I was using to support my students in making decisions in more conscious ways. At the same time, as a graduate student, I needed to decide on exactly what I wanted to research for my dissertation work. I had spent three to four years studying the idea of reader identity as it played out in my classroom. I conducted small studies, wrote research papers, and presented my work at conferences.

Through those activities, I learned some intellectually interesting and pragmatically productive information about connecting students with one another as readers and how my students responded to my encouraging them to attend to their own identities as readers: noticing and naming things like their favorite authors, books, genres, series, their processes for figuring out words, and their strategies for better understanding text. However, I was unsettled with having reader identity be my main focus. It seemed too specific relative to how I was seeing the world; what my students and I were coming to learn about ourselves as readers was stretching into knowledge about ourselves as learners in general. I wanted my research to reflect my recent expansion. I ended up writing my way to connection.

Taking shape. As the wind spiraled through the trees in front of my favorite coffee shop, I reached for my empty iced coffee cup to garner one more sip from before tossing it into the trash. In parallel form, I looked down at the grey lined pages that I was using for my notes that day. Shaking my head at the words I had written and feeling stale and stuck as a result of reading them, I turned the page, and wrote, “*What’s the point?*”

Why did I care so much about research around identity? What mattered most about what I’d found out about identity and its place with learners in schools? How could this work grow? These questions smattered the top of the page and after a line skip and a short dash, I attempted an answer. And what I wrote was primarily about the idea of supporting my kids toward making conscious choices. While I hoped that with my identity work I was encouraging my kids to make conscious choices about what books they read and how they worked to understand them, I decided that what mattered most about that work was helping students take the information they’d collected about

themselves as readers to make those conscious choices about what they were reading and how. By conscious choices, I meant that I wanted them to be able to do the work that I described in my earlier vignette about Vincent and Deanna. I wanted them to pause, become aware of the situation at hand, and make a choice out of that awareness.

If I was going to grow this work, I wanted to see it pervade all that we did in the classroom, in every subject area. I decided that I needed to focus in on the idea of making conscious choices as learners. And staring down at the number of times I'd written *conscious choices* on my paper, my stuckness started to dissolve. I saw explicit potential for my work in mindfulness and identity to coincide. Though I did not have a clear plan for how any of this would look, I was starting to draw energy from the potential in this connection. Seeing this common thread in my answers and, as a result, feeling wonderfully unstuck, I gathered my things and walked a little more freely through that breeze away from the coffee shop than I had on the walk toward it.

Becoming. I started thinking about what the connection between mindfulness and identity would look like and sound like in my classroom. I researched programs that used mindfulness in classrooms, and found story after story about how mindfulness was changing the landscape of student behavior in schools. It made sense - work in mindfulness practices changed my behaviors - but the studies focused on having students follow teacher directions and school rules. I was not comfortable employing mindfulness primarily in the name of helping students make choices within someone else's design. Instead, I wanted to use mindfulness and my learning from it to support my students in being more aware, finding more possibility, and becoming more willing to make their own decisions in various situations, not making the decisions that someone else

determined were best. While it makes sense that with mindfulness that, a student's choices would fall in line with school rules and teacher direction, for me, mindfulness was more than a direction-following tool. I decided that whatever I did in school with mindfulness would need to emphasize more than simply following someone else's directions. What I did needed to help my students develop, trust, and stand behind their own plans of action.

As with most inquiries, I talked with friends about my wonderings and some of them suggested some readings to me. On the recommendation of a friend, I read Jon Kabat Zinn's (2011) *Wherever You Go There You Are*, a book of short mindfulness stories and practice exercises. It led me to research Jon Kabat Zinn's work and the curriculum associated with him. I researched it more deeply and found out about the training programs offered for teachers who were interested in using the curriculum. I signed up for training as I finished my last few classes in my graduate program. I tried out some of the lessons from that curriculum with my class, and decided that to do the kind of work in mindfulness practice with students that I wanted to do, I would need more time than I could reserve for it during the school day. I decided to host an afterschool program where we would practice mindfulness and talk with one another about our experiences as mindfulness practitioners. Though the mindfulness curriculum in which I was trained provided a starting point for what I did with these groups after school, I found that, just like in my work as a teacher, the most effective curricular moments were those that arose when I tailored the curriculum to what my kids were dealing with or interested in at the time. In May of 2016, I closed out my last mindfulness

after-school session for the school year planning to take the next year to develop my own mindfulness curriculum with a group of kids who would come to an afterschool club.

I spent the summer writing a dissertation proposal and trying to avoid thinking about what the kids and I would actually do each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon in mindfulness club. I knew I did not want to simply repeat the eight week program in Mindful School's curriculum, but I did not know what I wanted to do instead. So, I procrastinated. And as August drew closer, I decided to simply pick up where I left off in the Spring, with breathing. It seemed like a logical place to start. Many of my kids associated mindfulness with breathing deeply to get calm anyway, so I thought it might be a connection for them to follow.

We started at the beginning of October. In my reflective notebook, I wrote that I sought for Mindfulness Club to be:

A time when a group of people interested in mindfulness meet together to try out different mindfulness techniques. We discuss our experiences in using the techniques and talk about ways that these techniques can support our actions in the world. There are times when we will read, act, write, draw, and play with some of the concepts behind mindfulness in order to understand them better.

Through these engagements, we will start to develop a sense of what mindfulness is, how we practice it, and how it plays out in our lives. We finish each session with one of the basic techniques, breathing deeply for a few rounds. I intend for this to be a time for us to inquire into mindfulness, ourselves, and our ways of being in the world around us.

It was wordy. As is typically expected with time and space, I now pare down the paragraph to: Mindfulness Club is time when a group of people meet to practice mindfulness techniques, discuss their experiences within mindfulness, and engage with mindfulness concepts in multimodal ways. Within and originating from my data, I uncovered nine major ways that my students and I characterized mindfulness throughout our study. In this chapter, I tell you the stories that helped me to determine and provide evidence for characterizations of mindfulness as: calm, emotion, transformation, awareness, dwelling place, attention to body and breath, choice, skillfulness in relationship, and revelation of what we do not notice.

Mindfulness as Calm

In *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Kabat-Zinn (1994) outlines several concepts related to mindfulness philosophies in ways that make the philosophies accessible in similar ways to the words of my students. My students and Kabat-Zinn (1994) helped me to see the beauty and value in how the mundane and daily struggles can become the most important fodder for practice. I borrow from Kabat-Zinn (1994) in order to frame my students' stories and provide mindfulness philosophical touchstones that ground my students stories throughout this chapter. He writes:

Dwelling in stillness and looking inward for some part of each day, we touch what is most real and reliable in ourselves and most easily overlooked and undeveloped. When we can be centered in ourselves, even for brief periods of time in the face of the pull of the outer world, not having to look elsewhere for something to fill us up or make us happy, we can be at home wherever we find ourselves, at peace with things as they are, moment by moment (p. 96).

Calm matters. “It makes you calm,” one student commented, parroting what nearly all the students had said in response to my question about why anyone would even want to spend their time being mindful or attending to their attention.

I asked this question in a classroom discussion one day, and over and over, students who offered answers touched on the purpose of mindfulness being to make the practitioner feel calm. Even with prompting, poking, and nudging from me toward other potential effects, *calm* was the word that mattered to them. The tension I felt following this discussion caused me pause. I had to accept that using mindfulness as an access point for finding calm was the primary reason that they engaged in mindfulness. However, it felt trite and cliché that we were sitting around talking about calm after a year of solid reflection around mindfulness and talking about different situations in which mindfulness helped them. Summer came and I had long since let go of the frustration of not getting the complexity of thought that I wanted from my students. I began reading through and analyzing their responses to me in interviews and discussions. As I looked back through that data, I saw the traces of the word *calm* throughout their responses. At the same time, I was re-reading through some of the canonical texts in mindfulness philosophy, and I began to understand an emphasis on getting calm was not just a stereotypical simplification of the effects of meditation, it was central to others’ experiences of mindfulness as well, even those of people who dedicate their lives to studying mindfulness. No matter how varied my students’ offerings, a sense of calm was central to their noticings and interestingly enough, primary in philosophical texts of mindfulness.

Being calm at home. Stephen explained during one of his interviews that being calm helped him at home:

Emily: Could be that. I know a lot of adults who experience that; sometimes I experience the same thing. You mentioned something just a second ago about you 'do it together.' Does she sometimes breathe with you?

Stephen: Sometimes when she gets mad, she just kind of (breathing) walks away naturally. She does that already naturally, like, sometimes when she comes and picks me up, I know she's I know she's been breathing because she would come to me all happy and stuff, and then when she gets mad or something she would breathe or sometimes she does Facebook on her phone.

Emily: You told a couple of stories about how when your mom's stressed out at home, you find ways to work through her responses to that because it's really, really hard.

Stephen: Very hard, so sometimes I just find a way to get out of that general area that she's in. So like if she's in the kitchen, I'll go to my room or if she's in my room I'll I would say, I need to go to the bathroom and just sit on the toilet for a few minutes...not like with the seat down of course...but just sit on it and breathe until I'm ready until I go back into my room.

Emily: Does it seem to change the way you guys interact?

Stephen: Yes like, once I'm good when my mom gets mad, I'll say, 'I love you.' Or I'll say, 'Mom calm down' and usually she will, but when I didn't breathe, I'd kind of debate with her and she'll get mad at me.

Emily: That's a really interesting pattern. that's kind of cool. So can you talk more about that - like the difference between debating and then all the stuff you say differently?

Stephen: So, when I breathe, I feel better, enough that, I can sit down and talk with her and not get mad or if she makes a mistake I be like, 'It's okay', and when I don't, I get angry easily. Very angry and then I grind my teeth a lot when I try not to, then I try not to, ya know, let it out...then when I breathe...when I'm calmed down I can calm my mom down. And then we can sit down and do it together and usually when it works and that's how we get stuff.

Emily That's really cool. What do you mean 'get stuff?' Like understand it?

His reasons for finding calm seemed to me to be apparent, practical, and varied, and he understood it all through the lens of shifting from upset to calm. Davis and I also discussed a situation from home that involved family interaction:

Davis: When I would calm down, I recognize that I need to stay calm and not be so loud all the time and do what's right, so I won't have to keep doing it.

Emily: So, is it easier to listen to your parents when you're calm like that?

Davis: Yeah

General reasons for getting calm. As we considered reasons for getting calm, I worked to provide my students a sense that no matter what the external situation, the process of finding calm was almost always accessible within their inner worlds. In a

discussion where Carter noted how difficult some of his situations were with his family lately, this conversation occurred:

Emily: It becomes really, really important for you to remember that even though other people outside of you are going to do things that make life really, really difficult, you've always got your internal world that you can do something about.

Sam: You're being really tough about this, I would have cried for the whole day.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, and understand... you get what Sam is saying right?

Carter: uh huh

Emily: You're super strong and part of what makes you super strong is that you know what to do in the moment to make sure you're okay, even when things feel like they're falling apart around you. Thank you so much for being brave enough to share that with us, Carter.

Immersing ourselves in those processes, we found corners within the space of calm to explore, illuminating connections between calm and other ideas. In every one of our interviews, Davis mentioned that mindfulness created a sense of calm within him and connected mindfulness and integrity:

Davis: When we're in the class, like my work is almost done but I didn't finish it in the right amount of time and I was playing during some of that time and I had to go to the front and finish it, and I was about to get mad and try to sneak out. But then I said I'm not going to do that I'm going to have integrity.

Emily: Wow, what's *integrity* mean?

Davis: Doing the right thing whether someone's watching you or not.

Emily: Sounds like you've talked about that somewhere. How does mindfulness connect to integrity or any of those thoughts that you're learning about how to be?

Davis: Because if you're ...you have to be mindful, and integrity includes that, because if you don't have integrity or mindfulness, you have to know everything that's mindful, plus integrity helps you kinda get calmed down, because if you tell them...if I wasn't having integrity and I told them I was doing the wrong thing...then that will help me out because then I will just calm down about it then, if I keep it in my head I will still be worried about it.

Making a different connection in his last interview, Edward saw mindfulness as an antidote to anger:

It's affected me as a person because I can use it to do things quicker or not get angry at someone...you know, just like...I won't get...I mean I might get angry at them but I use mindfulness. I don't want to essentially explode at them and get really mad at them.

Danielle's use of mindfulness as a calming agent was something that she discovered she was already doing in her softball practices: Our work together facilitated her ability to recognize what she was doing:

Danielle: Well, a lot of times before I started coming to your mindfulness or was in your class I would just randomly breathe not knowing what I

was doing or what it was. And then I would forget those times and then when I started coming here, when I would start doing it again, I would catch myself and know what I was doing. But I honestly don't remember the times before that I did it, but I honestly remember pitching and softball because we do it all the time.

Emily: That was cool about what you honestly remember and what you don't honestly remember...talk about what you mean by that.

Danielle: The times that I would do it, um, when I was with you I would always know that I was doing mindfulness um and breathing because we talk about it. And I understood it more, but before I started doing mindfulness with you I would always do it but not recognize it. I would always do it and then forget about it.

Later in the same interview, we talked more about mindfulness practices:

Danielle: I would say that we focus on being calm and recognizing when we do stuff and when we don't do stuff. I would talk about how we breathe every time when we come in and the exercises we do. And the other night my dad started asking me if every night I could teach him a different breathing exercise before I go to bed. And I would teach him the exercises and he would say which ones were the best for him. Because he has trouble doing this one where you clog one nostril. And so I would, I wouldn't say that to do mindfulness you have to do this then this...Different people can do have trouble or no trouble doing different things.

Emily: That's really important...

Danielle: ...and I would talk about the coloring and stuff how we can put mindfulness into that and I would talk about the mindfulness I use in my life when I didn't realize it at first and maybe they will start thinking about it too after I've shared my connections to mindfulness.

Nick found spaces in his life to use mindfulness to help him calm down when he was angry. As he explained in one of our interviews:

Nick: I decided to come because I have anger issues sometimes, and I get upset very easily.

Emily: Yeah I find that's true for me too and you know yourself well because it is...we're in stressful situations all day. Why did you keep coming back?

Nick: Because, the first time I came here it worked out fine and I felt calmer after.

Sam mentioned how using mindfulness to get calm has not only worked in the moment, but it had long term effects on his emotions:

Before I did this, I would go get mad. Go get sad, but whenever I do this, there's a lot less of those natural feelings and my instincts to defend myself if someone insults me is no more since if they insult me I walk away.

Sam and I discussed in one of his interviews how he found mindfulness interesting:

Sam: Once we enter the door we're calm, Once we breathe, we're calm.
That would probably get them [other students] bored, but it's not boring.

Emily: How is it not boring?... that's something I think a lot...there are a lot of people in this room right now and that's kind of surprising to me because my guess would be that most people would think this is boring.

Sam: It's not boring for me, because it's a time when you sit and breathe (and) all these thoughts come in but you have to kick them out.
There's a lot happening in your head but not in your physical body

Stephen also noted his process of getting calm and how it helped him to move past anger.

Stephen: Mindfulness, when I breathe and stuff it just kind of calms down my day or it helps me to end the day. So, I will be more calm and not get as angry when I would get angry at my mom. Does that make any sense?

Emily: Like normally you'd get angry, but you find that if you do it before, once you get to your mom, you don't get as angry...

Stephen: Yeah, I don't

Emily: Like I find the same thing too. If I make sure to breathe in the morning, I have a whole lot more patience for the rest of the day.

Specific times when being calm made a difference. Several students provided stories of times they would or had used mindfulness in specific situations in their lives.

Carter noted in his last interview about times with friends where he used mindfulness to help him deal with difficult situations with his friend.

Emily: Carter, I'm going to be asking questions about how mindfulness has impacted you this year, you can talk about you as a student or a family member or friend or a person in general, or if you don't feel like it has, be honest about that too....

Carter: No, it has, it... I think the last question you asked me, I don't think I'm going to answer that one. It's changed me. When I get annoyed sometimes, I cool myself down. Sometimes not always, sometimes I get really um, what's the word for it.

Emily: Agitated? Like okay, so I watch...Is this an example of that? This is what I see from the outside, when you start to talk [in classroom discussion] and another person jumps in with a thought related to what you're saying, in the past you would have stopped for a whole lot longer and looked more upset, but when it happened today, and your face went like "Why are you interrupting me" but then you realized "Oh he's just saying something back to me about what I was saying," and then you were like "Okay...", and then you kept going, is that kinda what you're talking about?

Carter: Yeah, cause, like you've said, I've noticed, that there are some days when I get angry with this one person, and there are some days I just don't want to go to school... . After the second incident that I've had with that person, then, I just... that was when I just started not wanting to

come to school. I wanted to stay at home because I didn't want not deal with that person. I don't want to get in trouble again. But I want to come to school more because, I mean, I get more relaxed when I'm around him. I don't know, I just get, wheneverI don't feel like I should tell the teachers, I don't feel like....I feel like he's gotten in trouble enough; I don't need to get him in trouble any more. I don't want to do that to him, because it's the wrong thing to do...trying to get that person in trouble.

Christine found mindfulness helpful in handling situations with her sister:

“I think it affected me because when I get angry at my sister, instead of yelling at her, I just walk up to my room and shut the door.”

Davis noted that mindfulness helped in, and in advance of, several different situations at home and school. He even found ways to help his friends stop an argument at school.

Davis: Because I like it that you teach us breathing exercises and I want to know more in how you do it so when...because I never know when stuff happens and I always want to be prepared.

Emily: What kinds of things might happen that you're unprepared for?

Davis: When I grow up, I might get upset with my sisters or something and I'm probably going to have to calm down.

Later in the same interview, he reflected:

When I'm at my dinner table, and today at lunch, when I breathed in and breathed out. I didn't know what happened. It calmed me down...When I'm in...about to

get in trouble with my parents because I'm making bad choices, and I get upset, but I have to use mindfulness...the first time I did it I thought it wouldn't really help anything, but it did.

In an interview with me later in the year, this exchange occurred:

Davis: Sometimes at home, I sometimes I get in trouble for stuff I didn't do. My sisters just lie and say that I did it when they did it. After I get in trouble, I have to stay in my room and I get my phone taken away for a week. One time I just had to calm down, because at first I was about to cry and scream, because I said if I calm down, that's just going to make me forget about it.

Emily: Did it work?

Davis: Yeah

Emily: How did you do it?

Davis: I jus... when I was about to scream, I thought about it and calmed down, I just sat there for a couple of minutes, it just went away and I forgot what I was thinking about.

In our last interview, he told a story about a fight between two of his friends in which he found the calming attributes of mindfulness helpful. He offered his process of finding calm by finding space:

Davis: Kinda like when if somebody was...kinda like when Trevor and Zander were in an argument today, because Zander accidentally slapped him because he hit his hand, I mean, his face a little bit and they were in an

argument. I was, like just calm down, and I didn't know what to do. So, I walked away for a minute and I breathed in and out.

Emily: Did that help you know what to do? What'd you do?

Davis: I just said, "Just give each other space for a little bit," and at recess they started playing together, and they got in the same argument, then I was, like, I said, "Don't go to each other, even recess because that can make it even worse because that can make you want to say, 'Oh the teacher's not around, now I can do something to you.'"

