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An investigation into mindfulness, creativity and the actor

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment for the  
degree of MA by Research

The University of Huddersfield

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## **Abstract**

As a teacher of drama in a Post-16 Further Education College I had become aware of the increasing number of students struggling with poor emotional well-being and mental health issues. With an overwhelming number of students seeking help from the College health practitioner and referrals to the counsellor, it was necessary to look for alternative methods to support my students, hence the idea evolved to embed mindfulness in my lessons. Mindfulness, akin to the work of the actor, explores the interrelationship between mind and body, and the human condition, and encourages people to view the world from diverse perspectives. The mental health and emotional well-being of my students became the instigator. The intention was to enable them to gain insight into the mind's workings and to develop the ability to self-regulate, which, in turn, would support their actor training. This being comparable to the work of Constantin Stanislavsky, who was influenced by Eastern practices in the development of the System.

With limited literature on mindfulness and the actor, it was necessary to look to Kabat-Zinn, Williams and Penman, who successfully relocated mindfulness in health and therapy. In the various publications studied there was a clear consensus in identified benefits when practicing mindfulness. Benefits shared across diverse domains, include, improved attention and concentration, a sense of gratitude, strengthened compassion toward others, emotional awareness and self-regulation, and extending insight into the self.

My exploration of mindfulness and the relationship to the actor in Post-16 education ran over a period of eight months, and included a range of research methods, such as, observation, discussion and questionnaires. Findings included qualitative data comparable with other practitioners, including Baltzell, who successfully renegotiated mindfulness in the area of sport, music and dance. The majority of participants within the study articulated a new-found calmness, relaxed states, a deeper understanding of how the mind can cause unnecessary worry and anxiety; in turn, improved emotional well-being. The positives extended to utilising the inner creative source, expanding imagination and creativity, impacting positively on learning, the actor process and experience, ensemble work and final performance outcomes.

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Mam, Dad, David, Michael, Dawn, Louis, Grace and Sam

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## Introduction and Rationale

The project investigates the relationship between mindfulness and the training actor, with particular emphasis on the Post-16 student, exploring the benefits in the application of mindfulness in creative and performance practice. The project focuses on two questions, these are:

Can mindfulness practice remove psychological barriers within the trainee actor, enabling access to internal creative resources?

Can mindfulness enhance and strengthen the trainee actor's creative and performance practice?

The rationale for the project came from a notable increase in student issues relating to poor mental health and this becoming a barrier for some drama students in their education and training. As the initial idea evolved, the focus narrowed to placing emphasis on exploring mindfulness and creativity in the context of the Post-16 actor training at Burnley College UCLAN; with the by-product being increased self-awareness and strengthened resilience, with an improved well-being within all of the students on the course. Since 2010, I have gained a deeper understanding of the mind body interrelationship through the study and practice of mindfulness. As such, it occurred to me that mindfulness might also be helpful in supporting my drama students in Post-16 education, thus my personal experience of mindfulness underpins the rationale of this project. Supportive examples are presented in the paper (2014) 'Buddhist Mindfulness and Psychophysical Performance', by Chamberlain, Middleton and Plà, who exemplify the positive outcomes when integrating Buddhist principles within actor training. Middleton recalls experiences when working with Núñez and Worley, two significant practitioners who successfully integrate Buddhist practice within theatre and performance. The practice of other theatre practitioners support the project aims, at Burnley College UCLAN, which are: to reduce the trainee actor's psychological barriers around performance practice, coupled with a deeper exploration of the interconnection between mind and body. In the same paper, Middleton phrased mindfulness activity in the drama studio as a, 'reconditioning', and Plà recalls his first experiences when integrating Buddhist practice and meditation in the theatrical context. Akin to Middleton, Plà promotes the significant benefits to actor training and to the person, explaining, 'how training can bring us more consciousness, about us and about our reality, including social reality'. (Chamberlain *et al* 2014: n.p)

Relating to Plà, and to provide a personal context, my own mindfulness practice started with the intention to counteract and alleviate the symptoms of an under-active thyroid, which includes a negative impact on emotional well-being, resulting in unconscious negative actions, such as moving between extreme emotions, sabotaging relationships and self-medicating through alcohol. This ran parallel with emotional difficulties due to significant life changes, in 2010, which included the breakdown of the relationship with my son's father, and relocating across the country to start a new job. However, I continued to teach drama in Post-16 education, but required a redefined mind-set. It was at this point I needed to seek out a deeper understanding of my own situation, which in turn, opened out onto the broader 'human condition'. Mindfulness taught me a great deal and it was through this period of self-exploration that I felt more equipped to deal with changes in my living circumstances. Moreover, it became apparent that, at the same time, sadly, I had given little time to my own creative growth as a theatre maker; this continues to be a personal goal and developments on this will be reported as the thesis unfolds. If mindfulness had helped me as a person and in the creative context, then might it support my students in expanding self-awareness and, in turn, gain an enhanced actor training experience?

Mindfulness originates from Buddhism and has become more prominent in other domains since the 1970's, including health and therapy, although it is still very much underdeveloped in the area of drama and actor training. A significant contributor in retranslating mindfulness in health and therapy, Kabat-Zinn (2013) states that mindfulness is a way to overcome human vulnerabilities, resulting from a constellation of mental factors working together. In his Foreword to Penman's *Mindfulness for Creativity*, Mark Williams writes: 'the explosion of interest in mindfulness over the last few years has been extraordinary', (Penman, 2015 xi). Penman has extended the use and application of mindfulness in support of 'creatives' as well as anyone who wants to optimise their 'work, life and overall wellbeing'. Penman provides supportive literature, which includes practical exercises based on Eastern traditions and intends to expand creativity through promoting divergent thinking and the 'being mode'. The project makes extensive use of Penman's work, although adapted for application in the drama studio and trainee actors. Penman has many ideas and practices, but generic and open to varied audiences, and not necessarily in Drama or to the actor in-training. As the thesis unfolds, I will discuss the implementation and adaptation of exercises in more detail; highlighted in the literature review and the

section methodology. This influence forms the foundation of activity in support of my students, their creativity and wellbeing, whilst, at the same time, supporting further exploration of my own creativity.

### **The Burnley College UCLAN Landscape**

Returning to the context of the project, I will argue that the internal mind-set within some students, in the actor-training studio at Burnley College UCLAN, has become a barrier to self-expression. Furthermore, blocking access to what are natural, internal resources for creativity; this being confirmed through discussions with drama students. Extended evidence will unfold further along in the thesis, however, to provide a summary of the number of students accessing support for emotional well-being and mental health at the College – where approximately 2000 (16-19 years) students study. Sally Whelan, the College health practitioner confirmed that from September 2015 to July 2016, there was a total of 1,273 who ‘dropped in’ to seek help around mental health. To break this down further, 809 reported emotional difficulties, 88 of these students being referred to the College counsellor, whilst 46 were referred to external mental health services. Whelan explained ‘there seems to be a lack of resilience in students’ (Whelan. 18/1/16. pers.comm). Unfortunately the data cannot be narrowed by subject area, although Whelan confirmed ‘there has been a notable increase in students from the Department of Creative Arts accessing additional support for poor mental health’. Whelan expands further ‘the increase in use of social media and instant text messaging, accelerating conditions of anxiety and depression and students are suffering as a result of a rapidly changing world and it being a 24/7, 365 days of non-stop communications and incoming information. Impacting on self-esteem and self-worth’. To appreciate Whelan’s experience, and to gain deeper insight into the internal mind-set of the trainee actors, discussions widened to my drama students in September 2016. Feedback provided information on their internal landscapes and included existential thought patterns, ‘Planet X and how the world will die’ ‘Death’ ‘concerned for the future’. One student exclaimed, as she raised her arms, creating a circular shape as though carrying the world, ‘There is so much information coming at me from the world, the world!’ Several drama students worry about money, exacerbated by HE tuition fees, whereas other worries included ‘not making people proud’, ‘brother moving to Australia’, ‘Mum’s new job’, ‘Aunty’s dementia’, ‘jobs’, ‘court’, ‘life’, ‘love’, ‘weight gain’, ‘sorting sister’, ‘helping my mum’, ‘health’, ‘abortion’, ‘ex-boyfriend’. One particular student said, with sadness, ‘never finding something that makes my soul dance’. Over the past five years Colleges, Universities, and Drama Schools in particular, have seen a significant increase in

the demand for support for students with mental health issues. A clear example of this is at Rose Bruford College, a Drama and Performing Arts specialist organisation, where, over the past five years has extended support to the mental health needs of their actors in training. Michael Earley, Principal at Rose Bruford states that 'Conservatoire training reveals dilemmas and traumas that demand both understanding and healing'. (Earley, n.p).

The project at Burnley College UCLAN takes inspiration from this and will support the young person and their well-being, coupled with an enhanced experience in actor training through the application of mindfulness.

### **The Political Landscape**

To widen the scope further, and to position within a National frame, it is important to identify how increased poor mental health has become a concern and high on government agenda, with several policies and attempts at reducing human suffering. On a reduced scale, this National epidemic has filtered through into the drama training studio, at Burnley College UCLAN, becoming a barrier to creative expression.

In recent years various governments have presented contradictory messages around mental health and well-being, through 'well intentioned' policy making, inclusive of Post-16 education, although there is a notable gap in support services in this particular sector.

For example The Labour Party's agenda (2003) 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) provided directives in: Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-being. Similarly, The Conservative Coalition Party produced the white paper (2011), 'No Health without Mental Health', to gain parity between physical and mental well-being, from birth to old age. With the most recent statement from The Conservative Party, Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health, as quoted in the *TES* online edition, 'Three children in every classroom in the country have a mental health condition but only a quarter of them receive help, stressing early intervention can give patients a much better chance of full cure.' Hobby (2017). It seems the various governments have reframed the same issue, resulting in people being left with poor mental health. Hobby expands, 'Just as we are becoming more aware of children's mental health issues the resources are being taken away'.

In addition to ECM, The Conservative Party, in an attempt to develop a more tolerant, empathic and compassionate society, introduced British Values. Coincidentally, values correlating with the positive benefits mindfulness practice can bring about, with the most applicable government directives being, 'Enable students to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence' and 'Encourage respect for other people'. Gov.UK, *Guidance on promoting British Values in Schools published*, 2017.

The application of mindfulness at Burnley College UCLAN intended to nurture and cultivate the qualities highlighted in ECM and the British Values initiative. With an overarching aim to increase compassion towards self and others, decrease pressure on students, and to alleviate emotional difficulties through self-awareness. In turn, this practice would enable the trainee actor to explore their creative practice with a newly found psychological freedom; thus becoming a well-crafted actor. Rose Bruford College, as mentioned earlier, has recognised an increase in drama students struggling, and state 'Issues related to mental health are more common among performers than the general population with one in three of us affected every year' (O'Toole, n.p). Similar initiatives to Rose Bruford, pilot trials were held in other educational organisations, although predominately in Higher Education and in the US. A paper produced by MAPPG (2014. n.p) reports on the results from a project delivered to 137 students, aged 17 – 19. The evidence and results included decreased lethargy and negative affectivity, increased calm, relaxation, self-acceptance and emotional regulation. The project at Burnley College UCLAN aimed to offer something similar, and consequentially, provided a deeper understanding of the human condition and informing the work of the actor. In order to do so, it was necessary to design a programme that would initially reduce psychological barriers through cognitive exploration, with an overarching aim to clear pathways to internal creative resources, thus, diversifying the skill set of the trainee actor. Kabat-Zinn complements this intention, 'In the same way, we can be loving and compassionate as teachers / instructors / and guides, and introduce practices to cultivate loving kindness, especially, oneself in times of contraction and mental seizures, as well as compassion, joy, and equanimity.' (2013 p. 299). The application of mindfulness has become more prominent in the West, with Kabat-Zinn, Penman and Williams providing well established examples in medicine, health and therapy. However, more closely related to this study, Baltzell has noted the use of mindfulness in the domains of sports, music and dance. Tremayne and Morgan do provide a clear connection between mindfulness and the performer, and write, 'by cultivating our ability to pay attention in the present moment, we are able to

disengage from the mental 'clutter' and to have a clear and alert mind.' (2016 p. 390). The mental clutter generated by, although not exclusive, over thinking, thoughts or regrets of the past promoting unnecessary worry, or future thought processes fuelling anxiety. Furthermore, a range of 'what ifs' creating barriers to experiencing the present moment, which can contribute to a cluttered and unfocused mind. In the first instance, the project aimed to explore what could be defined as 'mental clutter' or an unfocused mind-set within the student, and, as such, the programme embedded mindfulness activity to, initially, promote focus and relaxation; prior to other exercises to expand pathways to internal creative resources.

### **Mindfulness and the Actor**

Stanislavsky's System, and techniques associated, promote the mind and body co-relationship within the actor, which has influenced the project at Burnley / UCLAN. Stanislavsky developed the System to promote naturalism as an acting style and to encourage actors to move away from Melodrama. The System forms the foundation of Post-16 drama National curriculum, introducing psychophysical work and enables trainee actors to translate and emulate human behaviour. Stanislavsky, in the 1900s, developed the System to inform an actor's approach in creating a role, although, initially, working on themselves. The System was a result of a developed relationship between Stanislavsky and Eastern traditions, with Hatha Yoga, in particular. Tcherkasski, (2016) presents connections between the System and Yoga: 'For the Yogi, the object of meditation is God. For Stanislavsky, the object of meditation is the role' (p. 106). Tcherkasski, reports in detail on Stanislavsky's use of Eastern practice, 'Yoga, the ancient Indian philosophical system, served as a stimulus to the creation of certain exercises'. (2016 p. 21). Tcherkasski discusses Stanislavsky's invitation to the actor to question what it is to be human, with the aim to increase self-awareness and to connect the mind and body. Furthermore, the actor can access his/her internal emotional reservoir, and to be more present and aware, coupled with improved attention. Tcherkasski describes one approach in Stanislavsky's studio 'A hint in the practice of the Buddhist wise men – and thenceforth he required his actors to practice prolonged psychophysical exercises as a means of cultivating concentration' (2016 p. 30).

As such, the project at Burnley College UCLAN takes influence from Stanislavsky and appreciate the parallels with Buddhist traditions and the actor already undertaken.

In addition to Stanislavsky, there have been many and varied influential factors and practitioners who have inspired the project, including those already mentioned, Baltzell, Kabat-Zinn, Penman, Williams, Worley, and Núñez. All in support of my students in their exploration of the mind and body co-relationship and creative practice; coupled the development of mental stamina and resilience within the young person.

## **Literature Review**

The main objective of this section is to establish the significance of the general field of study and identify a place where new contribution could be made. Investigators are exploring practices, adapting and applying mindfulness in the secular; allowing any person, from any background, to develop qualities and traits, closely rooted in Buddhist practice. Since the 1970s, mindfulness has been adopted for other use, although, now, in some contexts with no knowledge, or bearing only some relation to Buddhism. Discussion will respect the origins of Eastern tradition, whilst at the same time, present the journey of mindfulness and application in wider contemporary domains; with the relationship to drama being at the fore.

### **Mindfulness moving into the secular**

Application in health is illustrated in programmes developed by Kabat-Zinn and Williams, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), in 1974, and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), in 1999. Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2013), in *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, Origins, and Multiple Applications at the Intersection of Science and Dharma*, provide a clear overview of the developments of mindfulness in science and medicine, which outlines the journey of mindfulness moving from its original setting. This collection from international scholars, Buddhist and non-Buddhists, provides information on the evolution of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and how the Stress Reduction Clinic, founded 1979, University of Massachusetts Medical Center, Massachusetts; acted as the catalyst for Williams' Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). In addition, Fennell (University of Oxford, Department of Psychiatry, Warneford Hospital, UK) and Segal (Centre of Addiction and Mental Health, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada) take the debate further and discusses the development of integrating Mindfulness and Cognitive Therapy: *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: Culture Clash or Creative Fusion* (2013). This particular chapter highlights the 'marriage' of the Eastern 2500 year old tradition, fused with Western cognitive

and clinical science, and alike to any successful marriage there was a need for commonality, whilst respecting difference.

Moreover, other domains have included mindfulness in their practice, such as, Economics, Law and, in particular, Businesses are utilising mindfulness to support change management within organisations. More recently, a collection of essays edited by Amy Baltzell (2016) *Mindfulness and Performance: Current Perspectives in Social and Behavioural Sciences*, explores the impact on a range of performance contexts, from sports to music and dance, although drama being notably absent from the discussion.

### **Mindfulness definitions and benefits**

Mindfulness can be highly beneficial in support of individuals and groups, for example, Kabat-Zinn, Bush and Bodhi (2013) state that it can strengthen the cognitive nature of the mind. Similar to Olendzki (2013) and Csikszentmihalyi (1997), who both explore the reconstruction of the mind through mindfulness, with an interdependence with external factors. Comparable with Penman and Williams (2011) who expand on the mind's workings and how mindfulness is a way of being and to bring about a lucid awareness inspired by stillness. Penman (2015) defines mindfulness practice as 'A sense of knowing what you are doing as it is happening, moment by moment'. Baer (2003), on a similar note, defines it as opening up attention, noticing shifting experiences. Langer (2005), states that it isn't the act of mindlessness but rather an 'openness to novelty, acting on novel distinctions'. To move further back, Shapiro (1980) identified the benefits of mindfulness as, gaining deeper insight, consciousness and reality, gaining optimal states of well-being and 'cortisol secretion'. Giges and Reid (2009) promote the positive impact on cognitive processing through adapting and understanding the potential of a new condition and refer to Moore & Malinowski who support this notion 'Mindfulness can help with this; mindfulness has been shown to be related to cognitive flexibility'. The British Psychology Society (2011), present an article which confirms positive results around stress reduction, conflict resolution and resilience. Jones (2011) in particular, discusses cognitive control in the context of primary education in the traditional sense of imparting knowledge. Furthermore, advises a need to explore 'habits of mind' to enhance learning and form new habits through training. Jones also provides a definition of what mindfulness actually is not to 'clear one's mind of all thoughts and

feelings, but to anchor oneself to current sensory experiences and to allow thoughts to enter the mind freely'; attributes highly beneficial to the actor.

### **Mindfulness and Creativity**

Mindfulness and meditation exercises the muscles and reconfigures the mind through interconnecting the conscious with the subconscious. This can, in turn, promote positive mental health and expand spontaneity, which can result in the growth of imagination and creativity. Creativity is within every person, although dependant on how this is drawn out and a person's exposure to creative challenge. Penman (2015) would define creativity as 'the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena and to generate solutions' (p. 16). Therefore, if the training actor is distracted or holds a negative mind set this will leave little mind space for the creative process or to formulate new ideas. Penman supports this 'to create ideas is imaginative, whereas to act upon them is to be creative' (p. 16). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) provides a definition, 'Creativity is the cultural equivalent of the process of genetic changes that result in biological evolution, where random variations take place in the chemistry of our chromosomes, below the threshold of consciousness' (p. 7). Both definitions support the notion that creativity is cultivated through exploration of the relationship between the conscious and subconscious, although, stimulation is important to ignite imagination and expand creative potential. An intention of the project was to alter the expectations held by the trainee actors, through exploring the internal landscape as a source for creativity, with the hope to promote a shift or encourage an altered state of being. Mindfulness was to become a vehicle to teach drama, and drama curriculum utilised to teach mindfulness.