Emily: Is it kinda like you've used what you learned about how mindfulness affects you, to help them in the situation? Like breathe, take your space, and calm down?

Davis: [nodded]

Danielle noted that in her pitching work in softball, she intentionally was able to find space to get calm once she recognized what she was doing:

"Yes, as a softball player I think it helps me a lot, because before if I was stressed in my pitch, I would breathe first and then start my motion, I didn't realize...I knew I was doing it, but I didn't realize that it was mindfulness that was helping me. So now that I know what it is, I feel like doing it more intentionally, it helps me better."

Natalie noted that calming herself was helpful in her school work and in singing:

Emily: So, what do you think that studying and practicing mindfulness has done for you as a person or as a student or as a friend or family member, and it may not have done anything.

Natalie: Well, I think I don't really notice the big things that it changed, but when I walk up to the little things, I notice how mindfulness is helpful. I've learned how to think before I say something, like if I'm about to say something that's mean, I can think what I'm going to say.

Emily: That's cool. Can you think of a time when maybe that's happened?

Natalie: When I was doing my homework. I was very busy that day because I was rushing. A few weeks ago, because I had gymnastics, I was just putting stuff down but then I realized that I should just take my time, I had all week, and just take a deep breath and think about what I was doing.

Emily: Nice. That's a really good example. Do you think it's helped you as an artist at all? Either with music or with the visual arts stuff you do?

Natalie: Um with music in chorus sometimes it helps me, sometimes I realize like when I'm about to sing, I have a solo, when I'm about to sing my solo, I get really scared, and I can take a deep breath and calm down.

Ryan noted that she uses the calming effects of mindfulness during math:

Like when I'm doing math and I get frustrated because I can't solve the math problem, I breathe and it helps me reset myself to where I can calm down and try over again.

Creating calm: different actions produce different states of being. The connection between what we do and how we feel came up in March during one of our afterschool sessions when we did an activity that emphasized the difference between “play” and “practice.” First, we practiced walking mindfully around the room, attending

to our feet and the ways that our bodies moved through the room. Students moved slowly, carefully paying close attention to one another, intentionally keeping their physical space from one another. Then we noticed and discussed how we felt. Second, I invited them to play and talk to one another, doing whatever it meant to “play” as they walked. While I did not tape the end of practice discussion, I did capture the experience in my reflection journal:

Yesterday we did a combination of mindfulness practice and play so we could see the difference in response to play versus practice... The tape is clear. The noise and energy level are both very clear on the tape as being heightened [after play], I wish I would have had audio of the end of the practice reflection. They were able to articulate it too. And Stephen and Miles did a brilliant job of bringing it together when they mentioned that sometimes you get so happy that something goes wrong and you get really, really sad. These things they are saying are excellent examples of how these kids’ experiences are informing understandings of mindfulness and balance in ways that help everyone to grow, me too.

Later in the year, Stephen followed up conceptually with a response to my comment about what happens when we get very excited. In a very short exchange, Stephen and I agreed on the experience.

Emily: Okay. Have you ever noticed that when you feel upset...

Stephen (overlapping): I do it naturally sometimes...

Emily: If you keep following that feeling and keep being upset that things aren’t going to turn out really great. There’s a very good chance that if you keep being upset you’re going to make a choice you hadn’t planned to

make. Have you ever noticed that when you get so excited the same kind of thing happens?

Stephen: Yeah, you make a mistake.”

Clearing our minds to access calm. One aspect of using mindfulness for developing a sense of calm included a process we termed *clearing our minds*. Sam and Stephen both explained about why they found that process of clearing minds as important:

Sam: Mindfulness is like a different kind of sport for me. You have to practice like any other sport and like there’s no games, but there is clearing up your mind.

Emily: When you say practice, but there is no games, what do you mean by that?

Sam: What I mean by that is...There is no competition for mindfulness. But there is practicing how to do it, practicing how long your brain can stay mindful.

Later in the same talk, I asked Sam how he felt about mindfulness being a school subject. He answered:

“I think it should be [a school subject] ... mindfulness, I read an article, mindfulness. It is 85% more able to clear yourself, your mind for tests assessments and basically school.”

Stephen examined it a little bit differently when he told about what he thought mind clearing means, how to practice it, and how discussing it helped him realize his own growth:

Mindfulness to me is just getting your mind clear, like you say, focusing on one thing, like what I mean by getting my mind clear: everything that happened that day is just off my mind, I can focus on one thing and I can do work better and stuff.

Later in the discussion, he explained being mindful in contrast and connection to doing mindfulness:

Stephen: Being mindful is when you, I think, when you are in the process...

Emily: Say more about that, what do you mean about being in the process?

Stephen: Like when you're breathing, that's in the process of it, and when you're drawing, you're in the process of it, and then you're just getting your mind clear off of that, and doing mindfulness things, like mindfulness moving, I would say, then like being mindful, at the recess field, when you're like playing a game and being mindful of other people's feelings, like physically being mindful.

Emily: Physically being mindful, what does that mean?

Stephen: Like meaning like doing mindful things, walking mindfully, playing mindfully."

Calm as a counter to excitement. Several students' stories were about mindfulness as a counter to excitement. For example, Oliver noted how he responded to emotionally charged situations during soccer season:

Oliver: Sometimes I get really nervous, I have a tournament this weekend, and I'm really nervous because my foot hurts; I can't kick because my joint hurts. So, I'm really nervous. So, um, I like I decided that before the

game I'm going to get pumped up, but then I'm going to breathe and focus.

Emily: Yeah

Oliver: I've done that with a couple of other games and I think kind of it worked

Emily: So like... Do you see those two things, getting pumped up and breathing and focusing as two different things?

Oliver: Yes, because getting pumped up is like, Whooo...then breathing, you're focusing.

Emily: I'm wondering...I hadn't thought about them this way before you started talking, but I'm wondering if getting pumped up is an important part, could also be the practicing emotions thing the other day.

Oliver: And also before I came in to talk to you, I breathed to hold in my emotions because I didn't know what it was going to be about. I was nervous.

Emily: That's interesting ...that's interesting that you mentioned holding them in, I don't think you have to really hold them in necessarily you just have to be able to. like we talked about ...make a choice. I think when you're getting yourself pumped up, you're making a choice with your emotions.

Oliver: 'Cause like when I get pumped up, I feel like I'm in the game, but when the game's about to start I breathe like right when two se.. ...a minute before he blows the whistle I breathe...and when he blows the whistle then I lose focus because like...definitely, but like I feel better...Like I

feel like I'm in the game but then I breathe I feel like I'm still in the game...pumped up helps you with that.

Emily: No I agree with you, I think getting pumped up when you get in the game, there are a lot of people who are experts about mindfulness who talk about mindfulness that way, that talk like you're in the game...I think it's cool that that's one of the things...it's different from breathing and focusing, but it's also a part of mindfulness too. Any other stories you want to share about it?

Oliver: Well let's see...Sometimes when I focus it's hard for...like I focus too hard and then it's, like, not like necessary to be focused and then, like, after I stop and I'm, like, what happened? I get too focused and then I'm, like, what happened and I'm, like, where is it? It's like it's so tiny. I just get off, like I blink and I'm, like, where is it? Then... so I when I breathe, I knew it was in the instructions so I breathed and then I found it.

Emily: It's interesting so you like get so focused you were missing what you were focused on and then you have to re-find it again. You've gotta find your focus."

Getting calm in unfair situations. My students told stories about using mindfulness to get calm while in unfair situations. Several of their stories involved handling their feeling in the context of games they play:

Carter: Okay, so if you're playing a game and someone cheats...or they do something...say one team had five players and one team had four

players. And the 4 players were the best golf players, and the other team had two okay people and the rest are not that good, then you could use mindfulness, and be, like, breathe and say, “Okay you can win this, even if they are the best players.”

Christine: Sometimes when my sister and my mom and my dad play a game, sometimes, most of the time my sister, she always wants to, like, change the rules in the middle of the game, so I get really annoyed, because that’s not how the game works. ...So, when she does that I just ignore her.”

Edward: (U)nfairness - it’s happened at school before. Unfairness to a kid playing basketball, they’d like push him ya know... take the ball from him not pass it to him, like socially exclude him from the game. Which mindfulness definitely would have worked for him, because the kid could have done mindfulness and then gone to the teacher and told...As a bystander, um, I could have used mindfulness, like,...if I was like having conflict in my mind like this kid shouldn’t get like beat up or something, or for some reason I think, yeah, I mean he’s kind of mean sometimes, let’s not tell. If I could use mindfulness, then I could go tell. Go tell the teacher.”

Other times, they talked about using mindfulness in unfair situations at home or at school:

Davis: Sometimes at home, I sometimes I get in trouble for stuff I didn’t do. My sisters just lie and say that I did it when they did it. After I get in

trouble, I have to stay in my room and I get my phone taken away for a week. One time I just had to calm down, because at first I was about to cry and scream, because I said if I calm down, that's just going to make me forget about it."

Natalie: Sometimes when I play at my neighbor's house, we all get in a little argument, when we take a minute to ourselves and we focus on what we actually (are arguing) about and it helps us solve our problems.

Sam: Yeah, whenever, sometimes my teacher, uh, says, "Go sit down, and I'll meet you at the table." Sometimes she doesn't do that, and I get frustrated. Sometimes there's a point where I just want to cry, but whenever I just notice myself at that point, I ask .. the teacher to go to the bathroom and in the bathroom just stand there with the four corners of my feet like roots are going into the floor and then I feel quite better.

In his last interview with me, Stephen and I discussed a situation in which he used mindfulness to resolve an unfair situation:

Stephen: Sometimes a person [a teacher], I'm not going to say who it is, they actually show they like one gender (better) than the other gender. And they let one gender do something while the other gender doesn't do anything, doesn't ya know, then they get on that one about what they're doing. Then the other gender they don't do anything to, then everyone gets mad at the one person because they're being mean to them and not the others.

Emily: That was an interesting thing you've brought up. In those situations, it helps you to know how not to get involved, that's what it sounds like. Could there be a way that mindfulness helps you do something? Like what could you do in that case to try to make that situation better? Because the person you're talking about has a lot of power.

Stephen: Like breathe or something and be nice to that person so that that person can be nice to you back.

Though my questions were an attempt to lead him toward communicating with the teacher in question as a form of resisting unfair treatment, Stephen seemed consistent in his desire to seek mutual respect. His answer reminds me of another time when Stephen mentioned that he handled unfair situations at home in a similar manner:

My mom she gets stressed because, my mom and my dad never really got married, so she's working two jobs and then she gets stressed and then I feel like she's taking it out on me and... because she's yelling at me telling me to do stuff that doesn't make sense, and then that makes me mad and stuff, because like the other day she got mad at me because I wanted to bring water to school, like so I would just breathe, I would go up to my room and breathe.

These kinds of stories reminded me that in unfair or unjust situations, the actions available and the actions that are optimal may not be external actions. Often, I have tried to determine within situations of injustice, the best way to act, assuming that some sort of external action was necessary or the only type of action I needed to consider. However, my students surprised and reminded me that when acting mindfully and determining a

course of effective action, simply finding calm in the midst of potentially chaotic and conflicting may be the type of action necessary to determine next steps.

Coda: Mindfulness as calm. Because I practice mindfulness, I could relate to the experience of using a mindfulness practice to calm my mind. However, initially, it seemed to me to be such an initial step in the practices and processes of mindfulness that I found myself discrediting and discounting its importance in my personal practice and our work together. By listening to my students' stories and discussing those with them, I rediscovered its primacy. I intend now to allow myself the space and patience to experience calm and reap its benefits. Listening to their stories about how mindfulness helps them to quiet their minds, reminds me that developing and expanding a calm mental and emotional space is worth the time and effort, simply to experience it for itself and for the foundation it sets for intentional action to come. After some time and reflection, I now smile at how it seems no coincidence to me that together my students and I uncovered an understanding that a practitioner may develop the understandings that calm can provide.

Mindfulness as Emotions

Too often, our lives cease working because we cease working at life, because we are unwilling to take responsibility for things as they are, and to work with our difficulties. We don't understand that it is actually possible to attain clarity, understanding, and transformation right in the middle of what is here and now, however problematic it may be. But it is easier and less threatening to our sense of self to project our involvement in our problems onto other people and the environment...The challenge of mindfulness is to work with the very

circumstances that you find yourself in—no matter how unpleasant, how discouraging, how limited, how unending and stuck they may appear to be—and to make sure that you have done everything in your power to use their energies to transform yourself before you decide to cut your losses and move on. It is right here that the real work needs to happen (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 199).

Within these circumstances that Kabat-Zinn (1994) outlines, a multiplicity of emotions arise. When we can acknowledge the emotions we are feeling, and allow ourselves to truly feel them, we find ourselves doing that work that he emphasizes. Compellingly counterintuitive things began happening in my own practice when I started to consider emotions not as spurs for action, but as natural and helpful responses to the situations in my life, no matter how pleasant or unpleasant. Emotions became things I could work with as opposed to things I avoided feeling or ended up layering on additional emotions. My students, colleagues, and I explored these spaces for work throughout the year together.

Within mindfulness philosophy, there is a simile of emotions being like darts. As we feel things, the simile suggests that the feeling serves as the first dart. Then often we will get frustrated or thrilled at the feeling itself, shooting the second dart into ourselves.

Emotions on emotions. As an example of those darts, I had a talk with a colleague at the end of the year in which we connected over some of our struggles as teachers, and though no specific names were mentioned, we connected around situations in school that arise for teachers as we navigate the space between external expectations about school and our classroom decisions. I shared that there were times when I noticed myself getting defensive about my decisions when they were questioned by those who

are not consistently in the classroom. Before talking with my colleague about this, I am not sure I had really considered the way that I processed these situations. I began realizing how very important it was to me that I worked to see my emotions clearly without judgement. I explained to her that I found that when I noticed and admitted my defensiveness to myself, I could carefully question why I felt the need to defend myself. I could remind myself that no matter the specific situation, the people who were questioning my actions in the classroom were seeking the best education possible for the children in my care, just as I was. When I noticed my emotions of defensiveness, I could see that the defense was in effect a second dart. The first dart was the fear of not living up to the standards set by someone else. I was placing the situation in a frame of achieving a standard. In noticing my emotions, I could then take the conscious step of reframing the situation in my mind. When I did that, it became easier to think, talk, and act, in accordance with all parties being on the same team in seeking what was in the best interest of our children. My colleague questioned whether or not I could remove the defensiveness when I noticed it, I responded that I never felt that it completely disappeared, but I did get the sense that I was getting better at noticing that feeling in myself more quickly and responding to the feeling and then the situation purposefully instead of reacting to it impulsively.

Noticing so we can name. My students' awareness of their emotions seemed to produce similar results. Sam, for example, talked about situations where he found himself experiencing anger, and how noticing it was helpful in owning those emotions:

At the beginning, before mindfulness, I had an easy temper, I blamed a lot of people for the things that I've done. But when I came to mindfulness [club], I learned that sometimes I just have to take up the actions I've done and stand for it.

When Britney posited that she would talk about our mindfulness club with others who had not been before, she made evident how practicing mindfulness affected her emotions and her approach to situations:

I think I would tell them how ...that my school has this club and it talks about how to be how to be mindful and I wouldn't know how to say it but maybe trustful? I think probably I'd say ...be aware of yourself, if you're not calm. And it just makes all the memories feel better... - bad memories or good memories - feel better.

Emotion as connector. I had never considered memories as holding feelings, but I could connect to that once Britney put it into words for us. One of the most striking stories of attending to emotions happened between two very good friends who had been having a few rocky moments in their friendship. Ryan told me about a revelation she had about a conflict she and her friend had when he tried to explain and illustrate to her how it felt to be treated a certain way:

Ryan: Stephen was right, I really didn't care about how he felt then, but like I breathed through stuff and I took a moment and realized that it [what she had done with other friends] can be really hurtful, and I didn't know it could be like that because I had never really experienced that.

Emily: And that's fair, there's no way for you to know unless you've been through it. It's cool that you are at the point. Does it feel better?

Ryan: [nodded]

Empathy. Ryan's empathetic insight is one that I wish I had experienced earlier in life. Realizing before I took actions that they could cause pain may have saved my friends and me pain and conflict. Ryan applied the same lens to some other friendships and how an unfair rule of a game they created affected their group of friends:

Ryan: Like sometimes in games when I say stuff, when I make a rule that's unfair, I have to think about it before I do it. That could like...we made a rule that was unfair, and it kinda like messed with our friendship for a while and I don't want to do that.

Emily: I think this year you've seen the connections between the things you do and your relationships. And that's very important because it means that you could do something about the friendships that seem to be having trouble. Ya know? I think you have also started to figure out just like you were talking about with Stephen, and understanding how people feel, you've realized when somebody else is having trouble in a different friendship you can jump into help.

Ryan's personal inquiry into her friendships helped her become someone who knew how to support other groups of friends in solving their problems. She learned to listen for the times when she could be the kind of friend who could make a friend feel cared for and pushed them to care for others at the same time.

Recess and emotions. During recess games, we often experienced intense emotions. That provided us with an opportunity practice mindfulness. Stephen

highlighted one of these times when he described his process for working through kickball games:

If I get mad, I breathe in and breathe out a couple of times. Or if there's a tough game or something, when we're losing, I breathe in and breathe out to keep me from getting mad or angry or something like that. And sometimes, when it's like hard times, that would be the time for me, the best time for me to use mindfulness.

The times I saw him do the work he described in this story, I was consistently impressed by the way he noted what he was feeling with enough immediacy to do something about it.

Coda: Mindfulness as emotions. Across the year, I found that my disciplinary conversations with my students had less to do with following rules or even their reasoning for taking the actions they took and more to do with how they were feeling in a given moment. I found that if I could help them to see that I was not judging their frustration, fear, anger, or disdain, and that difficult emotions were natural in difficult situations, then together we could find pathways to more effective courses of action. It was fascinating to me that it was in the context of relationships that we most often found that the mindfulness of our emotions was important. Attending to those emotions within themselves also, in turn, supported them in their friendships. Sometimes mindfulness of emotions seemed helpful even in the same relationship situations that spurred the mindfulness in the first place. I still struggle with having patience with myself in those tough situations. However, the more I talked my students through having patience with

their emotions, the more I noticed when I was shooting second and third darts into myself, frustrated that I was angry at my sadness in response to a trying situation.

Mindfulness as Transformation

It is a commonly held view that meditation is a way to shut off the pressures of the world or of your own mind, but this is not an accurate impression. Meditation is neither shutting things out nor off. It is seeing things clearly, and deliberately positioning yourself differently in relationship to them (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 30).

One of the most poignant transformations I experienced in my own mindfulness practices involved a repositioning of myself in relation to my world. My practice also helped me more clearly see the ways that the world changes and exhibits characteristics of impermanence. I was able to better see a world that better aligned with the evidence about the world I gather from living. Considering the concept of impermanence used to bring about feelings of anxiety in me, but through my practice and work with those emotions, it became easier to reposition myself in ever-changing situations.

Stories of change. Not only do we change; all things change. The idea of impermanence is one that I have contemplated often on my own and with others because it seems both obvious and counterintuitive. The idea seems obvious to me when I reflect on what I know about the world, when I consider that seasons change, technology advances, and children grow. At the same time, the idea of impermanence is counterintuitive because of the ways in which we make sense of the world through story. In storying, we take a snapshot of events, making them stand still in time in order to make sense of them (Rosen, 1985; Bruner, 2002).

When I talk about mindfulness with my friends, I tell stories about how I have changed the way that I approach situations in the classroom. I tell stories of my shifts in understanding about the world. I tell stories about how I frame situations differently in my life now than I did before. I tell stories about how I orient differently to difficulty in ways that demonstrate a release and a freedom I had not known before I practiced mindfulness. Acknowledging impermanence as a truth in my life and storying those changes may have influenced my students to do the same. My students also told stories about their shifts across time and argued that it was important to pass along those stories in an effort to continue developing a community of practitioners. Cade explained that sharing stories allowed people, to “tell your experiences to other people and they can try the same thing and they can be mindful.” Sam agreed and noted that he thought it was “important because not a lot of people use mindfulness as much as they need it... So we need to spread the word so people can get more successful about jobs and like people can make the right decisions instead of doing something they knew they shouldn’t have.”

Change over time. Shifts over time showed up in several students’ stories. When Cade realized that mindfulness did not just have the effect of calm, but increasing energy as well, he said, “Well yeah, I didn’t...at first when I started, I did not actually know that, when I started, I thought it was just like, like breathing, but now I realize it can give you energy, it can do a lot of stuff you don’t realize.” Similarly, Edward explained his shifts in how he engaged with friends differently:

Emily: [Do you] think it has affected the way you handle situations with friends?

Edward: Yes. It has because I won't, like, want to get really mad at them and like hit them. I won't want to do that, but I've never done that.

Emily: Ha. I know you've never done that. So...here's what I was thinking...I was wondering...and it might not be related to mindfulness...have you noticed over time that you've been able to say things to friends that you might not have been able to say last year or the year before?

Edward: Yes. Sometimes a friend will ask me like "What'd you think about this?" I thought it wasn't good or whatever. Now through with mindfulness and my mom's advising, I can just say, "I'm not gonna talk about that" and walk away or something.

Emily: How do you feel about that?

Edward: It makes me feel better than saying, "Oh I don't like that" or "I do like it." (It) makes me feel really good because I'm not being mean to a teacher or saying to this friend, "No, I like it and you should like it too rah rah rah."

Emily: Yeah, like getting caught up in it...I think I understand the situations you're talking about... I remember last year how difficult the situations would be that you were in and it's really hard to figure out what to say.

Edward: Yeah

Emily: And I feel like I've seen a different confidence in you in the past at least several months.

Shifts in practice resulted in shifts in experience. Early in the year, I was feeling frustrated with the way that we were using our time during mindfulness club. At

the time, I was inviting students to do an activity of their choice including reading, writing, drawing, coloring, or sitting and noticing our breath, while practicing bringing their awareness to the activity. In December, Miles commented that Oliver was being very physically active and loud during practice time and it was distracting to him. My frustration paralleled what Miles offered out loud. I saw that several of us, not just Oliver, were finding the seated and mostly still practices to be difficult to stay with for 10 minutes. I was frustrated because I was not sure of exactly what we might do differently to make staying with the given practice easier to do.

During another session, Oliver sneezed, other students laughed, and Oliver continued sneezing. That day, Miles made a comment in our discussion, with a tone that suggested to me that the authenticity of the sneezing was suspect, that he “was doing pretty good just breathing in and out until the sneezing started.” I responded about my own practice:

Sometimes we’ve gotta find a way to focus on something else. And what I did when that happened was I made sure to bring my awareness, bring my attention back into my eyes,. Instead of keeping them closed, I found a spot on the floor in front of me, so actively putting my attention and energy somewhere helped me to do that.

Miles responded my suggestions with a cursory head nod, but his demeanor indicated to me that having him act in response to his distraction was not what he had in mind as a solution. While mindfulness practice and philosophy emphasizes that responsibility of the practitioner in the face of distraction (Bodhi, 2005). I, too, felt the same tension around

the idea that there was something problematic about being physically active while in the practice space with others that I was not addressing well as the leader of the group.

Through my own reflections, I determined that I needed to find a way for the students who were personally, naturally, inclined to be physically active to have an outlet during their practice time. I started by leading some stretching sessions, allowing students to be physically active and sending their attention into the parts of their bodies that were stretching. I hoped that providing a practice that would allow for more physical activity would be supportive of both those who were naturally physically active and those who preferred a quieter practice. We would all sit together on the floor, and I would lead us through stretching our hamstrings together, breathing in and out, and placing our attention into the sensations we were feeling as we stretched. Almost immediately after the timer rang to end our practice, Oliver jumped up and explained the impact stretching had on him:

Oliver: After that, I felt like I could bike, like, 70 miles. I felt, like, stretched. I felt, like, calmer. When we were actually like laying down and staying still, I just tried to ease the pain and just breathe. To help me, I put the jacket over my head.

Emily: Sometimes I think when we move when we're sitting, the reason is we want to feel something. Like we are not feeling something and our bodies want to feel something. So when we're stretching, my theory is that it helps me to feel something while I'm being still, so like I'm doing stuff, but I'm not moving. Right? And then the results of it are then that I feel completely differently than I did if I were just sitting still.

Oliver: And after I felt, like...I want...I did this...I am wearing the shirt...I did this thing that you biked really far and I felt like I could do another one of those like easily. While I was stretching this way, I was like “Why didn’t I think of that [stretching]?” like before I went to bed [while on my bike trip].

Emily: I think sometimes we think that it’s just our brains that hold memories, but there’s been a lot of research done, and I’ve read a little bit of it, there’s been a lot of research done on how people’s bodies remember what they’ve experienced even if their minds don’t necessarily, and stretching can kind of help you to process that a little bit, it can help you to feel emotionally different because you’re feeling physically different.

Coda: Mindfulness as transformation. Mindfulness changed me. I observed others responding differently to me and me to them. I saw myself shift the way I saw myself and others. I approach life, friends, and family differently than I did before I started practicing.

My biggest shift came about when I deeply understood and accepted impermanence. I am now more willing to see that life is colored by change, and I find more peace when I do not try to hold circumstances still. I trust now more than ever that the nature of the world is change: new scientific theories emerge, friendships evolve, and even plants, in all their stillness, sprout, flower, and decay. Though it is sometimes difficult to accept emotionally, I know now that it serves me well to ride those waves of change rather than try to make still the torrent.

Despite the fact that mindfulness led to these changes I could see in myself, I did not anticipate that my students would notice such nuanced differences in their lives and attribute those to mindfulness. I have chosen only a few of those stories to tell here. I trust that my readers will find other stories of transformations in other sections.

Mindfulness as Awareness

The following selection is from a dharma talk given by Gil Fronsdal (2013), a mindfulness teacher out of California.

The idea is to shift ...to becoming aware enough of what's happening that we're no longer caught in the grip or in the blindness of what we're concerned with, to open up and really be aware of what's happening in the present moment and some particular aspects of what's happening now. And it's a hard shift to make because what we think about can seem very important or very attractive...

Self-talk as we probably know has a tremendous impact on how we feel. People's self-talk sometimes is not very wise. Sometimes we tell ourselves stories about what's happening in our lives and we tell ourselves kind-of, sometimes negative stories about ourselves, how terrible things are, not realizing it's just one interpretation; it's just one way of framing what happened. There might be other ways of understanding. There are stories to tell that are equally valid but seeing it from that point of view might be much more meaningful... To give an example that maybe is overdone: That would be to have something very difficult that's going on and one story would be 'this is just really a bummer, that I had this difficulty.' So if you say, you tell yourself a lot, that "This is really a bummer bummer bummer. How did this happen to me, poor me," versus 'This is an

unfortunate thing to happen, but this unfortunate thing gives me an opportunity to practice patience.” It’s a different story. Both stories maybe are true, but if you repeat the same thing over and over again, which story is going to have the best effect on you?

So, when people are preoccupied, they don’t tend to question what they’re preoccupied with, how they’re preoccupied, what stories they’re telling themselves, and if the stories are not useful ones, they can have a tremendously negative effect on us and the world around us. If we know that we’re thinking, then we can kinda look and see what we’re thinking about [and ask] “Is this useful?” And maybe there’s other perspectives. Maybe it’s true, this way I’m thinking, it was a bummer. But how long am I going to keep thinking, “Bummer bummer bummer?” Maybe I should tell myself a different story. The story I’ll tell myself is. “This is actually a useful opportunity. “[speaking as his thoughts] “No no, you don’t understand, it’s a bummer. It’s a certified bummer and it’s important that everyone know that. Everyone needs to know this that we see it as a bummer, it was a bummer.” We have to stay to that story. Some people are so loyal to their stories that they tell. So it’s possible to have a shift from what we’re thinking about, to being aware of what’s happening in the present (Fronsdal, 2013).

Awareness as noticing right now. My students and I uncovered ideas about how we told ourselves stories to make sense of situations. These situations happened around us in a world characterized by a relentless and all-consuming flow of events. We realized that when we told ourselves stories about these events, we crystalized them, choosing the

parts to include and the parts to make “still.” I am aware that I often tell myself “bummer” type stories almost immediately after something happening. It doesn’t even appear to me that I have told a story, it simply seems that I have clearly seen the events and their nature is bummer-esque. If I can stop, though, for just a moment and engage my awareness of the present moment, something strange happens. I have a harder time seeing the “bummer” story in my current situation. When I stop deciding that I already know how the story goes, I realize there are so many other things I could include in my story. Not only that, but I realize that the things I might include in the storying of a given event are changing around me all the time.

Awareness manifested. Awareness of a present moment effects the way that we story the events in our lives, but the act of bringing awareness to a present moment has many other implications. It fascinates me to consider the kinds of things that are possible for me when I take a second or two to notice. Recently in the final half-mile stretch of a 5k, I became very aware of the space around me, the stores that lined the streets, the cars parked in front of them, the people running behind me, and suddenly I recognized that there was a gap between my awareness of those things and my naming them. It was a strange experience, but one that I saw as beneficial. In that moment, I saw an example of the way that my sense of receptive awareness related to my active acknowledgement of things in language. When I could notice something and pause in the awareness before naming it, I was more able to make a choice about how I would further place my attention and my thinking. When I could control my attention in this way, I felt less distracted and could use my energy more intentionally.

Awareness as preparation. Several students mentioned that their work in mindfulness helped them to develop awareness when they needed it, and connected awareness to helping them deal with stress. I categorized these kinds of stories as Mindfulness as Preparation for Something Else. I noticed this first when Davis explained about how he saw mindfulness work as preparation for when he might become upset next.

Similarly, Danielle explained how the work in our mindfulness club prepared her for her performance as an athlete on the softball field:

Being able to come to mindfulness before I go to softball helps me because I feel like I'm already in the mood to be calm and just relax, because, whenever I'm in softball, I always tense up and I don't do as good of a job because I'm more stressed out. Being able to come to mindfulness helps me already get into that mood so that when I get to softball practice, I'm already ready.

Stephen and I talked about how using mindfulness led to or prepared him for better decisions to come:

Stephen: Mindfulness, when I breathe and stuff it just kind of calms down my day or it helps me to end the day. So, I will be more calm and not get as angry when I would get angry at my mom, does that make any sense?

Emily: Like normally you'd get angry, but you find that if you do it before, once you get to your mom you don't get as angry...

Stephen: Yeah, I don't.

Emily: Like, I find the same thing too. If I make sure to breathe in the morning I have a whole lot more patience for the rest of the day.

Stephen: Like, I found that mom she was doing that like a lot. I just caught on to doing that at home, I do it here now. But at home I would take short breaths that would help me a little teeny bit, but now that I do it more, now I feel better.”

Awareness as choice. Some of the most interesting aspects of our time together happened when we talked about our experiences. When together, we named the noticing, changes happened. The students had varied and thoughtful things to say when we talked about whether or not talking about our work in mindfulness was helpful or not. Danielle, for example, explained:

I think both [talking about mindfulness and keeping her experiences to herself] are important. I think talking about it is important because talking about it helps you, I think, it helps me be able to notice more because I know that I’m going to talk about it, and I can share about it. But when I don’t talk about it, it’s like when I’m doing it at night when I’m not tired and it’s helping me get sleepy, I don’t normally tell my family that I’m doing it because I don’t think there’s a reason to, because I’m doing it naturally.

Danielle’s awareness of the effects of talking about mindfulness demonstrate an effect I had not considered: heightened anticipation. I could definitely understand that knowing there would be talk about an experience changed the way that Danielle noticed.

For several sessions, after Oliver and I realized that stretching was a powerful mindfulness tool, we included stretching into our practice sessions. It gave us an opportunity to notice differences between internal and external experiences. For one session, I played a guided breathing practice from the Headspace app on my phone. After

practicing our stretching with that app on in the background, Lakin noted, “I didn’t really feel me stretching because I was concentrating on what the man was saying.”

Miles equally found his attention and awareness changing with shifts in his internal and external environments. He talked about how he decided to actively color differently, with what I would term precision and discipline when he said,

For mindful coloring what I had to do is, I just had to line up the pencils in the order I wanted to use them, and then I just randomly colored one part because otherwise I would interfere with the thought, “Which color do I want to use next? Where do I want to color with this color?” So I just colored in the closest spot to the center, with the next color in my line of colored pencils. But I also did that better...I did that because Stephen was doing like this... [Miles makes a noise to demonstrate the colored pencils moving around in the bucket where I kept the Legos] and he would knock a bunch out of the bin and so I couldn’t concentrate. There was so much noise over here that I couldn’t hear myself think.

Ryan mentioned a release through talk when she said that she enjoyed mindfulness club because “it helps me like get out stuff that I have been wanting to get out for a while.” When I asked her to go into detail about what it has helped her get out, she noted the times we had discussed being compassionate to people who may not be our best friends as a form of mindfulness work. She added,

Sometimes just thinking and breathing, but also like when we have talks about that ‘may you be safe, may you be happy...may you be healthy.’ It helps me think about the people I don’t like so much and try to make friendships and stuff with them.”

Those conscious choices changed the landscape of our interactions with one another.

I remember early on in my mindfulness practices the realization that I needed to listen to what my body, my emotions, and my mental state were saying to me. It was quite a contrast from what I was learning in school or teaching in school where there were often prescribed “best” ways to do or think about things. In constructing and conducting the workshop, I had emphasized choice. As Sam explained, “Ms. Whitecotton lets us choose if you want to do it or not do it, it is the choice.” However, Carter’s comment reminded me that the concept of *choice* that I held involved more than simply having an authority figure bestow an option.

Awareness as responsibility. In drawing on awareness, becoming clearer in the opportunities we had to make choices, and in then making those choices, we become more responsible for ourselves in our environments. Sam saw a shift in the ways that he, “blamed a lot of people for the things that I’ve done. But when I came to mindfulness, I learned that sometimes I just have to take up the actions I’ve done and stand for it.”

Carter too found space to “take up the actions” he had done. He reflected that he went “back and I sort of go through what I’ve done wrong and I try to make myself remember to not do this, that kind of thing. I get stressed out because it’s hard to remember some things, so yeah those are the ways I used mindfulness.”

One of the ways that Carter employed his responsibility happened in math; he treated his attention as a dream of sorts in order to help him to see where his thoughts were going and make a choice about where he wanted to place them. As he explained:

Since math is not my favorite subject at all...when I go in my head I cancel out, and then I wake up from like my dream or whatever it is, I’m like. ‘Wait, what are

we doing? Because that's... I just sometimes go into my own world and I come out of it and I'm in like a totally different time, I'm like what happened? Lately I still do it sometimes, it's not as long. I do it for a few seconds, I'm focusing more on what I'm supposed to do.

This shift of perspective toward awareness, even the awareness of preoccupation, suggests the students understanding the practice of mindfulness. Paying attention looks and feels different when it is no longer a process of placing your mind where you're told, but realizing that in many ways your mind has a mind of its own. Understanding its patterns and waking up to present moment awareness is vital to making choices that are different than the ones you've previously made.

Coda: Mindfulness as awareness. At the Center for Inquiry, the teachers and students talk a lot about noticing and naming. That dual sided process is a major foundational step when we engage in an investigation, experiment, or inquiry in our classrooms (Mills, 2014). We might begin answering the questions in an inquiry into nutrition by noticing and naming our own eating habits. We might begin an inquiry on insects by spending time outside our classroom windows noticing the ants carrying snack crumbs back into the hill and developing questions about what we see. We might engage in writing our own memoirs by reading lots of memoirs, noticing what those stories have in common, and naming those things as characteristics of memoirs to guide us in writing our own. However, I wonder what might happen if we stopped to pause right before naming those eating habits, creating questions about ants, or naming those aspects of memoir. Upon seeing and hearing my students and myself experience awareness for its own sake, I began asking questions about how far we could take this concept of pause. I

wondered to what extent could we expand space in our own minds and practical possibilities if we were to pause longer in the awareness. How could we shift our experiences and our stories about them if we became practiced in taking time to dwell in this space we expand for ourselves?

Mindfulness as Dwelling

Within mindfulness philosophy, there is a conceptualization of the feeling of being fully immersed in an activity without actively trying to force anything specific to happen as being in a state of non-doing. Non-doing runs directly counter to ideas of being busy for the sake of being busy or being overly active in exhaustive ways. Kabat-Zinn (1994) wrote:

Enormous effort can be involved [in the mindfulness concept of non-doing], but it is a graceful, knowledgeable, effortless effort, a ‘doerless doing,’ cultivated over a lifetime. Effortless activity happens at moments in dance and in sports at the highest levels of performance; when it does, it takes everybody’s breath away. But it also happens in every area of human activity, from painting to car repair to parenting. Years of practice and experience combine on some occasions, giving rise to a new capacity to let execution unfold beyond technique, beyond exertion, beyond thinking. Action then becomes a pure expression of art, of being, of letting go of all doing—a merging of mind and body in motion. We thrill in watching a superb performance, whether athletic or artistic, because it allows us to participate in the magic of true mastery, to be uplifted, if only briefly, and perhaps to share in the intention that each of us, in our own way, might touch such moments of grace and harmony in the living of our own lives (p. 44).

Metaphor matters. In February, I brought some of my research to our faculty's Curricular Conversation. In these weekly meetings, we discuss different things teachers are doing in their classrooms and in other inquiry-based classrooms. I told about how I had been trying out mindfulness in my classroom and in my after-school club. I was immersing myself in mindfulness in all aspects of my life; something with which my colleagues potentially were completely unfamiliar. I presented about how I defined mindfulness, some of the practices we had been doing in mindfulness club, some of the conversations about mindfulness principles we had during mindfulness club and in my classroom, and students' quotes from our discussions. In my presentation, I talked about principles that are not commonly discussed in school circles. When I stopped presenting and we began to talk together, something miraculous seemed to happen. Just as when I breathe into a muscle, the tension in it releases and I can use it, the tension in the room began to dissipate. It was interesting to listen to the room relax as my colleagues began to engage in conversation about mindfulness as a state of being. Laura, a first-grade teacher, told a story of dance as the place where she finds herself experiencing being in a state of mindfulness. Tim, a second-grade teacher, talked about practicing his guitar every night even for just a little while to access space for his mind to just be. Amanda, a fifth-grade teacher, reflected on her choice to not bring her phone on a run as her way of finding mental and emotional expansion while running. Others also talked about mindfulness as a place.