To narrow the focus towards mindfulness and the actor, Morgan and Treymayne (2016) provide alternative descriptions to a non-mindful approach 'acting mindlessly', 'less attentive' and 'easily distracted'. Furthermore, expand on the positive benefits to the actor who can gain the ability to notice concepts and shifts in attention, and can hone a flexibility within the mind. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) discusses barriers in reaching creative optimum, and this includes cognitive processing, internal and external demands, through making a choice where to place attention. Supporting this notion, Bush (2013), refers to the practice at Studio Art at State University of New York, where Cheng states 'meditation helps us to tap the intuitive creative functions of the right brain' (p. 189). On a similar

point, Boffel, at Syracuse University, teaches mindfulness on the course Contemplative Arts and Society to promote 'creativity, wellbeing, and compassionate connections'.

The project at Burnley College UCLAN provided trainee actors the opportunity to discover internal cognitive processes and strengthen command and fluidity in placement of attention; with the aim to alleviate possible barriers to creative pathways.

As mentioned, previously, there is no direct literature on drama and mindfulness, or on Mindfulness within Post Compulsory Education and Training in drama, UK based; and this is where the project at Burnley College UCLAN wishes to expand upon. There have been pilot trials within education, in the USA, non-drama based, although useful examples. Bush (2013) discusses outcomes when embedding mindfulness in higher education and states that the developments within science run in conjunction with mindfulness in education. Moreover, education offers alternative answers, which include, 'the classroom context raises interesting questions that may not currently be at the forefront in health and healing studies about the potential of mindfulness for cognitive transformations' (p. 183). Bush presents the similarities between the Cognitive Therapist and that of the educator, and suggests both provide a 'secure context', where 'trust develops and change is possible'. Bush also discusses the work of William James, who states 'An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence' (p. 183). Whilst there have been some studies within the higher education US context, there have been very few in the UK further and higher education sector; although it will be noted where there are any similarities or differences to US studies in terms of outcomes.

### **The Actor and Eastern Practice**

As briefly outlined in the introduction, Stanislavsky's System was designed in response to the ethos and exercises associated with Hatha Yoga. Tcherasski (2016) discusses this influence and impact on the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, which enabled an actor to strengthen awareness and attention in examining the psychophysical, and referred to this as 'training and drill'. The System and 'training and drill' evolved from Stanislavsky's frustration when playing Ibsen's Doctor Stockmann, in 1906, lacking in concentration and focus he drew upon Buddhism in preparing as an actor. Training included the introduction and application of the 'inner observer', similar to that of 'the watcher' a term used by some mindfulness practitioners. The inner observer encourages the actor to engage with the inner landscape and internal narrative, which can impact negatively on an actors focus and attention if

not monitored closely. To strengthen an actor's attention Stanislavsky created the 'circle of attention', an imagined circle around the actor to determine the size of attention and focus. This could be the size of the theatrical auditorium including the audience, although if the audience becomes a distraction, the circle should decrease to only include the actor. The actor can increase the circle once attention and focus is strengthened; therefore the focus must be on the internal rather than becoming distracted by external factors.

The emergence of the relationship between Stanislavsky and Eastern practice became apparent in his work as a director and an actor. It is documented in a review of his performance where the System had clearly been implemented, 'his body expresses his state of mind. He is, as it were, 'being' (Fryer. 2013. n.p)

It was 1911, potentially earlier, when Stanislavsky studied Ramacharaka's, *Hatha Yoga: Yogic Philosophy of the Physical Well-Being of Man*, (published 1904), which Tcherkasski, (2016) reports on Stanislavsky's influences and building the System. This particular book was one of many written by Yogi Ramacharaka, who was born in India around 1799, and who ventured out early in life to hunt for the truth. He spent the majority of his life in the East, fasting, meditating and studying in various lamaseries and monasteries. Stanislavsky's interest grew around Ramacharaka and Eastern practice and, as such, supported the development of the System, with the intention to enable an actor to embrace his inner world. Furthermore, the system transcends limitations in the physical sense and allows an actor to gain higher levels of creative psychological consciousness when preparing a role. Stanislavsky said, 'One must offer different paths. One of these is the path of action. There is also another path: you can go from feeling towards action, actuating feeling first' (2016 p. 71). The Stanislavsky System, as mentioned previously, is beneficial to the actor in training and also forms the foundation of the National curriculum in the UK, appearing as content on GCSE, BTEC and A Level qualifications; as well as higher education and training programmes at universities and conservatoires. Stanislavsky and his work on the System is a successful example when embedding Eastern practice within an actor training programme, as such, the research study at Burnley College UCLAN, draws upon Stanislavsky and the System.

Brown (2015) *Psychology Today*, specific to mindfulness and the role of the actor, covers the creation of presence and gaining a stronger command of attention, whilst questioning, 'At a cognitive level,

what are actors doing? And is it somehow similar to what we all do as we play different roles in our everyday lives?' Conducting wider research towards internet based resources, largely relating to mindfulness in Psychology and Therapy, although it became apparent of the limited resources in the area of 'Mindfulness and Acting' or 'Mindfulness and Drama'. However, one online article, *Psychology Today*, (2015) Goldstein presents, 'Mindfulness and Acting' and asks the question 'Is what actors do parallel to non-judgmental awareness of the self?' Goldstein, author of many articles and book chapters on the effects of acting training on social skills, questions the role an actor plays on stage and compares to roles played in other parts of life. For example with family members and romantic partners. Goldstein offers possible answers, one being 'The idea of different 'presences' in everyday life has been explored, and it maybe that actors are simply doing this in a performative context', or 'a combination of emotion regulation and executive function'. Goldstein expands to the idea of an actor deciding 'appropriate given circumstances' and this term forms part of Stanislavsky's System, and enables an actor to decipher character motivations and indicators of emotional engagement. Goldstein also draws our attention to the concept 'In mindfulness, one does not pass judgment, but instead simply observes what is happening physically and emotionally' (Goldstein n.p). This particular concept sits comfortably with the project in connecting mindfulness with the trainee actor and to encourage the use of the self as a form of research when developing a character for the stage.

### **Arts Therapies and Mindfulness**

Within the context of mindfulness and drama in the UK, there a very few examples to draw upon, however, studies in the area of Arts Therapies and Mindfulness, provide several examples and points of reference. Clear evidence is apparent in the multiple online resources geared towards Mindfulness and Trauma / PTSD on the website, 'Acting with Mindfulness', which provides an overview of Arts and Mindfulness as therapy. Parallels with the work of Rappaport, in the publication and collection, *Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies*, and *Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies: Theory and Practice*, (2014) and *Focusing-orientated Art Therapy -Accessing the Bodies Wisdom and Creative Intelligence* (2009). Rappaport outlines the progressive nature of Arts in Therapy over the last 75 years, Rappaport being a significant force in advocating Arts Therapy. Rappaport highlights the benefits as 'present-moment awareness, compassion, and insight, and ways that mindfulness fosters awareness of and an attunement with the creative pulse of life itself' (2014 p15).

Gluck provides a chapter within this publication, entitled Mindfulness and Drama Therapy – Insight Improvisation and the Transformation of Anger (p 107 – 128), outlines his personal introduction to mindfulness, in 1990. This led to the design of a programme in 1999, 'Mindfulness and Choicelessness: Freedom in Performance', which combines Insight Meditation with improvised drama and psychotherapy. Gluck identifies the complementary nature of drama therapy and mindfulness, drama therapy being more outward and expressive, whereas mindfulness is, essentially, an exploration of the inner landscape; complementary in terms of finding balance between the two. I would agree with Gluck in that 'the client in therapy is fully engaged in a therapy process in the same ways an actor is fully engaged in a performance – mentally, physically, vocally, and emotionally' (p 108). Comparisons can be made here with Stanislavsky's System, initially there is inward-directed work, and this informs the actor's outward-directed expression. This, again, suggests that mindfulness within the context of drama, can not only transform the actor but can, in turn, transform the person; and following the completion of this project, I now believe there is no separation. To recall Worley, Author of *Coming from Nothing, the Sacred Art of Acting*, (2001), and guest presenter at the Mindfulness and Performance International Symposium, University of Huddersfield, prompted thinking and discussion around the actor and person being one in the same, and 'it is one small step to the stage', Worley (2016). Worley continues to work and write around the actor and mindfulness, and has a new book (2018) *Teaching Presence: Field Notes for Players*, Boulder CO. Naropa, however, my research was complete before it was published. Mitra Lee Worley teacher of Mudra and Maitra Space Awareness, Presence in Teaching and Contemplative Teaching and Learning, as well we making significant contributions in the field of contemplative arts and education, presented a workshop around an actor's interaction with space. It was during this workshop Worley presented the question 'is there a gap between life and stage?' Worley (2001) recounts her experience when teaching ensemble acting at Naropa Institute;

*I went to Chogyam Trungpa's talks on meditation. To my surprise I found that what I was groping toward communicating through the medium of theatre was clearly articulated by Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist lama with an English accent walked with a limp and who seemed to speak directly into my core. (p 14).*

Worley also writes around the role of the actor, 'At its best actor training heightens awareness of what it is to be human' (p 124). Comparatively, Moyle (2016) forms part of the Baltzell collection, discusses the benefits to the dancer working with mindfulness, which includes, self-regulated attention and

awareness, which are inherent in the practice of dance, as is the necessity to maintain a strong body-mind connection.