This metaphor has been an important for the kids and me. It is a place that we know by feel more than we know by thought. To describe mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn (1994) uses the word "dwelling" (p.94) and Fronsdal (2013) used abiding. One of my

students Sam, described it as a zone when he characterized it as not asleep and not awake: “Sometimes you don’t really be mindful, but you are in sleep or awake zone. Mindfulness has its own zone.” Ryan noted that she was becoming aware of “when I’m not being mindful and when I am.”

Metaphors provide us the outlines around a concept that help us to do the pragmatic connecting necessary for us to make sense of concepts, especially those that may be unfamiliar to our experience. Words like *abiding* and *dwelling* and *zone* help us to see mindfulness as a space to inhabit, a context for action and a foundation from which we can grow. In exploring the geography of the mindful zone, my students and I found connections to the kinds of general effects of being in this space, the differences between *being mindful* and *doing a mindfulness practice*, and enhanced agency in our lives.

What happens when we dwell in mindfulness. Stephen noted that the effects of mindfulness as place impacted his academic performance:

When I think I’m being mindful, my personal work, I think, it just goes up, I’m doing great. When I’m not being mindful, I’m just trying to get it over with, move on to the next thing, very quick like you would say I have to do one thing before I do another.

Carter connected mindfulness to his experience as a reader:

Well, when I read, I really don’t want to get out of the book ‘cause I’m so focused on it that my mind, like my mind is so aware of it, that my mind just doesn’t want to get out of it.

I had no idea that his feeling this involved in a book was a new experience for Carter.. He seemed so accustomed to being in the world of the book; I thought he had been doing that for years.

To access these states of being, throughout the year in class and in our mindfulness club, I introduced different techniques. From the very first time we met, I provided everyone ways that I use my breathing, patterns of thought, and patterns of behavior to help me find these places. Danielle sharing alternate nostril breathing with her dad and Sam describing the way he used visualization to imagine his feet becoming roots to ground himself when he became emotionally uprooted by something in that happened in the classroom.

Are we being mindful or doing mindfulness? Within the larger metaphor of mindfulness as a space to dwell, my students and I often used the expressions the *being mindful* and *doing mindfulness*. For three mindfulness sessions, I framed a discussion for the group around the idea of the differences and similarities between *being* and *doing mindfulness*. After we spent time discussing these differences as a group, I asked about this juxtaposition of being and doing in one of our interviews. Across these settings, there was a flavor of intentional, isolated, and out-of-context use associated with “doing” mindfulness, though that “doing” still happened within the dwelling place of mindfulness. For example, Cade and Zander described the *doing* of mindfulness as what we did together each time we met for Mindfulness Club, it was purposeful placement of attention for the sake of practicing holding attention in one place and then moving it back when it wavered. When students addressed *being* mindful, there was a sense that this verb was what happened more easily when we were in our daily lives, experiencing the

dwelling place of mindfulness. It happened, not when practicing mindfulness, but when we were doing something else, and an opportunity to be mindful arose in their daily lives. These times happened when they were playing games at recess, responding to conflicts with siblings, and when they were angry.

Cade and I explored the spaces where he could see the contrasts between being and doing mindfulness in one of his interviews:

Cade: Well, doing mindfulness is like you're purposefully trying to like do mindfulness, kinda like a mindfulness practice. But if you're being mindful, it's just like you're being mindful and you've studied mindfulness and you're being mindful in your everyday lives, kinda like you're more aware and you're calm, that's like being mindful.

Emily: What do you think the relationship is between the two?

Cade: Obviously they are both mindfulness, and I think that doing mindfulness is like being mindful, because it's kind of similar how you react when something goes on.

Emily: Okay, so being mindful has something to do with how you react to things around you? If you're being mindful, how would the reaction be different than if you weren't being mindful?

Cade: Maybe like if someone was like doing something you didn't like and you were using mindfulness, maybe you would just try to say...like try to like calm them down...and try like ..calm them down....not being mindful you would like get angry and mean and you would have an argument.

Davis differentiated between the two when he said, “Doing mindfulness is like actually working on it and like practicing it, and being mindful is...being mindful can be ...being mindful is probably like you’re being mindful and you actually do it.”

Danielle used the context of softball practice as one of the places where she found herself being mindful when she said, “I think when you’re doing mindfulness...is like when we do mindfulness like after school mindfulness here...and I think being mindful is like when I’m at softball practice and I have to calm myself down when hitting or pitching. [Then] I think you’re being mindful...One is when you’re actually using it in an activity...but doing mindfulness is where you’re just like you’re practicing, like doing one thing, where you’re coloring or reading.”

Stephen explained being involved in mindfulness was an “in process” feeling and that the *how* of what you were doing mattered. He mentioned “walking mindfully, playing mindfully,” and “physically being mindful.” Sam extended that idea by describing mindfulness as a practice:

Mindfulness practice is...uh practicing mindfully. Not going and doing stuff...doing stuff that is chaotic, but like doing stuff that is mindful, keeping your... if you’re doing something, keeping your eyes on it, your brain on it, your whole nervous system on it, and just breathing in and out, doing the thing you’re doing basically.”

The idea of “doing the thing you’re doing” is so simple and obvious to me, it might at first glance be dismissed as pointless to say, but in my estimation, there is wisdom within its simplicity. Sam’s focused attention runs counter to the multitasking that seems to saturate our lives.

Agency in mindful space. Being in a specific place often results in something. Spending time in an ice cream shop, for example, often results in ice cream being eaten. Spending time in a bowling alley, often results in bowling. Spending time in a barber shop, often results in hair being cut. The same happens when spending time in the space of mindfulness. Earlier, I told of Sam's assessment that mindfulness helped him have, "a lot less of those natural feelings and my instincts to defend myself if someone insults me is no more since, if they insult me, I walk away."

Cade noted the agency of being within a mindful space when he noted, "mindfulness is like a study that's where you practice it and you're like... You're like...it makes...it can do multiple things: it can calm you down, help you have energy and strength... and it can do lots of stuff of that nature, it's really powerful."

Cade mentioned physical results of abiding in a space of mindfulness in his life, but Sam often sees mindfulness as an agentive response to his intense emotions. In October, Sam described an example from a time when he was disappointed at home. He and I discussed the results of his breathing into disappointment:

Sam: On the weekends, I had something like Edward, I didn't want to tell this to you last week because I just didn't want to. So, I really wanted to go to the state fair when I was sick, so when my mom said I couldn't, I just said okay and went to my room and started breathing. Because I haven't went like last year, third grade, second grade, first grade was the only time I went.

Emily: Yeah that's super disappointing right?

Sam: Because I always get sick at that time of year.

Emily: What happened when you breathed?

Sam: Well I felt a little better, I felt like I didn't need to go, I could always go some other time.

Emily: Sometimes it makes it easier for me to handle what's going on around me.

Sam's response to expecting something and getting disappointed was reflected in one of Edward's offerings from earlier in the same discussion. He said:

I've been using breathing at home and like normally every day I go out with my brothers to play soccer and basketball. Since we have a soccer goal and our neighbor has a basketball goal that we can use when we play basketball. Normally we decided what we're going to do one day, and I prefer soccer, because I actually do soccer. So like for the past two days we've done basketball...and I was like depressed because I expected we [would] do soccer, and then we didn't. So I was a little bit depressed so I used breathing and we just played basketball.

Coda: Mindfulness as dwelling. Active listening is often a term used in curricular programs that address behavior or ways of being in classrooms. I agree that listening is important. However, I do think I can intentionally expand space for purposefully being in a classroom -- for intentionally being aware of ourselves and surroundings without pressure to do, create, derive, find, or uncover. In my own practice, when I carve out space to be, just like Laura, Tim, and Amanda noted, I find myself able to do more, uncovering possibilities in difficult situations where I may have felt stuck before. One of the first times I found this to be true was when I was first practicing yoga. In the yoga classes I attended, we got in different poses in order to pay attention to how

our hamstrings felt. We noted shifts in intensity, location, and even whether or not we noticed the desire to avoid the feeling. It seems to be an exercise in futility when I say it all in words, but the mindfulness of the body resulted for me in some of the same productivity that Oliver mentioned when he first experienced mindfully stretching.

Mindfulness as Attention to Body and Breath

It helps to have a focus for your attention, an anchor line to tether you to the present moment and to guide you back when the mind wanders. The breath serves this purpose exceedingly well. It can be a true ally. Bringing awareness to our breathing, we remind ourselves that we are here now, so we might as well be fully awake for whatever is already happening (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 18).

When our faculty talked about those ways of accessing the state of mindfulness, we discussed active engagements like running, dancing, and playing music. My students and I found that the same kind of attention to the body was specifically helpful when we were working to access mindful states of being. Attention to breath and complementary attention to the body have provided us those anchors back to the present moment and a point of departure for further conscious choices.

Making mindfulness accessible to all. In December one of my colleagues, Meghan, very tentatively, politely, stuck her head in my room to ask me about some of her second-grade students who she thought might benefit from work in mindfulness. I had planned to only allow fourth and fifth grade students into the after-school club. However, I was interested in seeing how younger kids might take to the process, so I told her they could come. Two months later, she told a story that demonstrated how attending to bodies and breath helped her students through a tricky situation.

Our elementary school campus is right next to a middle school whose cafeteria we share. Coming back from lunch one day, Meghan's class saw a fight break out between two students from the middle school. They returned to the classroom "real shook up." She explained that she had just given them a chance to talk through what they had just seen, when one of the students, Davis suggested that the class try some of the alternating nostril breathing exercises that I just taught the group during our after school club. The other two students who were joining him in our afternoon sessions then followed up with some other breathing techniques. Meghan was proud of their willingness to talk about the things that seemed to be helpful to them from mindfulness. I was a little floored at their willingness to participate out loud after only a few sessions. I know how powerful these practices are for me, but I had been reluctant to impose that experience on anyone else. I wondered though, how many other adults talk about ways to get calm as though everyone needs ways to stay calm? In my reflection that day, I wrote as a response to hearing this story:

Everybody was 'real shook up' but they got back to the classroom and Davis (who just started coming this week) suggested that they do some alternate nostril breathing then Zander and Trevor jumped in to suggest they try other things. I guess that [mindfulness] as a remedy is the gateway to this stuff. I know there's more there, but doors are much smaller than rooms. Oh, the other day I said in response to [someone saying a common phrase in yoga circles] "take your yoga off your mat"... "take your mat off your yoga." I think that the restrictions I was placing on mindfulness were creating barriers to practice.

Meghan's story was a turning point for me. I had heard mindfulness used and discussed as a way to settle anger in classrooms, but there were so many other aspects of it that I wanted to impart those to my students. However, Meghan's experience reminded me that simply paying attention to one's body can bring about emotional, mental, and physical changes. In my yoga class, I was doing that kind of remedy work. I was taking stress and changing it into peacefulness within me. I realized that when I skipped that purpose for my students, I was creating barriers to practice. Davis and his second-grade classmates wanted and independently used the techniques I was giving them. It became time for me to realize that in the simple instantiations of mindfulness, we could most clearly see the power of it.

Finding our breath. Davis told our after school group that the breathing techniques were the reason he returned to mindfulness club:

Because I like it that you teach us breathing exercises and I want to know more in how you do it so when...because I never know when stuff happens and I always want to be prepared.

In one of the stories an earlier section, I wrote about how Davis responded to an argument between two of his friends. He used breathing to help him through that situation. Whereas Davis used mindful breathing to slow himself down to think through the situation with his friends or to keep himself from reacting emotionally too quickly, Edward found that breathing was a way to do his school assignments more quickly. He recalled:

It just helps me do things quicker. I can breathe before I do something at my house like a project we have to do or at school and it feels like I do it much much

quicker. At the beginning of the year, we did this ReadWorks thing and I didn't really have breathing as much as I do now, I mean I did it last year but it had been like the whole summer since we had those classes, so, it took me a little while at my house, and now we did a ReadWorks yesterday, and I did it ten minutes...in aftercare.

In one of her first interviews, Britney explained how she used breathing to remedy a situation away from school that connected her physical feelings to her breath:

I was at the barber shop and she was about to like put like a perm in my hair and I don't really like perms I just like washing my hair because perms, they itchy. My mom wanted to make my hair look pretty because we was going to a wedding...

And I was getting mad because the store ...the perm part, it like didn't work...So we had to use our washer and it was just water and just water to wash my hair so she washed my hair and then I got over it. She fixed my hair and put stuff in it.

And after she fixed my hair, I was breathing...My stomach hurts when I sit in that chair I don't know why so I was breathing and my stomach felt better and those bad feelings that I had when my mom washed my hair in that chair.

Danielle and I both discussed how mindfulness could help a headache. I reflected early in the year, "sometimes now if I get a headache, what I work to really do, is that thing that Oliver and Danielle were talking about...I'd imagine myself breathing into whatever [muscle] was tight and then exhaling letting all of it go."

Danielle in a later discussion that she tried it at home with her mom when she said, "at home, my mom...she has a really bad cold and this headache. I taught her the headache mindfulness thing and she's been using it a lot before she goes to bed."

I was reluctant to use mindfulness for these purposes, but what I found was when I opened my own mind and honed these aspects of mindfulness, other rooms of mindfulness technique, effect, experience, or result opened wide. Mindfulness as a remedy was simply the doorway into them.

Body and breath as access points. Often as we told stories about using mindfulness as a remedy, mindfulness of the body or a technique involving the body like alternate nostril breathing was involved. Oliver and Stephen found such nuanced attention to themselves through their bodies. Oliver told the story about how during his soccer game:

At my soccer games, I tried to ignore all the noise... I had a PK [penalty kick] I think it was last week, yeah, and I tried to block out all the crowd noise to focus...and then the whistle blew, like, I don't know what happened but like...I lost focus....I scored, but I lost focus .I aimed for a place but I got in the opposite. Finding focus was bodily experience for Oliver, just as it was for Stephen.

In one of our discussions after we practiced mindful stretching, Stephen described:

Well I was, I couldn't really keep my eyes closed, so I just stared at one thing a little bit until I could get my focus back, and then on the first one, that's when my focus got off track, but I brought my focus back on the mindfulness stuff and then my mind started thinking pictures. Those noises were the horse...the horse...I could just see the horse running and then the horse stopping. It helped pretty great once it was done. Like every time when I get finished breathing or something, I always feel great afterwards and it helped me with the rest of my afternoon.

In response, in the same conversation, I then asked, “Did you feel kind of connected to the story he was telling about the horse when you were able to get the pictures in your mind and refocus?” Oliver then responded:

Yeah I could connect it like so much. I watched a movie and they were like taming a wild horse I could like I was like I had like an image in my mind but the image was like moving...it was really cool.

Miles found access back into his focus and even through tough emotions in a similar way when in the midst of chaos around him:

I found it really really hard to concentrate because I was a little bit angry, I was a little bit aggravated at Nick and Sam because I was sitting right next to them I was trying to get the breathe in breathe out one and then I got distracted so, and I got distracted by the printer, so I messed with that for a couple of seconds, then I just tried sitting down being quiet and it helped a lot.

Cade noticed that when he used his breath at certain times, he felt changes in his body:

Since we’re packing up all my stuff, I’d been lifting a bunch of boxes on top of each other and my arms were really tired and I couldn’t lift this heavy box up, then I sat down and started breathing and I got this burst of energy and I could lift it.”

This was so powerful to him that he told the story again in an interview with me:

Well yeah, I didn’t...at first when I started I didn’t actually know that, when I started, I thought it was just like, like breathing, but now I realize it can give you energy, it can do a lot of stuff you don’t realize.

It was in attending to his body that he found the power in his own practice.

Connecting body & mind as an access point for concentration. Carter

connected body and mind in many of his stories and in his general comments about how “mindfulness can help because it can make your body more aware and your mind more aware.” He saw that connection when he considered the ways that we practice and access concentration:

Mindfulness to me is a time when you calm your body and when you...in mindfulness you don't just do anything or color or draw or read, you're basically making your body focus on one thing, not making your mind focus on something else. Basically, mindfulness is when you are, to me, you are, like, I don't know how to explain it, your mind is not, [your mind] is being mindful and not wandering off into something that you don't need your mind to get into. That's really what I think about mindfulness.. .mindfulness is making you calm and making your mind just focus on one thing and not move over to other things.

Coda: Mindfulness as attention to the body and breath. Though it took a shift of understanding for me to realize the importance of mindfulness of the body, the understanding was in keeping with the idea that often simplicity is the most effective access point to eventual depth. In listening back through our conversations, the wisdom of paying attention to body and breath seemed to surface in every corner. Using this as an access point, Stephen, Oliver, and Miles all found that they could recover focus and calm using attention to their bodies, and I find the same is true in many of my mindfulness practices. In school, though, far too often stillness and an emphasis on controlled thinking are used as access points to forcing students' attention.

Mindfulness as Choice

The impulse frequently arises in me to squeeze another this or another that into this moment. Just this phone call, just stopping off here on my way there. Never mind that it might be in the opposite direction. I've learned to identify this impulse and mistrust it. I work hard at saying no to it. It would have me eat breakfast with my eyes riveted to the cereal box, reading for the hundredth time the dietary contents of the contents, or the amazing free offer from the company. This impulse doesn't care what it feeds on, as long as it's feeding. The newspaper is an even better draw, or the L. L. Bean catalogue, or whatever else is around. It scavenges to fill time, conspires with my mind to keep me unconscious, lulled in a fog of numbness to a certain extent, just enough to fill or overflow my belly while I actually miss breakfast. It has me unavailable to others at those times, missing the play of light on the table, the smells in the room, the energies of the moment, including arguments and disputes, as we come together before going our separate ways for the day. I like to practice voluntary simplicity to counter such impulses and make sure nourishment comes at a deep level. It involves intentionally doing only one thing at a time and making sure I am here for it (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 68).

Here, Kabat-Zinn (1994) talks about the impulse to do certain things that put him in positions that make it easier to be less present and less aware. These impulses to squeeze one more thing into the workings of a day make it difficult to focus on doing just one thing at a time, the kind of focus I encourage with my students multiple times a day. Making the choice to focus on just one thing at a time and doing that thing with

deliberate intention, allows us to be present enough to truly see the choices in front of us at any given time a day. An example from the classroom of being in a position to make a choice because we do one thing at a time comes for us during transitions between our workshops. Before every transition, we pause a moment, and I remind students to do only one thing at a time. I try hard to follow the same practice. For me, this means that as students are moving around, for example, if I need to get the book I am reading to start the next workshop, then I am fully doing that job until I finish it, instead of starting to get the materials and allowing myself to set them down somewhere to pick up the five pencils that need to go back into their pencil cup on the table. This may mean I get fewer things done, but it means I prioritize what will help me be the most present with my students when it matters. That presence is my primary responsibility in the classroom.