### **Wider Training Opportunities**

It is encouraging to find other educational establishments who successfully integrate mindfulness within curriculum, although these are in the minority. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, promote the use of mindfulness as part of an evening class, 'Mindfulness for Performers' (2017). The course aims to develop skills for performance and general good mental health through adapting the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programmes, to suit those working in the Performing Arts. The themes explored include, working with obstacles, such as performance anxiety and self-criticism, and cultivating stage-presence, flow and finding opportunity for divergent thinking. Penman defines creativity in contrast to convergent thinking, 'Divergent thinking is spontaneous and free-flowing. It lies behind the 'purest' forms of creativity and in many ways is true creativity' (2009 p.17). Furthermore, at the University of Oxford, an eight-week MBCT course is offered to health and education practitioners, which suggests work within these two domains continue to widen and increase in popularity. There is a growing interest and increased application of mindfulness in the context of training, and key examples are: Post Graduate courses in mindfulness at Exeter University, and at Bangor University and The Centre of Mindfulness Research and Practice. In both organisations research is undertaken in mindfulness with the general workplace and in health sector, although, again, non-specific to the role of the actor or actor training programmes. However, the University of Huddersfield have advanced in this area and successfully established Centre for Psychophysical Performance Research.

### **Centre for Psychophysical Performance Research**

The work at the University of Huddersfield, with particular reference to the Centre for Psychophysical Performance Research continues to grow in the area of Drama and Performance. In 2016, Chamberlain and Middleton planned and successfully executed a week-long symposium, which I had the pleasure to attend. The week started with a two-day intensive 'Swimming in the Inner Source' with Núñez, director of the Taller de Investigacion Teatral since 1975. Furthermore, Núñez, author of Anthropocosmic Theatre, and creator of 'dynamics' – physical training structures, blends ritual and

performance, and embeds psychophysical performer training. Núñez presented varied exercises throughout the two-day intensive and encouraged participants to utilise their inner source for creativity. There was a particular exercise which stood out to me, where I was asked to work with eyes closed and follow instructions provided by Núñez, which placed me in an imagined forest and this became the stimulus. Along the way Núñez stimulated my imagination teasing out the development of a narrative, which escalated to me walking and climbing in caves, and meeting a squirrel who then became my guide. I noticed the imagination was strong enough to lead the way, with the simplest of instruction, with no need for external stimulant, such as props, costume or other actors. I also noticed freedom within my body, which responded, intuitively, to the building narrative within my mind. Furthermore, I developed courage and moved with freedom, not self-conscious or nervous, my attention was focused and closed off to external factors. I naturally responded to my imagination and what it provided in the development of an internal narrative and the external physical choreography. The internal stimulated the body in the studio space, which resulted in the creation of different shapes, use of levels, diverse tempos, positions and structures, with moments of pause and stillness.

Other activities at the symposium included, investigating space, inner and outer spheres with Worley, and exploring mindfulness in drama based activities with Chamberlain. Greatly appreciative of this opportunity working alongside National and International practitioners, who continue to research and integrate mindfulness within creativity and performance. In addition, and prior to the symposium, exploration in meditative and mindfulness practice was undertaken at a two-day intensive workshop with Dartnell, 'Freedom from Expression' (2015). Some of these experiences will be expanded upon in the section Project Outcomes and Critical Analysis.

### **Online Resources**

Online resources have expanded in the area of mindfulness and the actor, which suggests a growing appreciation and need. The website, Stagemilk, is a useful example and demonstrates this emerging online presence, which provides accessibility and reaching a wider audience; and includes the working actor. An article on 'Mindfulness for Actors' focuses on the actor in the casting room, rehearsals and performance work, and to alleviate nerves and stage fright. However, the resources

lack detailed guidance for the actor, or academic background, evidence, or argument. Additionally, the website, 'Mindfulness Alive' provides resource in the form of drama games and storytelling to cultivate mindfulness qualities, 'when applied creatively, they become powerful teaching tools for people of all ages, and especially for those who are young'. These resources support the teaching of mindfulness through drama exercises, such as 'the emotional walk', and 'therapist and client', role play to decipher and assess knowledge and thoughts; all relatable and transferable to Dramatherapy. These online materials are limited in scope and further justify the development for more formal research in this area, as well as a programme which integrates mindfulness within National Drama curriculum.

### **The Sceptic and Mindfulness**

There are, of course, sceptical views when intermixing mindfulness within other domains. Furedi (2014), in *The Guardian*, presented the argument that mindfulness practice can come at a price, advising the necessity to have qualified teachers of mindfulness, who understand mental health. Crane (2016), provides a balanced paper and shares mixed views in the relocation and retranslation of mindfulness in multiple streams, and states that this requires careful attention and the need for sensitivity when working between sectors. Foster (2016), in *The Guardian*, presents mindfulness from a predominately cynical view, suggesting the app Headspace profiting £25m, is a commercial enterprise rather than one of supporting the many. This article highlights the use of mindfulness in making staff happier in high profiled firms, which includes Google, Apple, Sony, Ikea, the Department of Health and Transport for London, coupled with the question 'But could such a one-size-fits-all solution backfire in unexpected ways?' Devon (2017) *Times Educational Supplement*, writes, 'up until fairly recently, the word 'mindfulness' was almost guaranteed to elicit a gigantic eye-roll from me'. Although, goes on to encourage teachers to embed mindfulness in their practice in support of positive mental health in students.

There are, of course, always going to be mixed views on mindfulness, however, the project aims to qualify the benefits of this practice when working with trainee actors. Furthermore, the success of Stanislavsky and his work are enough to entice an actor to gain a deeper comprehension on Buddhist practice when utilising the System in drama.

## **Mindfulness in Post-16 Education**

With the aim to bring mindfulness to Post-16 actor training curriculum, at Burnley College UCLAN, it was essential to consider and observe the two distinct cultures at an intersection, actor training at Burnley College UCLAN and Buddhist Ancient Traditions. Furthermore, I regularly questioned if these two domains have enough in common to ensure a harmonious partnership?

Bush (2013) describes the work of Chogham Trungpa Rinpoche, at Naropa Institute, who initiated the fusion of learning experiences with contemplative practice and achieved positive outcomes, such as 'awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others'. Similarly, Cheng (2013) sees the inherent connection between the arts and mindfulness and illustrate how some universities, in the US, infuse curriculum with mindfulness practice and teachings; with successful student case studies.

This correlates with the work of Worley (2001) who provides examples contemplative learning through the medium of acting, along with explanations on the interrelationship between Buddhist mindfulness and the actor. Furthermore, Worley defines the manifesto held by Naropa University and the practice of acting as offering clues to understand what Buddhism, a 2,500-year-old tradition expresses.

Worley echoes the benefits to the performing arts, 'As actors we are students of reality. We need ways to clear our channels, to become empty vessels through which the truth of the human condition can be revealed to our audience and to us'. Similarly to Rappaport (2014), writes around arts therapy when working with children and adolescents 'While many children are able to learn formal mindfulness practices, such as sitting and walking meditation, the arts often provide an enjoyable, tangible route to access and express mindfulness practices' (p 248). Supporting this, Bush provides detail on the growth of Contemplative Practice Fellowships, with a central focus to 'create curriculum in diverse disciplines that encompass and encourage the study of contemplation'. Raising relevant questions to support the need for wider research 'What can meditation offer the arts? How can you describe contemplative practices in arts education to others? What makes me a better contemplative teacher? Simple questions; complex answers.' (p 188).

The work already undertaken in educational establishments provided a security around the potential benefits when embedding mindfulness within the curriculum at Burnley College UCLAN. The project at Burnley College / UCLAN, and the practice of mindfulness intended to improve the well-being,

extend empathy, as well as provide a practical to equip trainee actors in the process of creation and in performance.

## **Methodology**

### **Practice as Research**

Kershaw and Nicholson (2011) highlight historical developments when investigating methodology in the creative context, with Practice as Research at the forefront. There have been vast developments in theatre and performance since the 1950's, with rapid increase throughout the 90's and beyond; running parallel with the evolution of Practice as Research, as methodology. The authors (2011) also present the 'fundamental troubling of epistemology and ontology binary' in the context of theatre and performance practice led research. Therefore, in the context of the project at Burnley College UCLAN, it was essential to provide space and time for each participant, regardless of background, to discover and explore mindfulness in relation to their own creative practice; whilst acknowledging and accepting their personal experience and thoughts throughout the research process. At the same time, Kershaw and Nicholson question if methods place restriction, as such, methods were chosen to support the nature of the multifaceted subject area, theatre and performance, with the integration of mindfulness practice. Therefore, not one particular method could be identified as holding a particular bias, and the choice of research methods were chosen to complement each other, with the participants and research questions at the fore.

Pitches and colleagues present the chapter 'Performer Training: Researching Practice in the Theatre Laboratory', providing case-studies from the past 100 years. Furthermore they identify the parallels with the work Stanislavsky conducted in various theatre studios, whilst raising the question 'What are the pitfalls, and, conversely, the potentialities when researching in and around the theatre studio environment?' (p.138). Pitches identifies research pitfalls in the drama studio concerning the 'legitimacy and authority' on findings, or research activity and outcomes being 'bad' or 'shallow'. Additionally, this highlighted the necessity for the researcher-practitioner to remain at an 'analytical distance' in order to gain valid and reliable information. To avoid such pitfalls, the decision was taken to plan time for immersion and separation, with the aim to obtain objective evaluation on the participants at work and when receiving their feedback. This also supports the necessity to implement multiple research methods to acquire qualitative information held by the participant, and in

the context of this project methods came in the form of questionnaires, combined with discussion, verbal feedback, and observation.

Throughout the research period, it was essential to take on a reflective position, and to question outcomes as they happened and from a reflexive stance. Therefore, I observed initial developments and remained inquisitive through gentle questioning, with the aim to understand if mindfulness could, in fact, impact on a trainee actor's creative process, experience and skills development. Moreover, it was imperative to allocate sufficient time for the participants, and, myself as researcher, to reflect and act on experiences, although to correlate with previous happenings and outcomes. Group and individual reflections were questioned through verbal discussion and paper based questionnaires, which collectively provided opportunity to evaluate if change had, in fact, occurred within the participant.

### **Teacher and Researcher**

To combine the role of teacher and researcher came with challenge, although necessary in the context of the project, and, as such, in turn, the research activity influenced my working world as an educationalist. I worked with flexibility and moved between roles as required, for example, as teacher essential to facilitate a student's learning and assessment in their main qualification, which ran parallel with my additional role as researcher. Throughout the project process it was necessary to build in time for the trainee actor to explore mindfulness in correlation with creative development, although with the aim for drama curriculum and mindfulness activity to support one another.

Pitches (2011) highlights the necessity to find balance within research activity 'To the researcher who is looking in on the training laboratory from outside and for whom there are varying degrees of immersion combined with separation' (p. 138). To take this forward, I conducted practice led research, from a reflective and reflexive stance, and remained conscious of the moments of separation to allow time for discovery and to observe participants, in contrast with personal immersion through participation, discussion and to question; all in support of the initial research questions. To sustain this creative enquiry required a flexible approach in terms of research style and methods to capture the experience and truth felt by each participant in this exploratory theatre context.

The programme, itself, evolved through reading around the work of Penman, in particular, mindfulness and creativity. Penman designed and delivered a programme focused on the relationship between mindfulness and creativity. The programme provides activity and exercises for any person who wishes to explore mindfulness in relation to expanding personal creativity. Penman (2015) connects Buddhism in the foreword of *Mindfulness for Creativity, Adapt, Create and Thrive in a Frantic World*; a publication formulated as a tool kit, with guidance on mindfulness and meditation activity. This publication offers different exercises set to run over a four week period, as such I decided that this would be suitable as the basis of the programme when working with Post-16 drama students at Burnley College UCLAN. For example, week 3 – Resilience, to summarise Penman’s activity - encourages a person to befriend an enemy and to support conflict resolution, however, I adapted this to relate to Stanislavsky’s System, ‘Magic If’ also known as ‘What If’. As an actor following Stanislavsky’s System, it is essential to commit to develop an emotional reservoir to draw upon and to strengthen empathy through posing questions through posing questions, such as, how would I feel? What would I think? How would I behave if I were that person? Penman’s programme provided a structure and ideas, and directly connected with Buddhist mindfulness, although, now, it had become apparent of the association with Stanislavsky’s System and influence taken from Hatha Yoga. Further detail of the adapted programme and the delivery of this project is presented later in the thesis, as part of project outcomes. There are, of course, many methods leading to sources of qualitative data, such as interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, postcards and observations. The project lent heavily towards the latter, observation, although supported through discussion, less formal than an interview. Post-cards were not used, however, students were invited to write thoughts on paper (any size, shape, length), coupled with email (bullet points, words, paragraphs), which provided choice to the participant, furthermore, always on a voluntary basis to alleviate pressure and decrease the demands on the student; although on occasion by invitation following a significant moment. It was intentional to not increase workload for the student through the request of additional written work, such as keeping logbooks or diaries; useful to the researcher, less useful and time consuming to the participant. The creative process in my classroom and in delivering Post-16 drama provision, as with most creative contexts, is predominately practical with underpinning theory, a multi-sensory experience, with interactive pedagogy to meet the needs of all students. Therefore, methodology, akin to the research conducted by Pitches and colleagues, would require several methods to access

truth from diverse participants and their individual experience mindfulness within an actor training programme.

The methodology supported the developed programme and the project, which was a constant moveable feast, and one which would require adaptability due to moments of the unknown. Research unmeasurable at a quantitative level when attempting to access diverse experiences; hence the decision to implement multiple research methods – observation, feedback through discussion and questionnaires.

### **Choice of Research Methods**

The implementation of formal, anonymous, questionnaires were used to capture the participant voice and experiences; questionnaires stored safely at Burnley College UCLAN and only used to inform project outcomes within this thesis. Participants were given the same questionnaire on two occasions, which left sufficient time to allow for development and reflection. The design of the questionnaire provided adequate writing space to enable participants to choose how much to write on personal experiences. This method was supported through observation, which also promoted a reflective dialogue between participants and myself, as researcher-practitioner.

### **Observation as Research Method**

Observation is a significant form of assessment (formative and summative) in Post-16 education, UK, which correlates with methods implemented in the context of this project. As such, the decision was taken that observation was the most accessible method and limited negative impact on an established classroom culture; this allowed for regular analysis on impact and time to adjust my approach, when necessary. Observation is a valid method to gain feedback and is a natural source to understand the human condition, it is essential to observe often to build trust and allow time for natural behaviour to occur.

Time was given to enable participants to adjust to mindfulness activity in the drama studio, prior to undertaking any formal evaluation on impact. The intention was to avoid the participants becoming overly conscious and presenting a 'performance', or doing or saying what they think the observer (researcher) wants to see or hear; which results in invalid information. This was also the reason why audio or visual recordings of participants at work was dismissed as evidence, to reduce self-

consciousness within the participant and to support the maintenance of anonymity and to encourage a freedom of expression within the drama studio. Additionally, to avoid the 'pitfall' of invalid information and to ensure my observations remained close to truth of what each participant revealed within the drama studio. The overall intention was to ensure observations and feedback from discussions, were validated by a third research method in taking participant responses through paper-based questionnaires.

### **Questionnaire as Research Method**

Questionnaires were distributed to participants, to support analysis and to identify any correlations, contradictions and to highlight any contrast within the information gained through observation and discussions. Questionnaires appear in several formats, although at all times, as with any method, should come with caution. From an ethical stance participants may view questionnaires as an intrusion and potentially feel threatened or sensitive towards this research method. In addition, due to the nature of the subject area mindfulness, which places emphasis on mind and body connection, could appear as an invasion of privacy and security with some participants. To counteract these concerns, also stated later in the ethics statement, participants were able to opt out of any activity and at any time, and choose whether to respond to questionnaires, or how much to write, and what type of information to divulge at any point in the project process. This also negates the possibility of participants who may feel coerced to complete the questionnaire; a pitfall Cohen et al (2007) point to 'Questionnaire respondents are not passive data providers for researchers; they are subjects not objects of research' (p 377). A paper-based questionnaire was developed, with open questions phrased around the intentions of the project, structured with care, coupled with open space for participants to write with freedom around feelings, thoughts and experience. With regards to content and presentation of a questionnaire, Cohen et al (2007) state the problems with semi and or unstructured questionnaires can lead to irrelevant or redundant information. 'The larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire may have to be, and the smaller the size of the sample, the less structured, more open and word-based the questionnaire may be' (p 320). At Burnley College UCLAN the sample size was relatively small at 33 participants and, as such, a questionnaire was developed with the needs of the Post-16 student at the forefront. Language and structure were considered and presented to encourage participants to think around

project questions, although, without an agenda attached and without the assumption participants held knowledge or viewpoints around the project. Cohen et al identifies this as a 'dangerous assumption', as such, it was made explicit in my communications with participants, prior to the completion of the questionnaire, that a non-judgmental approach would be taken and all answers were acceptable, including 'no opinion' or 'don't know', or to leave the space blank. However, the greatest strength can be the structure of the questionnaire, as such, the sequence of questions intentionally created a cognitive scaffold effect and built on the previous question to increase deeper thinking around the subject matter. A semi-structured questionnaire was produced to allow freedom and also included the rephrasing of a question to remain inclusive and with the aim to ascertain diverse experiences.

Methods embedded within the Practice as Research are similar to that of Action Research which involves an intervention in an educational context. The intervention in this context being mindfulness practice within the drama studio, at Burnley College / UCLAN, working with trainee actors.

McNiff and Whitehead provide the following description of Action Research (AR):

*A key characteristic of AR as generally understood is that AR is carried out by practitioners. So, in education, AR may typically be undertaken by a teacher.... Empirical research has to be carried out somewhere, in some setting, with some participants (2009 p 208).*

Action Research comparable to Practice as Research, and complemented the project at Burnley College / UCLAN, whilst providing clarity around decisions on methodology, due to the collaboration between myself and the participants. The project aimed to make a lasting effect on the participants and the organisation beyond the completion of the project. In the context of my workplace, the project will contribute to future practice within my own pedagogical delivery, student experience in drama, and to become a shared practice with colleagues across the organisation. Further similarities are viewed with McNiff 'We need to see learning as free, emergent and unfolding'. Akin to the philosophy of mindfulness to finds answers from within and being our own genius, McNiff (2013) goes on to promote 'the answers are within ourselves' (p 7). The project explores mindfulness as a new philosophy and an intervention in the drama studio, with a bespoke programme which intended to alleviate barriers to creativity. For example, breathing meditation was placed at the start of each session to promote relaxation, with discussion afterwards to assess personal states, which would then inform my practice for the rest of the session. In addition, a meditation to extend creative visualisation

received contrasting feedback, which included, a student who became receptive to higher energies and described the sensation as 'I became a vessel to a creative source'. This same student then went on to utilise this experience to develop a character for devised piece. However, in contrast, another student provided feedback and stated the exercise was 'too long'. From this feedback, I ensured activity was long enough to take effect and timed well to keep attention of all participants. This illustrates how methodology remained responsive and flexible to ensure each person remained happy and engaged in the new practice of mindfulness in the drama studio.

### **Ontology and Epistemology**

Choice of research methods were positioned within epistemology and ontology, informed by the nature of the subject, group / participant profile and geographical location. (Appendix A provides further detail on research participants). To categorise a position of ontology was influenced by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2017) taken from a relativist stance where all participant views were considered. The narrative emerged and grew from diverse experiences, where the results, at times, were polar opposite. For example, some students were resistant to new practices and in contrast some students were fully immersed in exploring mindfulness in creative practice. A relativist stance interwoven within a position of epistemology, social constructionist, I worked with the belief that reality does not exist by itself, but is constructed and given meaning by the individual. Therefore, I accepted all feelings, subjective beliefs and the thoughts of each participant presented through their communications and demonstrations. This position of epistemology combined with an ontology stance drove the progression and development of the project.