Finding our float. “There’s really no way you can do this without concentration,” Miles said as we started one of our discussions. He said it mostly to himself, but loud enough for the rest of us to hear, I then commented that without the ability to focus, it would be very difficult to sustain that focus, shift perspective, use compassion in difficult situations, or even recognize awareness. That same focus I used to keep my attention on the book I need to get during classroom transitions is what Miles is referring to here that helps him make the choices he makes mindfully. I agree with Miles’ idea that without concentration mindfulness is a very difficult task to consider. I define concentration as: placing one’s attention, intentionally and for extended periods of time, on an object, keeping it there, and bringing it back if it wavers. However, I believe there is an important distinction between having an *ability* to do something and *making the choice* to do something.

Fronsdal (2013) discussed concentration in one of his podcasts. In it he made a connection about concentrating and being concentrated as a state of being and somewhat of a sub-level within the state of being of mindfulness. In his talk, Fronsdal (2013) connected getting concentrated to the process of floating:

Most people, unless you have I guess the right kind of light body, most human bodies kind of sink. Enough that I think that if a person doesn't know how to float in water at all, never been taught how to float in water, would probably sink and maybe drown. Wouldn't be good for your health. But most people need to learn something about how to float, ya know, you should make yourself flat, you should tread water, you should take, you know, big...have a lot of air in your lungs that helps a little bit to keep you up. It's a little bit of skill (and) once you learn the skill, it's kind of like second nature. It's like, it feels like you're doing almost nothing at all.

But when you (are learning) it feels kind of frightening and you flail around and it takes a while to kinda learn. But once you learn, you still, even if you get really skilled at floating, and you can turn on your back and spread your arms out and your legs out and really kinda float, and it seems like there's no effort, there's still some effort involved, there's a skill you have to apply. Even though you would say mostly what's happening is that you're being held up by the water. You're floating; the water's holding you up. The water is holding you up, but you have to do something as well to allow the water to hold yourself up. You have to do something to allow something good to happen. ... If you think it's only up to you and your efforts, and you huff and you puff and you strain to do all

kinds of practices, you'll probably just sink. But you have to do just enough of your own work and make space to allow for something to unfold, to hold you up and support you.

In the after-school workshop and in my classroom, we worked on learning to concentrate, a process of choice, not ability. Supporting my students in making conscious choices was one of my main reasons for employing mindfulness techniques. A central element of making a conscious choice is concentration, and the inverse/converse is true as well. Having a concentrated mind is itself a conscious choice, one that takes time and skillful effort to achieve. In order to learn to concentrate, the students and I had to choose to do so. The importance of choosing to pay attention is often ignored in schools; it is more typical for teachers to tell students what, how, and why to pay attention. Either educators assume students are not in control enough of their concentration to be the ones choosing to place it somewhere or educators assume that students are accepting as important the same things that adults tell them is important. I learned from working with mindfulness though that students were capable of choosing to concentrate and that they and adults sometimes disagreed about what was important.

Making hard choices. Students often talked about making small, in-the-moment type choices to breathe when they were upset or to help them walk away from a conflict. However, there were times when students talked about having to make choices for themselves that looked more like the kind of decisions that would impact them for some time. In one of our very first sessions where we discussed making hard choices, Lakin and Dylan both told stories about important choices they had to make that were weighing on them:

Lakin: My mom made me quit a cheer team and then she's making me go to another one, and I told her I wanted to do tumbling, and she's saying she wants me to do cheer. And then it's stressful because I don't know which one to pick.

Emily: Ahh, so you've got make a choice there right? And that's another really important place because all of this is connected to making choices.

Lakin: And because the team that I quit, is the other team...and so I don't want to go on the stage with them.

Emily: That provides a lot of stuff, Dylan?

Dylan: My parents have been divorced for about two years now, and I'm getting to the age where I have to...I'm getting to the age wherever you're 13, 12, or 11 you have to pick who parents you want to permanently live with. That's getting kind of stressful for me, because I'm still deciding, ever since I found out I had to pick. And so sometimes I just stop everything I'm doing and take a breath.

Throughout the year, other students saw mindfulness, specifically the concentration aspects of it, as useful for academic support when they choose to employ it. Danielle commented that "I think that, as a student, mindfulness helps me because I am using mindfulness in things that I want to pay attention to like reading."

Dealing with distractions. In the process of engaging our concentration, we often found that certain things easily moved our attention away from the object of our concentration. Sometimes it happened so frequently that we felt like Miles when he said:

It's that I bring my focus back and then I'm losing it again. I bring it back and I lose it again and eventually I give up on trying to bring it back again because I get it for a second and then lose it again. What's the point?

I also had felt frustration around trying to concentrate and finding myself distracted. As one way to address this frustrated feeling and as a chance to experience mindfulness, during our after-school workshop, we often practiced concentrating. We took our attention, intentionally placed it on one activity, noticed it wandering, and brought it back. Oliver explained his process of gathering his focus when he was losing it:

Sometimes when I focus, I focus too hard and then, like, (I decide it is) not, like, necessary to be focused and then, like, after I stop and I'm like," What happened?"... "Where is it?" It's, like it's so tiny I just get off [track], like I blink and I'm, like," Where is it?" Then so...I breathed and then I found it.

We came to understand that there were times when we could put ourselves in a position that might prevent distraction.

Finding the conscious space to choose more efficiently and effectively. As an extension of Fronsdal's (2013) message about floating, we, too, found that accessing a state of concentration became something that we felt was less and less effortful, but allowed for us to be supported into even more awareness of those spaces where we can make choices. Stephen reflected this when he approached me in the middle of packing up after class one day. With eyes wide and tone cautious, he said, "I just did those mindful things you ask us to do, but I did them without thinking about it. That was really weird." These mindful things that Stephen took on supported him in making choices and being in

a position to articulate his reasoning for those choices throughout the day, and not just when we packed up.

As a teacher, I hoped that my students would become so adept at concentrating that it would be something they could access with little effort or strain when they need it and in the service of making truly conscious choices. One of the most striking days of this year was a day that Stephen took his mindfulness work in concentration and applied it in a situation where it would benefit him. We were beginning some computerized standardized testing in the spring of the school year. He had started his test, when he called me over, looked around, and whispered to me, “I really need to focus.” I asked him what he needed to make his focus easier, and he said that he was good. He put the hood of his jacket over his head, his fingers in his ears, and bent close to the computer to get to work. I could not and still cannot tell you why this test seemed to matter so much to him. However, what I know is that his decision to interpret the situation as one where focus was necessary and to engage a skill he had honed all year was evidence for me that he could access concentration when he chose to do so.

Concentration and strategic choices. Students often first mentioned that they found a need to be concentrated not in academic settings but during sports and games. Oliver, Danielle, Carter, and Matthew discussed how mindfulness helped them to make better choices when they played games. I remember the time Stephen participated in reflection discussion with the whole group after playing chess with his best friend. He was floored that by using a few mindfulness techniques like breathing, keeping his eyes in one spot, and staying out of conversation with his opponent, he was able to make

choices that set him up for taking his opponent's pieces. Carter made a similar connection:

Like when I play chess, I've been playing much better, it may be because I practice more often, but usually [even] when I'm practicing often, I just give someone my queen. Like I play online with other people. And like I move my queen up, and I'm like oh...I've put this king in check, don't even realize there's a rook right next to the queen, so he takes my queen. There's one time I was playing chess, I moved my queen up giving the person I was playing an advantage, put my king in check, so I put his king in check, I left my queen undefended, he took my queen and I was in check...but when I'm being mindful in mindfulness, I think ahead of what's going to happen. So I'm in a game, so like...I was playing with Stephen this morning. I was like there's my knight, there's his knight, he could take my knight and put me in check, so I probably want to get that knight out of the way so I have a bishop or something he doesn't know about and I take it, but then I see another bishop that he's not paying attention to, so I'm like, okay, I'll move to this square, then he moves the pawn that's guarding my bishop, so then I take his bishop, then like if I was playing, I'd move there and he'd like have maybe a rook there, so I think when I play chess mindfully, I'm playing better than when I usually am playing online.

Carter's assessment here is full of the choices he made as a result of being in the space of concentration. I see his strategy talk here as demonstrative of the idea that through concentrating, opportunities for choices and even expression of his skill became

more readily available in a mindful chess setting that he may not have seen in his online chess settings that he contrasted with mindful chess.

Throughout the year and from multiple angles, Danielle described how mindfulness is a major component of her softball performance and practice. When specifically talking about strategy within a game, she mentioned how her concentration allows her to keep her own agency and opportunity to choose a strategic move as a pitcher by breathing through potential distractions. She said:

It's like in softball and when you're pitching if you stop in the middle of a motion, they'll consider it a ball and everybody on base gets to advance one. Since the other team is up to bat, and the other people are in the dugout, they'll scream and shout like right as you let go of the ball to distract you, my pitching and hitting coach always told us to breath in and breath out.

Coda: Mindfulness as choice. I have recently been trying to teach a friend to swim laps using competitive swimming techniques. I swim laps for exercise, and I forget how many different pieces and parts there are to simply making sure she floats comfortably. Gil is right, there are so many skills that are necessary. However, she is a former college athlete and accustomed to practicing until something feels comfortable in her body. This same process that she's engaging is the one that I saw in my children all year. Each time we practiced coloring, chess, Legos, writing, or reading and actively brought our attention back to that activity, we made it easier for us to feel that float of concentration. More importantly though, in an arena where concentration is often only seen through the lens of judging an adeptness at the skills of it, I see value in viewing concentration as a choice students make. Only after framing our work in concentration as

a choice did it make sense to me to consider honing skill. The skill would only serve to help them making the choices they saw important and worth the effort to concentrate. Though it became easier and less effortful, just as floating does, honoring and respecting a student's choice to even get in the water, per se, matters more to me than their ability to float. Resting on our concentration, we could then make better choices and help ourselves grow in our understandings of mindfulness and our understandings of ourselves.

Mindfulness as Skillfulness in Relationship

Looking deeply into any process, we can see that the same applies. No sunlight, no life. No water, no life. No plants, no photosynthesis, no photosynthesis, no oxygen for animals to breathe. No parents, no you. No trucks, no food in the cities. No truck manufacturers, no trucks. No steel workers, no steel for the manufacturers. No mining, no steel for the steel workers. No food, no steel workers. No rain, no food. No sunlight, no rain. No conditions for star and planet formation in the formative universe, no sunlight, no Earth. These relationships are not always simple and linear. Usually things are embedded in a complex web of finely balanced interconnections. Certainly, what we call life, or health, or the biosphere, are all complex systems of interconnections, with no absolute starting point or end point (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 213-214).

Within Mindfulness philosophy, I have, at times, assumed that the emphasis on personal and individual inner-world practices around attention would create a de-emphasis on external relationships. However, the practices of Mindfulness philosophy place great importance on personal relationship as well, even within a system of thought that, at first glance, can appear very internal and cerebral. Just as the Kabat-Zinn (1994)

quote above, Mindfulness acknowledges the interconnectedness of all things as foundational to its philosophy, and humans' interconnectedness with one another is just one major site for those practices. In kind, navigating those relationships mindfully requires awareness and skillfulness that we can derive from personal practice.

Mindfulness proved useful when it supported states of concentration that helped with our academic inquiries, and it was reassuring to see how calm we could get when we paid attention to the sensations in our bodies. However, none of the effects of mindfulness that we storied this year were as poignant for me as those that led to deep awareness, understanding, and positively constructive action in our relationships with one another and our families.

In our last interview, I wanted to understand how my students thought about mindfulness relative to our relationships. Some of us in class had been very actively working through friendship issues with one another, and I would have guessed that they might have cited mindfulness as a source of support with those. However, there were some students, like Danielle, who very rarely asked for support around any relational issues with me. She and her friends generally seemed happy and she did not talk to me much about what she might do in difficult situations. I was curious about what she might say when I asked, "Can you think of a way that mindfulness might help you deal with a situation that's unfair -- either unfair to an individual or unfair to a group of people?"

Danielle: I recently just had a conversation about my mom with this. Um, how when Beth [her younger sister] and I get in an argument, like when we were cleaning the playroom and we only had five minutes. I was trying to tell my sister, 'Why don't you clean your room while I finish the

playroom, and then you can come back and help me?’ but she didn’t want to. So, I kept asking her to do that and she called on my dad and told him. And I think it’s always unfair because, then we had to do what Beth wanted. I think it’s unfair because me being the older one, I have to have more responsibility of Beth. If she wants to do something I have to accept the fact that she wants to do it. So I think it’s kinda unfair that I often don’t get a say with Beth. But when I’m using mindfulness I just like walk away and let it go.

Emily: What did you do about it in this case? You talked with your mom right? Do you think the conversation was productive?

Danielle: Yes

Emily: What did your mom say?

Danielle: She said, ‘Thank you for telling me because we didn’t realize you felt that way.’ That was a few weeks ago, and now I feel like it’s a lot easier to share my ideas because I know that my parents are going to (understand)...and my sister knows too ... my ideas will be productive, too.

Getting a sense of ourselves in relationships is so important and can be some of the greatest work we do toward bolstering our own feelings of personal strength. How much strength and personal power to make choices is found in relationships like these where we feel safe enough to discuss even difficult ideas or emotions?

Conflict contexts: Siblings and friends. Across the year, my students and I increasingly and more frequently made choices which I considered to be wise ones. This

was first apparent in conflicts with friends and siblings. Nick, Ryan, and Edward all talked about how using mindfulness to control emotions was helpful in their decision making. Twins Christine and Katy both reported fewer fights with one another at home, and attributed it to mindfulness. Carter, Davis, Dylan, Miles, and Lakin all told stories about how they found distance from a sibling who was frustrating them and used breathing to calm down. In another assessment and reflection on how mindfulness affected relationships, Danielle reflected:

It [mindfulness] helped me and my sister become closer I think because we don't get along very well, we've never gotten along very well, like I'm talking about in my speech for the conference. I feel like using mindfulness to just walk away has helped us not hurt each others' feelings, so we've grown closer in that way.

Students demonstrated via their stories that they found new ways to engage with others and to determine what to say. The longer I teach, the more I realize that my students who say or do things that seem mean or disrespectful to others in the class are in what I see as friendship situations that are difficult to navigate. The more respect I give them for how hard the situation is, the more they respond with an acknowledgement of the desire to be kind and caring. When Edward told his story about how mindfulness has helped him work through situations that were tricky with his friends, he articulated well the stress of being stuck in a situation where it seemed that no matter what he chose to say, it would put him in a position he did not want to be in socially.

At the beginning of my work with mindfulness and children, I saw potential for mindfulness to be an access point for helping them determine what the best course of action might be in unjust situations. I grappled with some of the best ways to handle

issues of social justice in the classroom throughout the year. I had gotten to a point that I wasn't reluctant to talk about issues in the news, globally and locally. In being willing to discuss these difficult issues in the classroom, I found that many of our discussions naturally interrogated why people would choose to do what they did in politics, to one another, and in their own lives. We could have seen these situations through lenses of systemic injustice, individual interpersonal conflict, fights between good guys and bad guys, individual moral failing, or any other number of very specific frames for a given situation. Instead, we used mindfulness as a frame. One of our discussions as a class, during morning meeting, reflects the sense of work in social justice situations. As a group, we worked to understand that every one of these situations we talked about involved people making choices. Knowing that helped us realize that often in situations where there may be inequity, honing our awareness and bringing to bear our concentration can allow us to see more clearly and make better choices ourselves within those situations and around them.

Understanding place and personality. One morning in May, in our language journal, Ryan asked the question, "What does where someone lives have to do with their personality?" She explained what she meant by talking about people living in the *'hood* acting a certain way, and she and several other students laughed about the term she used. Then some students started making jokes about living in the *'hood*. I was unsure of exactly how to respond to this situation. As I entered the discussion, I tried to be intentional in my push toward seeing the humanity around the people involved in the situation being discussed as opposed to seeing the situation of living in the *'hood* through the lens of a disrespectful caricature of a specific community.

Emily: We need to make sure we understand that the people who live there [the 'hood] are real people.

Stephen: [to explain why a person might live in 'the 'hood'] Or maybe you're just getting into college...

Emily: Whether you... you consider yourself to be living in the 'hood or not...

Stephen: I was...I know

Emily: Or maybe you have in the past or maybe you will in the future it's not a matter...I think it's an important thing for us to talk about especially because I've taught several kids who would say they live there... It's important that we don't turn those people that I care a great deal about into a group of 'they,' right?

Stephen tried hard to make sure that people were understanding that he lived in the 'hood in the past, and he followed up my comments about it not being that bad.

Stephen: Yeah, I used to live there.

Emily: Yeah so talk about that, because Ryan's question is an important one, I think...

Stephen: It's not really that bad

Emily: But she's asking, 'Why does place have something to do with personality?'

Stephen: Um, because mostly some of those people there are just getting out of college and stuff, and like they don't have a job maybe, and they go there and they don't really have a place to work so they're at home all

day and sometimes they have kids so sometimes they play outside with other kids.

Emily: So is lifestyle different than maybe what you're used to or your parents are used to? Other thoughts, Kyle?

Kyle: I think that it's what you're exposed to for your personality, because if you're exposed to living in like a really rich part of a city and you have a lot of money and can get everything you want. You just think and you just say that you get everything you want no matter what, and that would change your personality because that would change everything about you and you could get whatever you want...and you could get whatever you want from the store and that could change your personality.

Lakin: 'hood is short for neighborhood...second of all...some people think the 'hood is for a bunch of bad people and stuff, but I think it's just a place, some people don't intend to live there. But some people just move there because they don't have a lot of money or something, Ryan said why does place have to ...something with personality. I think that...I thought of Texas because they have an accent, and they have kind of a personality. When you think of Texas you think of Texas and stuff you think of horses..."

Emily: Okay so what's the mindful stance here? Thinking about if there could be a connection between place that you're from and personality. So how could you treat that understanding mindfully? Matthew, you had something?

Matthew: I don't really...There kind of is, but not like a ton...like if you're always in like a very nice place, you'll like get greedy and think you get everything you want, but if you're like, don't have a lot of money, then you won't be greedy, you'll just like be fine."

The reasons my students came up with as possibilities for why place and personality are connected were rooted in considering the place itself, acknowledging that living there may not be seen as desirable, but that there were life situations that made that a place that people needed to live. Digging into the potential causes of things and personal connections with a place matters in making the pace and the people living there feel real and moves us a step further toward humanizing a situation about which many people make dehumanizing assumptions. Addressing the idea that place and personality could be connected in multiple ways helps us to suspend judgement, especially negative judgement, and allows us to consider, with empathy, the situations of the people in a given place. That, to me, remains an important aspect of engaging with situations of potential injustice or social difficulty productively and in ways that help kids determine what they might do in a given social or community situation (like someone making a joke about living in the 'hood). What I believe matters most is that we find ways in the actual situations to act locally and immediately in the present - the only place any real action can take place.

Coda: Mindfulness as skillfulness in relationship. It makes a great deal of sense to me that Mindfulness philosophy would situate the whole of mindfulness work as happening within these relationships. Any relationship, regardless of closeness, can provide us the fodder for working mindfully. I see these friendship situations as the local

microcosms of some of the greater social ills we deal with as a society, and in discussing them as a class, we can come to clearer comprehension of the humanity behind the situation and the space for us to act as individuals. This humanization opens up the opportunity too to bring to light the humanity of those not just in power positions but equally those who are on the margins of society.