### **Ethics Statement**

As always, and as professional practice in Post-16 education, a full risk assessment was completed for this project and included the physical and emotional safety and well-being of all student participants. As a teacher and practitioner-researcher, the 'duty of care' policy was in place and implemented, if required. Participants were made aware of possible risks when exploring the self and deeper emotions and informed at the start of each session that participating in the project and activities were all on a voluntary basis, and at any time a participant could choose to sit out of the exercise. At all times, participants were given the option to opt in and out of exercises, or not take part

in the project at all, reiterating at all times this would not disrupt or dilute their experience in the drama training studio. Examples of participants opted not to take part is documented in project outcomes. Participants were monitored closely for any change in both physical and emotional well-being, supported the student profile; a document which indicates additional learning support or health needs of a student.

To provide an example of professional conduct in the delivery of National drama curriculum, the same safety measures are taken when teaching Stanislavsky's System. As mentioned, the System explores the psychophysical, as such, a risk assessment is in place to safeguard the well-being of the Post-16 student.

To ensure and uphold integrity and transparency throughout research activity, participants (and where applicable parents/guardians) were fully informed on the project's purpose and the nature of mindfulness activity. Furthermore, it was made clear how the research would be shared via a final thesis and available for all participants and parents / guardians to view.

As the thesis was written, anonymity remained central when concerning the participants, whilst also allowing the thesis to remain open for further use in other educational contexts; with the intention to widen this practice across the further education sector. As the thesis unfolds it will become apparent that certain participants are referred to, and labelled by a letter, eg - A, B, C, D....again to protect identity and participant's personal health matters or struggles with particular exercises. The participants were encouraged to focus on their studies and to avoid any conflicts of interest, students were reminded that the intention of the project was to enhance their educational experience. I also promoted the benefits of deeper engagement with mindfulness and actor training and the similarities to the work of Stanislavsky.

As always, professional boundaries were in place and the teacher and student relationship instilled at all times to reinforce stability for both parties. Moreover, when necessary and applicable, I referred to Safeguarding and Prevent policies. Each individual participant and their emotional, mental and physical safety remained paramount, along with enjoyment, academic progress and development of their skill set as an actor.

## **Project Outcomes**

This section reports on the process and provides a critical analysis on outcomes, and is divided in two parts:

Part One: Working with Trainee Actors at Burnley College UCLAN.

Part Two: Exploring my own Creative and Performance Practice.

### **Part One: Working with Trainee Actors at Burnley College UCLAN.**

#### **An overview**

Integrating mindfulness within National Post-16 drama curriculum when working with my students has resulted in diverse outcomes. The project provided each participant an introduction to Eastern traditions and practice in mindfulness integrated within an actor training programme. Accountability for student achievement remained paramount within the drama studio, and the intention was for mindfulness to support this. It was, therefore, imperative to effectively plan time and to fulfil the demands of the curriculum, without an increased pressure on participants.

Participants all studying Theatre and Drama on varied qualifications: Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced Level programmes as well as Foundation Degree course. Unfortunately, due to timetabling constraints little mindfulness intervention was offered to the AS and Degree students, however, intervention was offered and, in most cases, progress was made; key learning is provided as the discussion unfolds.

Moyle (2016) also values allocated time for mindfulness within education.

Engaging five to seven minutes of mindfulness training within their weekly lectures and tutorials additionally supported the notion of the inclusion of mindfulness in education settings to enhance students' learning and manage stressful situations more effectively (p 370).

The trainee actors, prior to intervention, arrived with constructed minds and attached to habitual thinking patterns built from internal, environmental or circumstantial factors, thus created distractions in the drama studio. Therefore, it was necessary to address these barriers for the participants to gain a deeper comprehension of the mind, whilst exploring mindfulness in their creative practice. Initial activity acknowledged how the mind works and encouraged participants to gain control through intentional placement of attention, and to detach from unhelpful thought patterns. Initial feedback

from some trainee actors indicated that mindfulness intervention had decreased stress and improved self-awareness and attention, through working consciously and being present in the moment. Initial feedback included 'increased focus', 'gained insight', 'being more mindful', 'being calm' and 'I believe mindfulness is having a mind filled only with the things that matter in the present moment'.

Comparable with Treymayne and Morgan (2016), who define mindfulness as 'being in touch with the present moment. It is also paying attention in an engaged way. Deciding what to pay attention to takes work' (p 389).

### **Planning the Programme**

The programme and activity implemented at Burnley College UCLAN was based on Penman's 'The Creativity Programme' (2015). The author of *Mindfulness for Creativity. Adapt, Create and Thrive in a Frantic World*, offered structured and adaptable exercises easily transferable to drama based qualifications. Penman's programme includes a four-week programme and daily activity, however, due to teacher contact time limitations, exercises were adapted to complement student timetables. Furthermore, rather than conducting activities daily, mindfulness would be practiced in each teaching session and extend beyond Penman's recommendation of seven days; as such, I referred to this as a phase. In addition, other mindfulness activity was included in the drama studio; taking influence and ideas from workshops attended with Chamberlain, Dartnell and Nunez. Worley (2001) was also highly influential, who viewed the studio as, 'a special place set aside for our experiments; other students and teachers are our collaborators and co-creators, beings who require care' (p 38).

A collaborative approach was taken with participants, at Burnley College UCLAN, with the intention to find answers from the group and individual experiences. Penman's programme would aid this and set foundations to build other activity upon. Penman promotes short periods of meditation to alter the mind-set, which can enhance cognitive processing and clarity of mind. Comparable with Treymayne and Morgan (2016), who highlight the benefits in practicing mindfulness as, the actor can gain the ability to intentionally place attention and disengage with mental clutter and external distraction. Similarly, to a participant who described their experience as, 'getting rid of all the negative thoughts that bother you, becoming more relaxed and aware of things, such as your surroundings and feelings'. To gain such benefits Penman recommends to practice mindfulness and meditation exercises beyond the four-week programme and commit to daily activity. However, daily practice

could not be dictated and had to be the choice of the participant. Pleasingly, an AS student reported on extended practice 'told my mum about how good my experiences were so she tried it with me too, trying to relieve stress and complex thoughts'. Another AS student reported 'meditating early evening and floating away'. Similarly, participant A, started using the app Headspace, 'overall, it's really helped me focus on what is important in everyday circumstances. Learning mindfulness meditation has made me want to explore it more, to the point where I now do it before bed every night'. I believe this has helped me de-stress and remind me of what actually is important and what things I'm worrying about over, for no reason'. The participants were keen to alter negative thinking patterns and this was evident in initial feedback presented 'to be less sad' 'stress' 'failure' and 'college work causing this stress' 'work / course worries too much!', all of which could be defined as 'mental clutter'.

However, participant B reported on the positives of mindfulness practice, 'I used to stress over irrelevant things, now I don't – it just makes me feel calm and happy'. Similar to an AS student who gained the ability to, 'relax, pause and take control', and another AS student identified 'made me feel more curious and inquisitive'.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) says the creative person should be curious and inquisitive of the way things are;

Every individual who has made a novel contribution to a domain remembers feeling awe about the mysteries of life and has rich anecdotes to tell about efforts to solve them (p 136).

The project enabled participants to develop an awareness of the self and the ability to change or alter thought patterns, which, in turn, expanded mental capacity and led to the development of new ideas.

The first phase in the drama studio encouraged trainee actors to acquire 'an open but disciplined mind that can gather and then integrate new ideas' Penman (2015 p 3). Whereas the second phase encouraged trainee actors to recognise ideas and their significance. Moving beyond this to phase 3, which encouraged trainee actors to take courage and follow their ideas through a developed resilience to cope with negative set-backs or problems within the creative context. The phases led to an increase in spontaneity and a free flowing body mind through letting go of habitual, negative cognitive processes. Participant B, shared feelings of liberation 'I enjoy meditation. Generally, it has helped me to appreciate the present and loosen my grip, not worrying about what is to come. To be less hard on myself'. One participant described mindfulness as, 'awareness / acceptance / peace',

similar to an AS student who said, 'being aware and calm in the present moment'. Comparable to a definition Penman (2015) provides, 'calm, open hearted and non-judgemental awareness'. One AS participant defined mindfulness as, 'how purely you see the world, without your mind telling you lies'. Comparable with Salzberg (2016) how people use delusion as a protectiveness through 'sheer reflexive reaction to our experience', and mindfulness being the way to break through 'the legends, the myths, the habits, the biases, and the lies that can be woven into our lives' (p 178).

The project at Burnley College UCLAN intended to remove any delusions the trainee actor may hold and to gain the ability to see the self from a more authentic position. Worley (2011) promotes questioning around this, 'What is your connection to the universe? Why do you live? What is real?'. Furthermore, the project encouraged the trainee actor to look inward-directing to support the creative process and to critically question the human condition, all in turn, should enhance the actors skill set in performance.

## **Phase One**

### **Environment and Comfort**

It was essential to create an appropriate environment where participants felt comfortable with the new practice of meditation and to explore their internal landscape. Various options for seating were offered, such as, theatre seats, free standing seating or the floor (with or without yoga mats). Initially, each participant chose where and how to sit, some choosing to sit on the seating provided, or to sit or lay down on the floor, or, alternatively to sit on the floor and rest against the wall.

### **Breathing Meditation**

An introduction to breathing meditation provided participants the time to explore and observe the workings and processes of the mind. Moreover, to identify how attachment to thought patterns drive emotions and the impact on the body; this process is necessary and beneficial to the actor in preparing a role with believability. It should be noted that at any time a participant could leave the meditation and observe; choice being essential throughout the duration of the project. This was noticed at a weekend intensive, Yoga in/as Performance (2016) and the language chosen by a Yogi, who 'invited' us to take part, which suggested non-participation was an option. At the start of each session, at Burnley College UCLAN, I invited participants to find a place in the studio with the

intention to empower participants to take exercises as far as their personal comfort zone would allow. I invited participants to take up a comfortable position, with eyes closed and to acknowledge the body in space, whilst resting palms gently on the lap, raised upwards or placed down. Participants settled, although some found the new start to the lesson different which was noticed in some participants who would fidget and reposition their body, although, eventually, remained in a position of choice. To respond to this, I gently encouraged participants to not 'judge, be compassionate towards yourself, allowing thoughts and feelings to be as they are', to promote self-acceptance. Tcherkasski, (2016) points to this,

Indeed, according to the ideas of the early period of the System and to the views of Ramacharaka, who affirmed the Raja Yoga....holds that the internal world must be conquered before the outer world is attacked' (p 81).

Akin to Stanislavsky (2007) and his ambition to explore the nuances of 'the relationship between our physical lives and our psychological experiences under-pinned Stanislavsky's investigations throughout the whole of his life' (p.5). Stanislavsky developed deeper insight of 'the human being (and, therefore, the actor) referring to this as the 'psychophysical instrument'.

Stanislavsky promoted focus, attention and relaxation as part of the System in preparing an actor for work. Relaxation being essential in preparing the body and mind prior to creative work; imperative before working on the psychophysical attributes of a character. Merlin (2007) confirms this in writing on Stanislavsky, 'If your body is relaxed, your mind usually opens, and then you can lock your focus into the onstage action without any effort whatsoever' (p 33).

The participants at Burnley College UCLAN embraced the start of a new routine, and clearly enjoyed the relaxation and space to breathe.

### **Feedback on Phase One**

As phase one progressed, most participants were comfortable and provided positive feedback, which suggested self-discovery had taken place. Participant B expressed this as 'visibilities of yourself and others, no clouded judgements'. An AS participant found 'escaping and looking at yourself' and an A Level participant stated 'being comfortable in your own mind'; which indicated the trainee actors were looking inward-directing. Several participants shared feedback and defined breathing meditation as a

'reflection on life', 'reflecting on flaws and trying to stop them', 'a way of inner reflection'. Participants became aware at a deeper level, reflected in feedback, 'your mind is full of thoughts' and 'to be in control of your minds activities whether they are positive or negative thoughts. To find balance and stability'.

Comparable with training the athlete in the application of mindfulness, Si, Lo and Zhang (2016) share the importance of 'insight' and 'awareness or discovery of life'. Furthermore 'when an individual establishes a new understanding of his or her meaning of life and personal value, which strengthens his or her ability to face a variety of life and personal challenges' (p 248). These attributes being highly beneficial to the trainee actor in knowing the self and, in turn, a gained insight into the human condition.

The trainee actor is faced with various challenges, which includes responding to multiple theatrical elements, stage fright, remembering lines, moves, stage positions, working within the ensemble. Breathing meditation helped participants to develop an approach to relaxation, yet remain alert, with a flexibility when placing attention. This was reflected in participant's feedback on phase one 'feeling good about yourself and your situation', 'relaxed and positive', and 'it's a chance not to care and focus'.

As phase one and breathing meditation continued, the participants were quiet and focused, the environment supported this with lights lowly lit but all was visible. A ten-minute breathing meditation was offered, commencing with the external, inviting participants to acknowledge the environment, and to take note of the room temperature, sounds, smells, although not to be drawn in, but to let them be. This exercise correlates directly with Stanislavsky's 'circle of attention', and encouraged the trainee actors to become attuned with the various elements within the studio, and to increase awareness of what they allowed into their circle of attention. This part of the exercise provided opportunity to retrain the autopilot and encourage the trainee actors to abandon habitual thought processes, and to be conscious of distractions. Penman's and Williams (2011) refer to the autopilot and reference Psychologist, Daniel Simons, who explains 'the extent to which we miss seemingly obvious things through automatically paying attention elsewhere' (p 68). Two participants referred to this meditation as 'almost like resetting your brain' and 'clarity of mind and body. Awareness of surroundings'. As breathing meditation progressed participants were asked to become curious towards the breath, its

anatomical process and the sensations associated, whilst noticing the expansion of lungs, the rib cage and the slight pause before exhalation. The participants were invited to observe the temperature of the air as it entered through the tip of the nose, and at the same time, to be aware when the mind wanders as it starts to think and build perceptions or make judgments. In response to this, I softly explained, 'be compassionate and do not criticise yourself, acknowledge the mind has wandered, and label this as 'thinking, thinking' or 'wandering, wandering'; and to gently escort the focus and attention back to the breath. Guidance taken directly from Penman's programme to decrease the actor's inner critical voice through intentional placement of attention.

### **Challenged by the Breathing Meditation**

It became apparent participant C was unable to undertake breathing meditation and found it difficult to keep his eyes closed. This particular student transferred onto the A Level course, from another College, and, as such, relocated from a different part of the country in an attempt to build bridges with his father.

He initially joined in with the breathing meditation, although as instructions were given an awkwardness and an unease appeared in his body. This participant closed his eyes for only a few moments before the distress manifested in the body, fidgeting, moving legs, and arms moving forward and backwards, head tilting and in constant motion. As practitioner-researcher, it was important to sustain observation of each participant and monitor difficulties faced or rejection of mindfulness practice. It was clear participant C was unable to be within his own internal narrative, as such, it was necessary that I intervened and stopped the negative experience. I gently placed my hand on his right shoulder to instigate communication as I whispered 'are you ok?' which was returned with the participant tapping his head as a visual sign of mental distress. This prompted a dialogue between myself and the student after the lesson where he was able to open up, 'personal depression and anxiety made some exercises distressing. Uncomfortable in myself', and, 'I can't deal with what's going on in my head'. Meditation and mindfulness activity was not helpful or the correct form of support for this person, at this stage in his life. Participant C independently chose moments when, and when not to take part in future meditations. Participant C, throughout the A Level course displayed angst and anxiety which prevented him from taking part in silent breathing meditations as his internal dialogue was too powerful to overcome without increased training in discipline and a developed

resilience. This was also apparent in his work as a trainee actor with attendance issues and unable to commit to the group, with constant visible distress and tension in the body, a lack of eye contact, or any control over his emotional states. This also translated through his work on stage and similar characteristics appeared in the roles he played. He lacked control of his mind and emotional state, therefore this was apparent in characters prepared and performed.

As a teacher, from this experience, I learnt the importance of the duration participants spend in practice and to firmly establish mindfulness in the studio culture; and to remain patient, to persevere and provide choice to the participant. Furthermore, mindfulness activity increased a dialogue with students from an empathic stance, for example, participant C resulted in increased communications with his tutor and the College counsellor to support his mental health.

### **Closing the Breathing Meditation**

To bring the breathing meditation to a close was completed in gentle manner, yet with a more energised vocal state. Participants were invited to conduct a body scan and to bring their attention to the feet, moving up the body, shifting attention to the limbs, torso, shoulders, head and face; again redeploying attention, although had now evolved to a more energised state. Participant A explained how the body scan benefitted her as an actor, 'during meditation we were asked to breath and feel certain aspects of the body, like our toes, legs, chest, head. I didn't realise how separate these body parts were from each other or how different they all felt from one another. The exercise helped me single out my body parts and feel different sensations, which has enabled me to focus on what my body wants to be doing in my next performance, how much energy is needed to show performance intentions'. Similarly to participant D, who highlighted, 'pin pointing body parts, never realised you could feel things individually'. Physical awareness through isolating body parts is critical for the training actor who is required to sense and control each body part when acting.

To come out of the meditation participants were invited to intentionally place their attention on the external and to move out of themselves, through reconnecting with sounds and the temperature of the room, and to sense the space around them. This, again, widened the focus held by the trainee actor in their circle of attention; intrinsic to Stanislavsky's System. Finally, participants were asked to open their eyes and digest the view in front of them. Participants opened their eyes at variant intervals, which indicated the force of the meditation and with what ease a participant could release themselves

from the meditative state. I learnt from this that some participants were zoning out / sleepy and too relaxed to then move onto drama curriculum and this required attention before phase two. However, in discussion participants expressed positive outcomes, 'enjoyed time out', 'brain space', 'time' and 'the ability to relax'. From this learning, I adjusted activity to encourage participants to find balance between a relaxed state, with a sustained alertness throughout practice; which was made explicit at the start of each meditation.

### **Emotional Check-in**

An activity I took part in at the workshop 'Small Exercises in Performance and Mindfulness' (2016), delivered by Chamberlain, art materials were provided to participants to record feelings and thoughts. To ensure participants were comfortable with their own internal narrative and experiences, I took the essence of this exercise and adapted to the project at Burnley College UCLAN. Rather than art materials I asked participants to conduct an emotional weather map, which required participants to compare their emotional deposition to the weather; which provided an accessible language for the Post-16 student to communicate their feelings. This also highlighted the inconsistency of weather, comparable with the complexity of emotions as a result from the conditions set within the mind. This exercise demonstrated psychophysical process within the human condition, and awareness of the internal presented through body and voice; once again, clear parallels with the role of the actor. This exercise enabled a participant to understand the psyche of a character; one A Level student said 'I now start to prepare a character inside-out, I used to begin from the outside with no attention to the inside'. Participants responded well to this activity, and described feelings 'low like grey sky', of feeling 'happy as sunshine', or just 'ok like grey clouds'. Dependant on feedback I would alter my approach to the rest of lesson taking into consideration students emotive states.

### **Feedback on phase one**

Feedback indicated discovery had taken place within most participants, which included 'focusing on breathing and relaxing' 'focusing on the breath, being comfortable, relaxing the mind' 'controlling your breath and focusing the mind' 'calm activity in switching off distraction and becoming completely focused on the mind and body' and 'on your own concentrating on nothing but the breath'.

Furthermore, 'meditation is when you relax and are clear thinking' 'allowing the mind to rest, and to

calm yourself' 'meditation is an energy and relaxation' 'positive breathing to calm yourself' 'peace in oneself – finding a quiet place to calm – open up' and 'calming the mind'.