Mindfulness as Revelation of What We Don't Notice

‘When someone is searching,’ said Siddhartha, ‘then it might easily happen that the only thing his eyes still see is that what he searches for, that he is unable to find anything, to let anything enter his mind, because he always thinks of nothing but the object of his search, because he has a goal, because he is obsessed by the goal. Searching means: having a goal. But finding means: being free, being open, having no goal. You, oh venerable one, are perhaps indeed a searcher, because, striving for your goal, there are many things you don't see, which are directly in front of your eyes.’ (Hesse, 1922, p. 65)

All in good time. Daniel, the same friend who asked me to read Ursula LeGuin's epic fantasy, invited me into the novel *Siddhartha* at a time in my life when I was struggling to find a philosophically ‘right’ course of action in my life. I felt like he was prescribing something to cure me of whatever philosophical blight ailed me, so I resisted. I was reintroduced to it 5 years later by Anna, another friend who had read it before, the same friend who shared the kayak with me and laughs with me about actuality and center lines. She simply mentioned it in passing, and being in a different and more open mental space than I had been before, I decided to pick it up. Because I can explore ideas with both of them, it was no surprise to me that the three of us would be connected by this

book. Both of them help me to see things that I “don’t see, which are directly in front of” my eyes (Hesse, 1922). *Siddhartha* (Hesse, 1922) is a novel about a boy who grows up in the time of a famously wise traveling teacher and is seeking wisdom himself. Siddhartha, the main character of the book, has a good friend named Govinda who accompanies him on different parts of his journey. The quote above is from a conversation they have about what Siddhartha learned his journey.

One thing I learned on my mindfulness journey is the way that practicing impacts how I see or notice. Within practice sessions, when I am intentionally bringing my attention back to a given activity, I find that I am able to notice more in the immediate present. I have also come to realize that there will always be more to see. Both these insights about how I see or notice helps me to have more agency in situations that feel stressful or out of my control; I realize that what I am experiencing is simply a story I am telling myself about the event. They are meanings I make. Knowing this opens my mind. When I can be more open-minded to what a given situation might mean, I find that I can often find a place for me to act, where at first glance, there didn’t seem to be one.

Phone addiction. At the end of the school year, we watched a clip from CNN Student News that featured interviews with smartphone app creators in which the creators revealed that their initial research into creating an app involved learning about addiction and what kinds of things they could add to their apps (notifications, advertisements, etc.) that might create more interaction from their market. We watched it as a whole class during morning meeting. The CNN Student News Reporter was investigating the question, “Are We Addicted to Our Phones?” After watching, I asked my students to

consider how mindfulness might relate to what we just watched together. Ryan and I then had this exchange:

Ryan: Well, like, I don't have a smartphone but I have a tablet, and, like, whenever I'm feeling bored I go to it. We get bored, like, younger people get bored easily, so we're on it a lot, so sometimes, like, when your parents want you to get off of it, you're kind of grumpy because you don't want to get off of it... and so that like that kind of triggers not being mindful, and like rushing because you want to get back to it.

Emily: So if you're off of it, you're saying it triggers not being mindful because you want to get back to it... there's like that feel of, 'I need to get back to it so I (am having) trouble thinking about what I'm doing right now'?

Ryan's consideration of why mindfulness might break when using a phone is thought-provoking to me. It reminds me of the ways in which I found mindfulness to be a tool for reflecting on my past choices without judgement. Grumpiness is a state that affects my mindfulness too, and I have to work to acknowledge when it is happening because I just don't want to be grumpy. Ryan's acknowledgement that it is happening to her and why demonstrates a gateway to personal agency. She is seeing or acknowledging something that may be difficult to see, especially when there is judgement attached to it.

Britney and Paris had similar insights:

Emily: Well, Ryan mentioned that as younger people you feel bored more easily, I don't know that that's the case, what adults have is they don't

have usually another adult telling them not to play on their phone, so boredom may come just as easily, but if your response is to go find electronics to keep your mind occupied, then maybe that's theirs, too.

Britney: When my parents tell me to do something and look for it on my ipad, I do it but I just tell it to them and then I just use my ipad for like two more hours because then I can't stop using it.

Emily: So connect that to mindfulness, how does that relate to being mindful?

Britney: Probably because you're doing something, then something else comes to your head you want to do that thing, and then it's something that you wanna do more than you wanna do right then, then you just do it.

Emily: So we've talked about (part of) mindfulness being the ability to bring your thoughts back to whatever you're supposed to be doing or you wanted to do in the first place. Right? So it sounds like to me, and correct me if I'm wrong please, so it sounds to me that when you get on the phone your mind is so sucked into the phone or tablet it gets harder to be mindful even while you're on the phone. Is that what you're saying?

Britney: Yeah because there are apps...because you stay on it for two hours.

Emily: And that guy... you heard what that guy said, he studied addiction. He said, "We studied the times you would need notifications. We studied the language from notifications that would addict people. We studied the way people get addicted, and that's what we put into our apps. They

were created that way, it's not just like random. They made it so it would do that.

Paris: I think that when you get on your phone it is really addicting because, like Britney said, there's apps and I think the reason it connects to mindfulness is because you have to be mindful about what you're doing on your phone and if it gets too addicting and you have to be mindful about what you're doing in mindfulness.

Emily: Say more about that, what do you mean 'to be mindful about what you're doing in mindfulness?'

Paris: Because, like, since we're not being mindful, like, about chess or we can't do Chromebooks yet...we're not really prepared for it...the next step in mindfulness.

Emily: Yeah it's a matter of...I see it as...that's my choice, it's not like there's some mindfulness committee that decided you are or aren't ready. It's my choice not to let us get there, we may get there next year, it's my choice because...what I see is there's still so much of...you know, when you do ask your parents for attention and they're on their phone, and their heads move but their eyes don't go, or their eyes go but their head won't move, it's because of that pull to the phone. And it's not... they're not trying to do that. But I see that with you guys, I ask you a question and you're still looking at the screen... but you're trying to turn your face toward me...you physically are not turning your eyeballs, which is why I ask you to turn your toes, and why I ask you to turn your eyes and

make sure your hands are free because it's so easy to pretend for ourselves that one part of our brain can do this and the other part can listen and we think we get it, and we so don't.

In our district, our students experience one-to-one computing; each of them has a Google Chromebook to use daily. Here, Paris demonstrates an understanding of mindfulness as something that involves increasing our skillfulness as we practice and grow. She addresses that growth in skillfulness in the context of using Chromebooks as potential tools for mindfulness practice. To help the kids grow in this way, I structure our work together as a dialogue in which I assess the ways that our attention acts within certain contexts, and make decisions about what kinds of things make the most sense for our work together. I also explain decision making process in order to help the students understand that 'readiness' is not a universal concept or even a real category, it is simply a choice I am making. In revealing why I make a decision, it is my intention to demonstrate one way of making a mindful choice.

Matthew continued the discussion:

Matthew: My family...I'm getting one [a phone] in 8th or 9th grade, with me it's pretty much like that for books. ...I play on my iPad like three min a day on weekdays and about 30 min on weekends.

Emily: So do you feel like the books is something you're addicted to?

Matthew: For me, like, when I'm reading if it's a good book, I like sometimes I'm kind of practically deaf when I'm reading a book....

Emily: Even though it's hard to get out of a book. It's hard to make your brain stop following a train of thought when it's really really really good.

Some reason I feel that as less of a pull or there's less danger involved than a screen. Dylan?

Dylan: It's not just phones; it's also iPads, TV, computers. So there's one app on my iPad that I'm really addicted to. It doesn't really send me notifications that much, it just sends me 'come back...'

Emily: Yeah, so apps invite you back like they're a friend saying come hang out with me.

Dylan: Yeah, whenever you first go on it, there's like ads up in the corner. It's for iPads, iPhones, computers, XBoxes.

Jeff: I think some of us are denying that we aren't really addicted, but I can say I'm very addicted. I think we are only bored if we have an iPad .. that we can use, that's not broken. I think it's mindful because whenever we do have it, we like are really bored easily, and not mindful just thinking about what will I do on my games...

Emily: Could mindfulness be used to combat this thing? Like... is the problem the phone?

Several voices: Yeah...No the apps...no it's you.

Emily: So let's play in this answer for a second... A couple of you said 'It's you.' If it's you, could mindfulness help break that?

Quinton: I think that it's good that someone's actually acknowledging that people need to get off their phones because like lots of kids in this class notice it with their parents or sisters or brothers, finally someone actually said to the public 'We're addicted to our phones.'

I think Quinton is right. In order for us to see what's in front of us that we may not be seeing, it may take someone else telling us something that we are reluctant to acknowledge. My hope is at our work together as a classroom family will provide my students and me the base of a community of good friends within which we can support one another in seeing what we might not have seen before. It is in revealing these layers that we find space and possibility for action. It is within experiencing these new ways to see that we begin to open to the possibility that there could be more to know than what we notice at first. And it is within reflecting on those experiences that we begin to trust a way of being and processing our worlds that engages a pre-disposition to "pay attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally" (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 1).

Coda: Mindfulness as Revelation of What We Don't Notice. At the end of *Siddhartha*, Govinda, Siddhartha's companion is still confused. By this time, Govinda has spent many years with Gotama, a teacher. Siddhartha, in contrast to Govinda, decided early on in life after some time of becoming a renunciant and studying a bit with Gotama, that he was going to seek wisdom and enlightenment elsewhere. As they reconnect and converse, Govinda begins to realize that Siddhartha seems to have acquired the same peaceful wisdom that seems to flow from Gotama. According to Govinda, Gotama and Siddhartha have the same demeanor and type of speech, but Govinda sees conflict between the words that Siddhartha offers to characterize the connections and potential disconnections between his learning and Gotama's teachings.

Then spoke Govinda, while bowing for a farewell: 'I thank you, Siddhartha, for telling me some of your thoughts. They are partially strange

thoughts, not all have been instantly understandable to me. This being as it may, I thank you, and I wish you to have calm days.’ (But secretly he thought to himself: This Siddhartha is a bizarre person, he expresses bizarre thoughts; his teachings sound foolish. So differently sound the exalted one’s pure teachings, clearer, purer, more comprehensible, nothing strange, foolish, or silly is contained in them. But different from his thoughts seemed to me Siddhartha’s hands and feet, his eyes, his forehead, his breath, his smile, his greeting, his walk. Never again, after our exalted Gotama has become one with the Nirvana, never since then have I met a person of whom I felt: this is a holy man! Only him, this Siddhartha, I have found to be like this. May his teachings be strange, may his words sound foolish; out of his gaze and his hand, his skin and his hair, out of every part of him shines a purity, shines a calmness, shines a cheerfulness and mildness and holiness, which I have seen in no other person since the final death of our exalted teacher.) As Govinda thought like this, and there was a conflict in his heart, he once again bowed to Siddhartha, drawn by love. Deeply he bowed to him who was calmly sitting.

“Siddhartha,” he spoke, “we have become old men. It is unlikely for one of us to see the other again in this incarnation. I see, beloved, that you have found peace. I confess that I haven’t found it. Tell me, oh honourable one, one more word, give me something on my way which I can grasp, which I can understand! Give me something to be with me on my path. It is often hard, my path, often dark, Siddhartha.

Siddhartha said nothing and looked at him with the ever unchanged, quiet smile. Govinda stared at his face, with fear, with yearning, suffering, and the eternal search was visible in his look, eternal not-finding. (Hesse, 1922, p. 69).

Govinda sought the peaceful wisdom Siddhartha and Gotama seemed to have found, however, he was looking for it in the wrong place. Govinda was looking for the product instead of looking for the process to peaceful wisdom. Govinda assumed knowledge of someone else's wisdom could bring him to a place of wisdom himself, whereas Siddhartha journeyed through defeat and victory, joy and struggle, praise and blame, all the while gathering wisdom and eventually arriving at a place of peace.

The story, of course, doesn't end here. Just as in Peircian (1878/1955) terms, doubt and its accompanying feelings of stuckness and confusion are just the catalyst one needs to spur an inquiry. Therefore, the stuckness from which Govinda seeks resolution is, like everything else, impermanent. I describe having a feeling of stuckness when I find a place in my life where thought and action collide, where old understandings become burdensome, or where past pathways and habitual choices fail to serve my goals any longer. In my final chapter, I will offer some access points to unstuckness, as the resultant implications of my inquiry of this study. I provide these words in Chapter 5, all the while simultaneously recognizing that "Knowledge can be conveyed, but not wisdom. It can be found, it can be lived, it is possible to be carried by it, miracles can be performed with it, but it cannot be expressed in words and taught" (Hesse, 1922, p. 66). Just as I have throughout my dissertation, I will convey what I can through words about my experiences and thoughts on them with the hope that it will inspire you to seek and construct your own wisdom on your own journey.

CHAPTER 5: BECOMING UNSTUCK

Look, my dear Govinda, this is one of my thoughts, which I have found: wisdom cannot be passed on. Wisdom which a wise man tries to pass on to someone always sounds like foolishness.” “Are you kidding?” asked Govinda. “I’m not kidding. I’m telling you what I’ve found. Knowledge can be conveyed, but not wisdom. It can be found, it can be lived, it is possible to be carried by it, miracles can be performed with it, but it cannot be expressed in words and taught. (Hesse, 1922 p. 66)

In keeping with the genre of a dissertation, my story will end with my learning and the implications of that learning. What I learned is particular in nature and specific to my year of mindfulness work with students. In earlier chapters, I tried to expand the base of the story some by giving you an idea of how mindfulness acted in the words and worlds of my students, by giving their stories to you alongside and within mine. In this chapter, again, I engage the stories of others from *Siddhartha* (Hesse, 1922) and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Pirsig, 1978), in order to give context to my thoughts. I begin with a very short story about John Dewey (1910) and me to illuminate and illustrate my learning.

In 1910, John Dewey wrote some words I have long lauded as Truth: “This process is called reflective thought; it alone is truly educative in value” (Dewey, 1910, p. 3). I built my own thinking off of that sentence and my classroom practices grew around

it, every year radiating that statement further and further outward like the annual growth rings of an old oak. Like the tree, each year's rings provided more balance and stability and less and less flexibility. I found myself holding tightly to that teaching, and realizing that I was living into a certainty. I was perceiving that *the* way for us to translate our experience into learning and then into action required reflective thought. Through this study, I found greater success and freedom as a learner and teacher when I held Dewey's (1910) words a little differently than I used to hold them.

I still agree that if we are to consider education as a language-based or thought-based process only, then his statement still holds: Reflecting as he describes it, putting experience into words or thoughts, is vital. For me, though, somewhere along the way, I saw that for as much as I became educated by the words and thinking I have used to make sense of experience, I become just as educated by simply being aware within the experience. When I engaged my awareness, or the name I give to the place or time before thinking, I found intelligence in my body, more wisdom in my choices, and the space for peace and compassion within times of chaos. Each of these qualities that developed in me spawned others of similar flavor, and all of it happened by engaging awareness and not actively engaging thinking. When I invited my students to do the same, they narrated their thoughts in similar ways to mine: characterizing mindfulness as calming and transformative. They saw awareness as grounded in emotion and focused on body and breath. They named it a space to dwell, make choices, develop relationships, and see in new ways. Reflection helped us name these things, but we found ourselves *using* our learning long before we *named* it. This order of operations: *use* before *naming* had me wondering if I had missed something central about reflection and learning.

Where I held certitude around Dewey's (1910) words before, I now wonder if reflection may not be the lone educative form of thinking. As I backed away from considering language-based reflection as the *only* educative form of thought, I began considering what could count as educative and I found myself acting differently in my classroom and in the world. I use the term *mindful inquiry* in this chapter to describe a shift toward a deeper and fuller understanding of, and engagement of, inquiry than I have known or used prior to this study. In this chapter, I characterize that process of *mindful inquiry* by exploring some of the ways I shifted my thinking toward valuing experience first, learning to receive by listening openly, and placing my attention differently. Finally, I explore ways I intend to shift my action in the future, by noting the sensible effects of this study in mindfulness.

Valuing Experience First

In light of my philosophical system of beliefs rooted in Pragmatic thought, this study was a springboard for me to consider nuancing the ways in which I am understanding the concept of *experience*. I am seeing now that I considered experience foundational before, but since my engagement with this study, I am inspired to explore more about the way that experience itself plays out in life and learning. Here I consider four aspects of experience: (1) Finding educative potential everywhere; (2) Exploring what is underneath words; (3) Placing reflection well; and 4) Repositioning ideas of practice, process and product.

Finding educative potential everywhere.

“Every stone was a teacher and every breeze a language” (Wood, 2003).

I have a favorite children's picture book called *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* (Wood, 2003). There are a lot of people who have favorite stories that are great tales of specific and particular human experience, similar to the things I have lauded throughout the last chapter. Children's picture books are often really good for that kind of particularization of experience. My favorite children's picture book is not like that. My favorite one is less the story of a person and more the story of a time. It feels like a story that has and can happen anywhere, to anyone and in fact it happens everywhere, to everyone at a given point in time. Douglas Wood and Jon J. Muth (2003) write and illustrate the fable of a time when nature was more of a main character and less of a setting, where "every stone was a teacher and every breeze a language," the animals lived in harmony with one another, the humans seemed peaceful, and nature was at rest holding it all, until one day... A thing called a truth falls from the sky (p. 2).

In this story world, truths are physical things. They are golden, and they can be held. The truth that appears in this world is one that the animals recognize as broken, cut in half, one-sided, not whole. Something was missing. The humans who found it could not see the one-sided nature of this truth, and they held it up as The Truth. They worshipped it, used it to acquire and assert power, and in the mind of a little human girl, this created doubt. She worried about the conflict, and decided to take a journey, to seek wisdom that might settle the doubt within her. She wondered what might stop the fighting. On her journey, she meets Old Turtle, the wise, sage-like character who shares with her the other half of the truth that the humans are holding onto so tightly. Through the book, the readers are unaware of what the specific content of the truths are until the

end when they are revealed. The first half read, “You are loved,” and the second half read, “so are they.”

Until studying mindfulness, the idea that wisdom is found within each stone was one I thought I agreed with but I did not connect that to a method for seeking wisdom. When the author of *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* (Wood, 2003) writes about stones as teachers, I now interpret it to be a way to help the reader see the importance and beauty in the raw, natural world around her. In similar fashion to the way that the book unfolds, I see that I have often overlooked the wisdom found in raw experience. It is this overlooked value that causes me to wonder if this is where I depart from Dewey (1910). In Wood’s (2003) book, the awareness of the characters who are not human, who were not trying to make sense of the truth, determining how it related to themselves, could see the truth for what it was -- one sided. It wasn’t that the truth itself was bad or wrong, it was just incomplete. However, sometimes, when I have jumped to reflect upon my experience I find that I miss parts of the experience that I would have wanted to include. The way that I found myself missing experience makes sense to me now, especially given all my work in story. When I reflect, I will often tell a story about what just happened, working like Rosen (1985/2017) discussed to “invent, yes, invent, beginnings and ends, for out there are no such things” (Kindle Location 8868). In deciding where the endings stop and beginnings start, I am editing experience. However, in the space of awareness, when I abide in mindfulness, I do not have to put words to experience, and I now see benefit from simply being within experience.

I distinguish this from the conscious reflection on experience that Dewey (1910) gave us years ago. Yes, reflection is still educative, but I have trouble considering it the

only educative form of thinking if I am defining educative as what supports learning and defining learning as the process through which we grow and make different choices than we made in the past.

In my work on mindfulness with students, there was far too much change in some of our own choices while we were in the midst of mindfulness that seemed to slip under the radar of consciousness for me to ignore the value of simply experiencing. It was as though we stumbled upon our thought and choice processes backwards sometimes. We noticed behavioral changes in ourselves and only then questioned why.

What I'm describing reminds me of an experience I had driving to and from my student teaching practicum. At the time, road construction teams rerouted the roads to the school where I taught. Several days in a row, the lanes and even the turns changed from the time I came to school to the time that I left for home. Each time I encountered a new pathway, it startled me and to know where I was, I had to think about how far I had come on the route because landmarks along the way now felt different. I realized I had made sense of them in relation to one another and my placement on the road, not as individual or isolated entities. I had to bring my navigation process to consciousness in order to get home or to get to school.

In the classroom and after-school, our discussions gave us the opportunity to talk about changes, but what mattered was not the talk but the changes from our well-trodden pathways of choice to those choices that were unfamiliar to us. Those are the ones that caught our attention. Stephen and I talked about these kinds of changes in his second interview. He and I discussed how as he talked it was occurring to him that things were different, not that he had made them different, but through practice they were different.

Stephen: Sometimes I just go totally blank. Like right now, it's just really getting to me

Emily: What's getting to you?

Stephen: I practiced a lot during the school year and I am getting better and better.

He was also the student who approached me several times throughout the course of the year, stunned that he had breathed, without thinking about it first, to get calm in situations where he had simply barreled through earlier. These types of experiences remind me that the reflection part is important to bring the work we do to a conscious language level, but that there exists a subtlety and subconscious aspect of learning and its connection to experience that I can no longer ignore as a teacher because of the changes I have seen in myself and my students.

These experiences imply to me that there are layers of understanding that surpass or lie beneath consciousness that mindfulness work can reach. I intend to spend more time considering the effects that mindfulness practices seem to have on our subconscious spaces in the service of better accessing conscious choice.

Exploring what is underneath words: Applications to Pragmatic thought.

The words are not good for the secret meaning, everything always becomes a bit different, as soon as it is put into words, gets distorted a bit, a bit silly—yes, and this is also very good, and I like it a lot, I also very much agree with this, that what is one man's treasure and wisdom always sounds like foolishness to another person...I know it, Govinda. And behold, with this we are right in the middle of the thicket of opinions, in the dispute about words. For I cannot deny, my words of love are in a contradiction, a seeming contradiction with Gotama's words. For

this very reason, I distrust in words so much, for I know, this contradiction is a deception. (Hesse, 1922, p. 67-69)

At this point in the story, Govinda, Siddhartha's cousin and old friend are discussing what Siddhartha has learned on his life journey and they are contrasting it with what Govinda has learned while studying with the Buddha. I mentioned in the last section of Chapter 4 that Govinda was seeking solace in the conscious retelling of experience. Govinda was expecting that if he followed the Buddha's teachings, word for word, that he would find enlightenment. He was hoping to borrow or worse, to steal, wisdom without experience.

We seek, at my school, to institutionalize a philosophy of inquiry as the base for learning into an educational system designed for direct instruction. We seek to insert processes of personal experience-based inquiry into an educational system built for the stealing of others' wisdom. Humankind believes that when we expect learning to result from anything other than true inquiry, we are expecting the impossible. I think we need to use another word besides learning to denote the result of listening to another's reflection on experience or the restating of information in direct instruction.

Given the subconscious space that I am now exploring within mindfulness practice, I wonder if in my learning life and teaching experience, I need to begin the troubling of the idea of "learning from" others. I feel comfortable asserting that we can be inspired by others to try or explore, but just as I cautioned you in the first paragraph of this chapter about taking my words as learning that you can just automatically apply to your situations, I wonder about the authenticity of anything we call learning that wasn't experienced directly. However, it is vital to keep the conversations going we have about

our lived experiences and resultant learning in the classroom, with people who live like we do, and more importantly with people who do not live like we do, in order that the catalytic doubt is constantly in play. However, I see it as important now to distinguish between that doubt that spurs inquiry and acceptance of another's learning as our own or as something that could stand for our own.

Placing reflection carefully in context of how we fixate belief. My realization that the awareness of an experience itself is an educative process is helpful to my understanding Peirce's theories of fixating belief and triadic construction. Peirce (1878/1955) outlined four ways to fixate belief: a priori, authority, tenacity, and the scientific method which I equate to inquiry. If we simply take someone else's words of reflection as our belief, we are ascribing to authority as a way to fixate our belief. However, if we listen to the reflection of another, consider it, and within us doubt arises, we can use the reflection and the resulting doubt as fodder for inquiry. Prior to this project, I saw reflection as a necessary piece in Pierce's (1877) Scientific Inquiry, as outlined by Dewey (1913). It was the piece within an inquiry where the experience was processed into learning. Now, I see reflection as vital in both places, at the beginning of the Scientific Method and at the end in order to articulate what we have experienced in light of what we knew before.

Repositioning ideas of practice, process, & product. My understanding of experience as the teacher, just by itself, implies that developing a space, temporally and physically for actually living the practices of mindfulness or writing is an important factor. If that practice is truly central in our minds, then teachers already do this work when we engage workshop structures in the classroom. However, often the process and

the product are the things we consider most within a workshop, not the practice underneath. I think the distinction among the three (practice, process, and product) is critical to understand.

I consider that, for example, I spend a lot of my time at a local art studio. I paint pictures there sometimes. In that space, practice is the act of painting, process is the technique used to create the product which is the painting itself. I am placing much more value now on the act of practice. There are days when I need to find an internal expansion of space, and I use the practice of painting to access it. Through that expansion of space, I can then approach the rest of life from a much more mindful place. I increase my capacity to make conscious choices as a painter and human being simply by practicing. Process and product also matter when I paint. I increase my knowledge of the process of painting by consciously considering the process aspects of this work (e.g., how I engage the brush with the paint to create an effect). I have a tangible result of my work that I can reflect upon or use as a snapshot of where I am as a painter in time. However, those two things are beyond the layer of practice that affects my being or my subconscious actions. This is of value for me to consider as a teacher because I have the opportunity to bring the effects and import of practice itself to bear on our work in any curricular structure. To start this work in mindfulness practice, my students and I spent 10 minutes practicing mindful attention to an activity at the beginning of every day.

My work in mindfulness helped me uncover the value in the things behind the words and thoughts - the practice behind the process and the product. This structure seems to map and mirror well onto Peircian triadic construction. The First, being practice itself, the Second being the process that brings to bear the action of the practice, and then

the product as the Third or what is ultimately constructed in the act of the three. Seeing these connections between triadic construction and the practice, process, and product structures helped me equally to connect mindfulness work to learning, bringing me back to the ways we find ourselves acting differently without any conscious awareness.

When we do the work that Stephen did earlier in noticing the difference between our behaviors now and our behaviors in the past, we can then uncover the matrix of both triads and actively engage in what Britney termed a “trustful” choice. I trust myself more as a result of mindfulness practice, and I believe that the reason I can trust myself is that I see how mindfulness work does all three.

Mindfulness helps me to actively engage the conscious and the subconscious aspects of any activity: practice, process, and product, and in doing so, I find myself in a flow of being where I no longer think it necessary to fight or resist events around me simply because of discomfort or disappointment. I can regard all that happens as a part of my practice, therefore, all that happens has value to me in life process and products. In the classroom, when I respond to unexpected things that happen, I convey to my students that all could be of value and that carefully considering what is happening matters. This way of responding to the unexpected then provides them further fodder for inquiry into their own processes.

Learning to Receive Expressions of Experience: Listening Openly

As a product of honoring experience, listening becomes a vital piece of that process and helped my students and me to see possibilities in ways that we had not seen before. For instance, often when students were frustrated with a friend or sibling, they mentioned stepping away to take a minute to breathe. This gave them the perspective to

see different things they might do or say instead of reacting immediately to the anger or frustration they were currently experiencing. These possibilities for action that we generated and allowed room for in our minds through using mindfulness practice often gave us options in tricky situations that we had yet to acknowledge. In the section above, I outlined the value of experience for experience's sake. However, I do not mean to suggest that words and other expressions of experience have no place. After conducting this study, I am convinced even more than I was before that to demonstrate the value of experience in our lives we must learn how to receive or listen well in ways that allow us to be a part of those experiences without fighting against them. In this section, I posit that for any given inquiry: (1) accessing the struggles around us to spur listening, (2) listening into the space before we seek to understand or judge, and (3) pausing in that space before we make a conscious choice about how to understand or judge all affect *how* we honor and respond to experience and the expressions of it. As one crucially important example below, I include the ways in which we (4) listen to the expressions and reflections of the experiences of others.

Accessing struggle to spur listening. In *Siddhartha*, Hesse (1922) provides us the journey that led to Siddhartha's learning and a conclusion that recounts all that learning. In the story, Siddhartha has personally experienced the struggle of his son running away after months of troublesome interactions between the two of them. Siddhartha's incident comes as a result of this inner turmoil and external quest for resolution. After studying the ways that my kids narrate their experiences as mindfulness practitioners, I came to realize through the struggle, challenge, sorrow, and doubt we have the opportunity to inquire, to learn.

In the following passage from *Siddhartha*, the narrator describes what happens as he stops trying to figure out his predicament and listens. He hears the river but experiences not a naming of the river, but a more subtle noticing. Though it is put into words because it is being narrated, I do not interpret *Siddhartha* to be naming what he hears. He simply listens. He listens to the point that differentiating or putting boundaries around the thoughts eventually becomes useless as all the experiences run together. At this point in the story, *Siddhartha* is living with an old riverboat ferryman named Vasudeva. Hesse (1922) wrote:

In this hour, *Siddhartha* stopped fighting his fate, stopped suffering. On his face flourished the cheerfulness of a knowledge, which is no longer opposed by any will, which knows perfection, which is in agreement with the flow of events, with the current of life, full of sympathy for the pain of others, full of sympathy for the pleasure of others, devoted to the flow, belonging to the oneness (Hesse, 1922, p. 62-64).

When *Siddhartha* stopped fighting, he found himself already unstuck. He did not need to change his circumstances, he needed to change how he approached them. I found the same. When I allowed my struggles to guide me into a space where I could listen, I often realized that I needed not change my position, just my perspective. In the times when my students mentioned getting angry with a sibling or stressed out at school, their responses reminded me that even simply listening to the breath could bring them back to a place where they could more fully experience a situation without the stuckness of frustration or sadness.

Listening into the space before we seek to name, understand, or judge. Non-judgement is itself a concept in mindfulness philosophy. To make non-judgement more clear, I will contrast it with its opposite: judgement. The idea of judgement in colloquial talk where I am from has connotations of negativity. So, my discussion of non-judgement will start there. When I talk about judgement alone, I do not mean labeling in a negative way. I mean judgement in any sense of labeling or naming. I addressed non-judgement in a sense in Chapter 4, Section 5, when I wrote about Fronsdal's (2013) talk about "bummers." In that section, I discussed how as situations happen, we make sense of them and how with mindful awareness we can have a choice as to how to story those to ourselves and others, having an impact on exactly what of a given situation we hold within us. Here, I'm talking about pausing in that space just before we story, label, or name. I see non-judgement as that place in between the event and its name. The concept appears more clear to me in the context of an analogy. I liken non-judgement to listening and judgement to speaking. Within this analogy, non-judgement is the more receptive of the two actions and judgement the more active of the two actions.

Often we judge certain situations immediately as a problem that we need to avoid or solve. When we do that, we lose the opportunities for acknowledging the value in simply practicing something, just doing the thing we are doing, and we miss possibilities to learn or even enjoy a given experience. What it means for me, in my work with children, is that I invoke the non-judgement piece of Kabat-Zinn's (2011) definition of mindfulness. I intend to be encouraging my students to receptively experience something for longer for its own sake before taking on the active piece of naming it and making sense of it -- even those situations that might be considered a struggle.

It is a part of the human experience that we find ourselves in situations that could qualify as what Gil called a “bummer” in my section on Awareness. It is a part of the students’ experience that they find themselves in situations that could be seen as uncomfortable or troublesome, necessitated by the challenges that learning engagements present and by the community structures of classrooms and schools. It is vital to me that I work in my teaching life at the level of response to these experiences. I believe my work encouraging my students is a crystallization of Kabat-Zinn’s (2011) non-judgement. I interpret his ideas of non-judgement to be more subtle than judging things harshly. I see that non-judgement in my life means simply not jumping to tell a story about or even name an event without pausing in the space beneath the words first. It isn’t that we never name what we notice, but I find it important now to spend enough time in the noticing of experience that we can consciously and intentionally make the decision about how we will story an experience to ourselves or name a certain aspect of experience.

Pausing in the space before naming, understanding or judging. Supporting students in practicing paying attention to how we are responding to experience matters most at a very initial level, the level of that pause. If I can help my kids and demonstrate through my own practice noticing the moment I find myself responding, I can then take on the task of naming it and utilizing it consciously for making a choice within a potentially tough situation. The applications for this work at the initial response level are numerous and varied and allow me options for planning curriculum that provide students time to observe their outer experience and their inner experience, potentially without the expectation of naming in reflection with others every single time. It may be worth the emphasis on pausing before we make a judgment call about a given experience, that I

take the time with my children to physically stop the motion in the classroom and direct their attention inward through some guided talk when we encounter potential for conflict, frustration, or challenge. Often, after practicing the physical pause in the classroom In doing so, I seek to invite students to become comfortable in a space of not doing, non-judgement, and receptive listening before we make a choice. How much more able to make productive choices or achieve our goals would we be, if we paused before we even named a situation? How much more possibility is there for personal growth when we can notice our habits before we step into their well-worn paths.

However, shared reflection of others as the generator of doubt within the larger scheme of fixating belief is a subtle difference from how I had seen it before, but helpful in engaging it toward conscious choices for myself and my students.

Deeply listening to others' reflections. When I place shared reflections on experience as the foundation for doubt and therefore the catalyst for inquiry, I have to re-emphasize the importance of listening with my students and anyone else who learns alongside me: colleagues, friends, and even my own family members. I now see listening as the vital first step in using others' words well in my own learning and encouraging that to happen in my students' learning as well. When I listen deeply, I provide myself the opportunity to be aware in a dual way: first to the speaker's words, gestures, and demeanor and second to my own responses to those offered words. When my students talked about their experiences with others, this kind of listening - where they were aware of what they felt as they heard another person - is what changed their relationships with one another.

When Ryan told the story of how she could not know what it felt like to experience what she was doing to Stephen in their friendship, she had just had a conversation with him where he said that he thought she was acting carelessly because she did not understand how he felt. When she reflected on her feelings, she realized she had resisted listening to Stephen's experience, and offered him an apology. She subsequently did the same thing with other students in similar situations. What I think she sees (because it is also what I have seen) is that deeply listening is hard. It creates situations where I have to handle the often negative tsunamis of emotions in ways that keep me open and vulnerable to what someone else said has happened, even when I feel that I'm being blamed for what I did not intend. Considering what it will take for us to have greater societal conversations about our social ills, I believe that our best hope is to listen to one another carefully, notice how those words are falling on our emotions, consider what our goals are (humanizing, respect, etc.), and respond in each moment from a place of conscious awareness rooted in those goals. This type of listening and response is the crux of productively discussing difficult topics in the classroom, as well.

The pull to generate and stoke a sense of self-awareness in listening when difficult topics arise is central to being able to navigate a difficult social space without reacting from guilt, blame, worry, frustration, hurt, or any other of the myriad emotions we hold when discussing divisive social issues. If we are to do the work that Jane Addams talked about in truly living out the ways that antagonism is unnecessary (Menand, 2001), then we must pause before responding and make a conscious choice each time we have the opportunity to discuss or take action on one of these issues. Otherwise we become caught in potentially uncomfortable feelings, reiterating over and

over to ourselves and those around us the angst of a conflict, but never taking responsibility for the roles we can play in making the different choices that are necessary in changing the landscape of injustice and societal problems.

Placing Attention Differently

When we listen receptively, we are listening with the eventual goal of a response, but not the immediate goal of a response. Listening receptively helps us to, again, find a space for pause not just before we act, but even before we set our intention. Through this study, I find that that kind of listening requires a certain approach that I had not even really considered as a part of a process of mindful inquiry before. The approach involves the decision to care about what we are doing and listening to, whether we feel like it or not. The approach involves deciding to suspend the decision that we understand in a way that demonstrates love first and that space opened by attention that is full of care makes room for the learning that follows to be more full. I now believe that an approach to understanding that will set the foundation for mindful inquiry requires: (1) understanding a relationship between love and meaning, (2) valuing letting go of our attachments to what we used to believe, and (3) intentionally accessing those times when we realize we know something by heart.

Love and meaning.

‘This too,’ spoke Siddhartha, ‘I do not care very much about. Let the things be illusions or not, after all I would then also be an illusion, and thus they are always like me. This is what makes them so dear and worthy of veneration for me: they are like me. Therefore, I can love them. And this is now a teaching you will laugh about: love, oh Govinda, seems to me to be the most important thing of all. To

thoroughly understand the world, to explain it, to despise it, may be the thing great thinkers do. But I'm only interested in being able to love the world, not to despise it, not to hate it and me, to be able to look upon it and me and all beings with love and admiration and great respect.' (Hesse, 1922, p. 68)

Running the risk of appearing anti-scientific, unempirical, or even anti-inquiry, I seek to extend the idea of engaging non-judgement by including this piece of Siddhartha. Here Siddhartha was making a distinction between understanding or making meaning of something and loving it. I resonated with this piece when I read it because of the ways that throughout my life, I have worked to understand the world in ways that have distanced me from it and atomized it into tiny bits. I define love as a state of being characterized by appreciation for a thing, person, or phenomenon that lives beyond the bounds of understanding or judgement. Love is self-sufficient and self-sustaining and is not contingent on any certain conditions or characteristics. When I consider non-judgement, I have been connecting it to the idea of not making a determination of any sort. I have seen and written about non-judgement as the state of suspending belief. but after working on this project, I am seeing the way that being colloquially non-judgmental or loving are also connected to the non-judgement piece that is central to my definition of mindfulness.

To love things first in a learning environment means pausing to appreciate the existence of something before seeking to understand it. Logistically, if we are studying a certain period in history, we might listen to the music or other media of that time period simply to appreciate it. In engaging my own inquiry into mindfulness with students, I found a space, and my students seemed to find spaces where it benefitted them to simply

experience themselves and experience the world for the sake of experience. The number of students who cite stopping whatever their initial reaction was to just take a breath, implied to me that the pause was significant. A shift in my own instruction going forward may be that I direct my students' attention more heavily to their senses and how their bodies are responding in any situation: learning, friendship, family, recess, or otherwise. In bringing them to this level, I believe they can actually engage Peirce's (1898) sensible effects by employing directly the senses that those effects would bring to bear as a means for interacting with the world.

However, what loving also means to me is that I can let go of the drive to know or the need to be caught in a web of constant attainment of knowledge. I will not attempt to completely erase my curiosity, as that seems implausible. I will still seek understanding, but what I will not do is allow the drive to know or any impulse to be in control of my decision making. For me in learning environments, this means that my sense of urgency expected in my actions for purveying curriculum will be honed and more carefully directed -- most probably directed toward how my students are viewing, articulating, and making their own conscious choices.

This honing and release of making sense of every experience immediately may also shift the ways that I see my work in helping students navigate difficult political or social situations. What might happen if we paused before judging situations of conflict on a global or local scale? Could we find multiple ways to story some of those scenarios that we hear about on the news or on the playground after pausing? Could we find more possibility for action toward freedom for all through multiple stories? What if when we saw something on the news or heard about a situation on the playground, we engaged our

listening, like Siddhartha did, and were simply allowing ourselves to experience a given news story as only one way of an infinite number of ways of perceiving and presenting that situation?

Demonstrating love: How we hold things matters. We live in a time when I often have to stop the news program we watch as a classroom because students begin yelling at the screen, booing or cheering, when footage of certain political figures appears on the screen. When stopped and encouraged to discuss why they are making those noises, my students typically provide well-supported reasoning for their judgements that spurred the cheers or boos. Though they may be seeking justice or fairness with their outbursts, both noble causes, just as we uncovered in paying attention to practice, the how matters. How they seek justice and how they see justice matters to how they respond to the situations of injustice in their worlds. It is in the pause, the space between noticing and naming that we have the chance to choose what we do. To change the world, we cannot continue walking the same ruts of habitual behavior we always have. As obvious and pointless as it may seem to say, we have to change something. We have to do something differently. What if what we did differently was to do what Siddhartha learned, to love above all things? What if we tried to approach all situations, even those that had obvious heroes and villains with love for every stakeholder? What if what we did was to intentionally demonstrate care or seek connection as the foundation to understanding difference between those stakeholders?

With my work as a mindfulness practitioner and teacher, I find that when I practice in the ways that I practiced with my kids this year: honing my focus, engaging

compassion for those around us, breathing intentionally, and discussing my experience when it is appropriate, I have more space in my life to love first and understand second.

When I place things in this order, I understand with a different quality of attention and a different integrity of action. When I love first, I can be open to a mode of understanding that causes my empathic connection to be the way I make sense of something as opposed to my making sense of something by distancing myself from it and splitting it into its atoms. When I love first, I can act from a place within that integrates my desire to care about the world around me and my understandings of the world around me, intentionally. When I love first, I find myself in a better position to trust the way life unfolds and to act in ways that I can use as supportive foundation for my next decisions.

Letting go to find the flow. White-water rafting guides harp on the rule of keeping your feet up if you fall out of the raft. In doing so, you prevent your legs from catching on rocks or getting stuck on the riverbed so that you simply follow the flow of the river. In not fighting the flow or trying to control the movement, the river supports your floating and you get some help keeping your head above water. It's a win-win. The same can be applied to life and learning. Our river of experience never stops. Attempts to control often leave us bruised and water logged.

Carrying things until they no longer serve. In my inquiry into mindfulness with my students, I found that I have a tendency to hold tightly to thoughts, philosophies, or what I have learned. To use the metaphor above, I really want to put my feet down and stand up in the river to feel a sense of control, to feel like I am on solid ground again. I used these thoughts that I hold tightly as a lens and system of control for what I see when

I seek to understand. In effect, these teachings were the guides or parameters controlling what I saw and how I understood.

However, through this project, I have a different view on teachings. There are stories within Indian philosophy about teachings being like a snake, even ones about mindfulness, and that holding them too tightly or in the wrong way will cause problems. These stories reference people who do not hold teachings with discernment being at risk of suffering and long-term harm to themselves or others. As I learned through taking a class in college with Rudy Mancke, South Carolina's naturalist, when you hold a snake, it is helpful to hold it just below the head, being in control of the snake's locus of motion. If you grasp a snake by the tail or body, you run the risk of it snapping back and biting you. I see this story as saying we, as practitioners must make decisions about the uses of teachings. The teachings are meant to be used by practitioners in their lives, but not held onto when they are no longer serving the practitioner. This story connects to the simile of the raft where mindfulness teachers describe building a raft and using it to cross a body of water while on a journey, but implore their students as to whether or not the raft should be used after that. The answer they often reach in discussion is that the raft is helpful in a context involving crossing a body of water, but it is burdensome in other dry-land contexts (Access to Insight, MN 22). So it is, with mindfulness teachings or any other philosophical understanding, they exist expressly for their use in practice, and now, I seek to position them in the same way in mine. This willingness to let go when appropriate is in step with Pragmatism as well, if I am to define things by their sensible effects, it stands to reason that I would find their worth in the same way. If in use, these teachings are

effective, then they are valuable to me. If in use, these teachings cause harm or seemingly pointless perseveration, I can release them.

Engaging love first and being in agreement with the flow, I have more room for simply being mentally and emotionally available with my experience, with my students, with myself, and with the present moment. Approaching life and learning in this way, I leave myself available to use the discernment necessary to appropriately bring to bear what I have learned. Holding tightly to ideas and teachings keeps me stuck, unable to do much more than persevere on and recycle through what I already know. I have found that what serves me best is to listen, whether it be to my patterns, thought processes, nature, or other people. Just as Siddhartha did, when I listen, I hear. When I look, I see. When I savor, I taste. Situating my experience in my senses and my body allows me to be in the present moment and doing so manifests my trust for this flow of experience. When I trust this flow, all is and all is possible, all at once. Time no longer binds me, because like every other framework for understanding this flow, time is just another story in which we construct a beginning and an ending. When I trust this flow, I no longer feel the need to exert a white-knuckle hold on philosophies, ideas, or ways of being.

I hope to convey to my students that in loving first, understanding second, and in consciously choosing to be in agreement with the flow of events, they can open up to experience and they can consciously story expansive understandings of themselves in a world full of possibility. To get there, though, I see the need for a shift in some of our traditional manifestations of life in a classroom. I'm not sure yet exactly what those shifts look like for me, but I do wonder: if we placed emphasis on noticing, pause before naming, engaged our internal and bodily experiences more, and reflected less with our

language and more with our bodies, what could that do to classroom experience and interaction?

Accessing Quality: When we know by heart. We could story this shift, about which I am wondering, to be a matter of accessing presently hidden spaces of learning and experience. Often at the Center for Inquiry, we encourage our students to “speak from the heart.” I wonder if we would uncover even more if we took that process into our inquiries, to consider what it means to know something by heart. Knowing something by heart helps us to reconnect emotion to our learning intentionally in ways that help us to employ that emotion or awareness of something without those senses and emotions driving our action in reckless ways. Our language-based interactions and understandings of the world provide us access to certain aspects of experience, most specifically the ones we can name. However, after this project, the aspects that exist prior to their naming or even fully outside of naming, are of more value to me than ever before and are the things I believe emotion and our awareness help us to engage.

Noting the Sensible Effects of This Work in Mindfulness

Writing about that moment before we express, reflect, or put something into words is difficult. Poets may seek to do that work. Artists may seek to do that work. Fiction writers may seek to do that work. Typically, researchers or academics do not. However, Phaedrus, one of Pirsig’s (1978) characters in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* attempted what I see as the same work I seek to do in writing about those times we know by heart as he began to realize that the implication of the idea of Quality in writing was something he could actually work with in class with his students. One way I see to get through the difficulty of expressing the inexpressible involves remembering

something that Peirce (1877/1955) uncovered for us long ago: when we seek to consider anything, the effects that occur as a result of our interaction with that thing, functionally become our understanding of that thing. Throughout this chapter, I wrote about ways that my *thinking* shifted around learning and life in a classroom, with those thought shifts being the major effects of my interaction with this study. To conclude, I describe three final effects that characterize my further *action* from this study including: (1) Freedom, (2) Cultural awareness and relevance, and (3) Connection.

Freedom: Living into possibilities beyond binaries. Pirsig's (1978) story of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* starts as a father and son venture out with some friends on a motorcycle tour across the country. Throughout the trip, the father who serves as our main character and narrator, gives a Chautauqua, a thoughtful and philosophically flavored talk on the nature of things and reality. The story of the trip runs parallel to the philosophy talk. As time goes by, something interesting begins to happen within the main character. He feels a ghost begin to creep into his ways of being. As the story unfolds, what we come to find is that this ghost is a former self of the narrator, named Phaedrus. This alone brings to bear questions of mental health and what it means to think outside of conventionally accepted norms. At a certain point in the story, the narrator tells us of an event in Phaedrus' life where he was a college professor teaching writing. He hears colleagues talk about making sure to teach his students about Quality in writing, to make sure their writing is good. He isn't sure what this means or how to define it, but he starts an inquiry for himself in which he and his students examine whether or not people in general understand what good writing is without it being taught. They read pieces of writing together, score them, and undoubtedly agree on what makes a

piece of writing good. He begins to develop a theory that without definition and without explanation, there exists an awareness of Quality, the goodness in things. It effectively blows his mind. He becomes engrossed in the pursuit of understanding it, but makes the fatal error of attempting to do so within the academy.

Taking a break from the story for a minute, I can empathize with Phaedrus in my inquiry into mindfulness. I realized at some point along the way that I was reluctant to write or even think about the project. I can look back at my reflection journal and see when this stuckness happened because I lost a considerable amount of steam and momentum in my processing. The realization I had was that I was learning something important, but I could not name it. And it was less a matter of my inability to find words, and more a matter of there not necessarily being any words to describe the experiences my students and I were having. I felt stuck again between the rational, language-based university and the raw, visceral experiences of mindfulness.

Back to the story: Phaedrus spends considerable amounts of time trying then to define what he has decided is an undefinable set of aggregates that has similar aspects to a concept, but is not necessarily a concept. In doing so, he uncovers, as he has throughout the book, the difference between the Classic (rational) and Romantic (aesthetic) Schools of Thought. What he sees now is that Quality is the point between the two; the point at which they cleave. There is some understanding of Quality in each realm but depending on which realm we use as a lens, we see Quality differently. Following this thread of endless non-definition in an academic world that requires definition of its inhabitants ended Phaedrus. However, in looking back, the narrator sees a possibility, which I intend

to be the way that I approach my uncovering of this undefinable space of mindfulness.

Pirsig (1978) writes:

Classical, square understanding is concerned with the piles of sand and the nature of the grains and the basis for sorting and interrelating them. Phaedrus' refusal to define Quality, in terms of this analogy, was an attempt to break the grip of the classical sand-sifting mode of understanding and find a point of common understanding between the classic and romantic worlds. Quality, the cleavage term between hip and square, seemed to be it. Both worlds used the term. Both knew what it was. It was just that the romantic left it alone and appreciated it for what it was and the classic tried to turn it into a set of intellectual building blocks for other purposes. Now, with the definition blocked, the classic mind was forced to view Quality as the romantic did, undistorted by thought structures.

I'm making a big thing out of all this, these classical-romantic differences, but Phaedrus didn't. He wasn't really interested in any kind of fusion of differences between these two worlds. He was after something else—his ghost. In the pursuit of this ghost he went on to wider meanings of Quality which drew him further and further to his end.

I differ from him in that I have no intention of going on to that end. He just passed through this territory and opened it up. I intend to stay and cultivate it and see if I can get something to grow. I think that the referent of a term that can split a world into hip and square, classic and romantic, technological and humanistic, is an entity that can unite a world already split along these lines into one. A real understanding of Quality doesn't just serve the System, or even beat it

or even escape it. A real understanding of Quality captures the System, tames it, and puts it to work for one's own personal use, while leaving one completely free to fulfill his inner destiny. (pp. 199-200)

I too seek unity. I seek unity of worlds that by their basic and fundamental natures appear different and in conflict, but like Jane Addams (in Menand, 2001) noted, are simply a concept in its growth. We live in a world too clouded by assumed conflict that to argue within or engage the assumption leaves us unable to see much farther than our identity insulation of retold self-stories. However, to approach life from a stance of present moment awareness and love or compassion for all provides for a kind of freedom. This is a freedom that gives us the chance to see the world as a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), not simply with the opportunity of connection, but with already existing infinite connections that are there for the taking. This is an understanding of an already established unity between all beings that instead of creating, we simply make the choice to access - to acknowledge on a daily basis that truth that Muir (1911) uncovered in the woods: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe" (p. 154). That universal rhizomatic web is the larger network to which my story of mindfulness helps me connect.

I seek a unity in my work in the classroom, that "captures the System, tames it, and puts it to work" (Pirsig, 1978, p. 200) for the personal use of my students and myself in order to fulfill our own inner destinies. In each of us fulfilling our own inner potentials, I believe we have the capacity to pause in situations of greatest apparent conflict in our global and local spaces and make a conscious choice. Uncovering the indescribable and undefinable in this project, I find a freedom to choose and to more clearly see the choice

at hand. It is that work that will change a nation, institutional oppression, and our world. Yes, that's a bold statement, and I stand by it. We must find a way to move past unconscious systemic talk and action toward seeing the world as it can be: one where we listen carefully to what is, we pause to consider what can be, and then we act to make it so.

In my work on this project, I think I found a figurative, emotional and mental, center line that my friend and I laughed about existing when we took that kayak trip a few years ago. Accessing that metaphor of a center line from earlier again, in the literal sense, attending to this line keeps the kayak from flipping over. It is in that place of balance that paddling the boat does more than turn it from side to side. When balanced, we can propel the boat forward. In the figurative sense, for me, this line keeps me from flipping like philosophical coins and swinging like ideological pendulums. When I find the place of center within myself in a given situation, I can make a conscious choice. I can propel my situation forward. As a society, it is vital that we do the work of finding a balance point.

Mindfulness allows us to be within the doing. Language gives us a polaroid type snapshot of the doing, and that we can hold on to. There is absolutely a place for documentation. We like things we can hold. But this project invites me to do more than hold my learning, claim it, own it. It invites me to live the learning alongside the others who live it as well. There are reasons that, within these ancient traditions, students study closely in apprentice-like relationships. Seeing a practice lived and living it in good companionship is the deepest learning.

I seek to dig beneath the words now because words are effectively, and pragmatically, tertiary to experience, the words that represent the concepts themselves are the Peircian Third. My mindfulness practice allows me to feel for a center line, physically like in the kayak, mentally like when I have a difficult decision to make, or emotionally like when I have to listen to a friend tell me something I do not want to hear. Feeling for that center line instead of seeking directions from someone else of how to find it places the responsibility on my shoulders to determine how I respond to how I feel. My mindfulness practice supports my being in an experience without having to spontaneously document it or immediately react to it. In that pause or gap, I can find the choice. There is value in being. The value can itself then be documented, and I hope that I have done that work in this paper. However, it is the doing and being where I intend to dwell more now. I seek to support the same in my students. When those of us who are living on the margins of society can engage in true discourse with those who have held societal power, in ways that employ mindfulness to be with the feelings of discomfort, breathe into them, and make a conscious choice around them, only then will we have hope for social action that serves to provide society productive direction as opposed to oscillation.

Cultural awareness and relevance: Providing access for all. Originally, as I laid out in the introduction, I sought a cohesive and positive, not reactive and disparate, theory of learning. I wanted a counter to the coin flipping and the pendulum swinging. What I found in my project, were access points to a web of what learning in classrooms could look like if we were to engage the pathway forward through honoring experience and tuning in to our internal with our experiences, because these two aspects are

accessible to anyone with a mind and breath, these two things are common experiences available to literally everyone.

When I was first teaching, I came to realize that what kids were often asked to do as requirements in school were unfair for some who had been accustomed to or had access to types of language or ways of being that differed from those typically valued in school. I began shifting the kinds of things we did together to better reflect things we all had access to and opened the culture of our classroom to more than what would be seen as valued in traditional classrooms. I listened carefully for how my students and their families engaged one another at home, what they valued, what they believed about learning, and I responded as thoughtfully as I could to make sure that our classroom was truly ours. Doing so seemed to allow for more learning for all students. I understood this shift in my instruction and curricular engagements as something called Culturally Relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

I sought to make what we did in the classroom relevant to the cultures of the people who comprised it. I still have room to grow in this area, of course, but what I just wrote, outlines the process. Mindfulness provides me access to a deeper level of that same process. With attention to body and breath, I seek to make the foundation of what we do together not contingent on any culture or set of prior experiences, but simply contingent on bodily experience in that moment. What happens when how we learn begins with what we all already have and it does not require any kind of language or culture pre-disposal to engage it? Of course, these acts of attention placement make the process of attending to breath and attention unfamiliar to many students' cultures, however, the act itself is one we all have the physical capacity and social freedom to

access, as we are the stewards of our attention. And that seems to me to be a decent place to start. I think I would like my job to be supporting those around me in realizing (literally making real), just like Phaedrus did, the wisdom, the ability, the genius, the agency and the integrity that we all already have, if only we might pause and take a breath.

Connection: Practicing in the context of relationships. I no longer seek to define that personal center or even who I am by anyone else's binary or ideological necessity. I can find the center line by doing exactly what the kayak guide said to do: feel for it. I can turn my attention inward in the most stressful or confusing of times and sense the things I do not have a name for yet. When in stressful situations, I can notice how tense my muscles become. When I receive care from friends, I can notice how expansive my chest feels. In those moments of literally connecting back to myself and my world, I find space. I can spend time in the sensory experience and pause to thoughtfully respond instead of emotionally reacting in avoidance. It is relevant to me that in the story that I used to begin my dissertation, my friend and I, were in a tandem (two-person) boat at the time of first considering a center. We were finding our center line in relation to the kayak and one another. In life, too, our center lines are not simply internal or isolated they are in constant and necessary interplay with a world of other beings. I found (and I believe that my students did too) that the more and more skillfully we listen inward to ourselves, the better equipped we are to listen deeply to one another. This interplay is circular as well, when we listen deeply to one another, it can equally inform our inward awareness as well.

These deep inclinations to listen are qualities I associate with living mindfully. This project has taught me that by living in this way, I can consciously act in the world and in doing so create a different world around me. I can exist in an increasingly mindful way and demonstrate to my students that living mindfully is an option of a way to be. In doing so, I invite them to step into their own boats, find their own center line, and paddle from it. And what's more, anyone can do this work. Anyone can find this freedom. What I am doing is not something that requires anything but breath and a mind. It does not rely on a social infrastructure to be fair or just. It is a way of being that everyone has access to right now, and therefore is, itself, an access point into making our worlds places of peace and freedom.

I am coming to see that we can only shift systems of inequity and individual decisions that breed inequity when we can personally and consciously act in our immediate and local spaces with fairness, kindness and willingness to share our own experiences. I believe that is the way we tame the System. We do so in every choice we have. Mindfulness gives us access to the choice. With this project, I learned that there is a space of possibility open to everyone who chooses to engage in mindfully attending to and mindfully acting in the world around them. And that space, like the flow of time, is infinite. There is not an end or beginning to what we can do or be. How we make sense of our worlds is, in fact, just another story we get to write. I do conclude that mindfulness gives me an access point to that decision making work and may do so for the students I teach. The story I choose to tell now, is that the center line is real and rooted in mindful attention. I am hopeful that in seeking it and acting from it daily, I expand my space to be

and live in ways that inspire others to work with me to support one another to simply be
and from that place of spaciousness, make more conscious choices.

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