However, continued practice was necessary, as one participant shared mixed feelings and suggested regular practice was essential, 'meditation to me, is a focus exercise, clearing the mind of thought. This is mostly effective for me but sometimes I struggle to focus'.

Participants had gained insight and awareness, with an acceptance of feelings as they are, and the ability to notice when focus was weak; all of which informed future practice. Breathing meditation promoted relaxation but also encouraged positive self-acceptance, important to the actor where trial, error, and where exploration of alternative pathways was required to support divergent thinking; essential to expand imagination and creativity.

### **Learning from Phase One**

As the project progressed alterations were made in support of the trainee actors, who tended to become lethargic following meditation. These were predominantly AS students who chose to lay on the floor and, on occasion, would fall asleep. It was noted during a reflective discussion that participants were not getting the recommended eight hours sleep and technology posed a significant distraction. This resulted in some participants using meditation to promote a sleepiness which impacted on participants energy, ability to place attention, or to get up and 'do' following 'being' in meditation. Of course, meditation can be of great benefit as a pre-sleep activity or when the mind is unsettled and requires time to relax and process. However, in the drama studio context, relaxation is promoted, although, balanced with an alertness in preparation for creative practice. This was also confirmed in feedback, which included 'calming down, relaxing' 'relaxing, exiting the worries of your mind' 'more focused, sometimes feel sleepy' 'distracted/tired' 'tired' and 'very tired and not so focused, but relaxed'. I altered my approach to increase an alertness and openness, and, as such, each participant was asked, rather than invited, to meditate in an upright position; holding some tension but within a relaxed state. Penman recommends sitting on a straight-backed chair and to adopt an alert but dignified posture with your spine about 2-3cm from the back. This was critical for a particular participant who suffered with back problems and initially forced himself to sit on the floor in an uncomfortable position, thus gained nothing but pain to focus on. As such, it was essential to meet the physical as well as emotional needs of the participants throughout the project.

Furthermore, I altered my vocal delivery to bring a more alert tone to the delivery of instructions, with intentional use of pace, pause and timing; all implemented to reinforce the alert state participants should hold. People comment regularly how soothing my voice can be in the delivery of guided meditation, although this had clearly contributed to some sleepy participants. The following points were raised regarding my vocal expression 'It's more relaxing as you're never stressed and always calm' 'Yes, nice and slowly = better reflection time' 'In a soft and thoughtful way, the voice helps me to calm' 'I believe the language used is completely fine, it helps me understand and respond correctly' 'Yes, motivated – positive – encouraging – not stressful!'. In response to this, I retained positive language, although, now, with an alertness in my vocal delivery of instructions 'In meditation remain alert and aware, yet using the breath to promote relaxation in body and to focus your attention'. With a continued sensitivity in the voice, to support an openness in teacher student relationship and to continue to promote a mutual respect within the revised studio culture. There was a genuine shift in culture and an increased openness, and as teacher I had become more relaxed and taking in more detail about the students; although always from a professional stance. Bush (2013) reports on similar findings and references an educationalist who found 'the most rewarding aspect of the course was the permission I gave myself to be more open, more informal, and more personal than I sometimes am as a teacher' (p 19).

Initial breathing meditation was now firmly established in the studio and provided a formal start to each session with participants naturally positioned in a dignified, upright position ready to focus the mind; relaxed, yet alert, all in support of the participants creative practice.

## **Phase Two**

Week two – Create, from Penman's – The Creative Programme was adapted with the aim to explore diverse perspectives and acknowledge potential bias within the mind. The intention was to provide the trainee actors with the ability to reposition their lens on society and extend empathy; an essential skill and attribute of an actor when preparing a role. This phase involved Penman's Sounds and Thoughts meditation and correlated with Stanislavsky's 'circle of attention'. The activity invited the trainee actors to pay close attention to the given or new circumstance through closely monitoring the inner landscape in response to external factors; acknowledging how the participants respond to the world around them. Penman (2015) illustrates this 'we never experience an objectively real world: we

do not see it in photographic detail' (p 80). The author goes on to state how this can cause trouble as we are forced to make sense of the world with 'incomplete and confusing information'. There are potential pitfalls if the trainee actor does not exercise the ability to view themselves and others differently, as such, internal narratives become ridged due to a lack of flexibility within the mind, and can, therefore, become a barrier to effective creative practice. Penman (2015) concurs and states that we have become disillusioned by our internal narrative and there is a need to de-bias the mind and to see diverse possibilities within a creative opportunity. Penman draws our attention to a previous study at Leiden University in the Netherlands, where the connection was made between meditation and divergent thinking, 'the type of thinking that helps new ideas and underpins great art, design, science and engineering' (p 83).

Phase Two started just as Phase One, Participant A described the regular start to the session, including the body scan, as 'feeling of sleeping yet still awake and picking out body parts to feel. Clearer and more awake, softened attitude to working'. Each phase would begin in the same way and to grow accustomed to the new routine and training in the studio, with the intention to settle and focus participants with a 90 second breathing meditation, prior to extended meditation activity in preparation for curriculum based work in drama. Sounds and Thoughts meditation encouraged the trainee actor to be present and to connect to thoughts as we do with sound, and to acknowledge their arrival, allowing them to pass through without attachment; whilst observing the gaps and silence in between. It is within this silence the creative voice can emerge and rise out of the background noise. Furthermore, this provides a trainee actor with the opportunity to become inquisitive around thoughts and ideas. Penman (2015) states that this 'allows your deep subconscious to effectively process information, reformulate problems, capture the essence of an idea and conjure up solutions' (p 87).

Participants were invited to 'listen and acknowledge sounds in the space, or within the body, such as the rush of blood through the ears, or the sound of the beating heart; whatever the sound, allow them just to be'. This exercise demonstrated that we have no control over the sound in the environment, although we can choose where to place attention. The participants were invited to explore the detail in the soundscape and invited to focus on the rise and fall, the texture, timbre, pitch, tone, volume, moving further into the sound, listening for pauses, silence, and any undercurrent. Listening being an essential skill as an actor and to sustain control of focus and attention, through listening to the content within the silence. My guidance to support this, included 'not to become drawn in or label the sound,

simply accept and allow the sound to travel and pass through, over and around'. Participants were invited to retranslate this exercise and observe their own thoughts in the same way, and to acknowledge thoughts stay for a while, and some dissolve instantly, whilst others impact on emotions. At regular intervals participants were encouraged to bring attention to the breath and to move attention fluidly between traveling thoughts, the breath and sounds. This exercise intended to train the participant to shift awareness and acknowledge the impact on the emotional landscape. At the same time, I reassured participants 'its ok to think', with occasional reminders to bring attention back to a sound or, find the novelty in thoughts and ideas that may arise; thus, in turn, explore the depths of the subconscious. Penman (2015) states 'your deep subconscious to more effectively process information, reformulate problems, capture the essence of an idea.' (p 87).

### **Phase Two – Participant Feedback**

There were many positive points of feedback, which included 'where I came out of it clear minded. Helps see things without a stressed mind. Helped me creatively, seeing new ideas for our devised piece, such as soil and white tree' 'It allowed me to calm myself and stop stresses, noticing detail of my thoughts' 'being at peace with myself, being able to close my eyes & feel calm instead of being scared to be on my own, controlling what I focus on' 'allowing all bad thoughts to leave your body replacing them with good ones. Breathing in and out' 'I believe meditation is the unloading of all thoughts that cloud the mind' 'I feel less stressed about exams, understand I can only do one thing at a time'. Others reported on Phase Two as, 'helped my focus and decreased stress, has helped me deal with problems' 'accepting how I feel & not judging my thoughts' 'I've learnt to think of better things, ideas, rather than my problems'. A Level participants in discussion said they found gaps within sounds and thoughts was where ideas came to the surface. For example, one participant recalls 'exploring the character who displays anxiety, I was able to visualise the character through the colour red, exploring this imagining physicality shaking, staccato like'.

### **Learning from Phase Two**

However, some participants were not fully engaged or benefited from this phase, one AS student reported 'on the whole, not really', and an A Level participant had gained 'nothing'. It was also noted that two participants found challenge to move inside the self, an AS student recalls 'not too good, I think about my regrets during meditation', and participant D reported difficulty, 'made me think about a

lot, so much, maybe too much'; which suggested there was a need for further training of attention placement and self-acceptance. It had also become apparent through observation, Foundation Theatre and Performance students were not taking to meditations, possibly due to a lack of regular practice and only teaching this group one lesson per week. There was a lack of discipline with the Foundation Theatre and Performance group and a dependency on me, as their teacher, for ideas and inspiration; as such, it was necessary to alter my approach. Initially, meditation was offered, but only on three occasions, and like the AS and A2 groups, there was an enjoyment of escapement and relief from feeling stressed, although, it did not extend beyond this with the Degree students / participants. Participant F confirmed this in a conversation, 'I enjoyed the meditation, and the breathing is supporting a more relaxed state, it's even helping with my asthma, I'm less panicked'. In contrast, participant E, mentioned a busy mind, 'during the meditations I found it fairly calming at the beginning, but when going deeper I started to become more agitated as I couldn't release the monkey mind'. Núñez (2016) spoke of the monkey mind, also taken from Buddhist imagery, although he referred to this as 'taming the wild horses of the mind'; as in training the mind with intentional placement of attention and focus.

The Foundation Degree participants did not engage fully or deal with the feelings that came to the surface during Phase One, and, as such, they continued to repeat cycles induced by chaotic thought patterns and continually being distracted by their own internal narrative. Penman (2015) also acknowledges this 'there is a fine line between taking a curious and playful interest in your thoughts and becoming seduced by them' (p 96). As such, in addition to the Sounds and Thoughts meditation, other activities were offered, inspired by Núñez and Chamberlain, Taking influence from the work at the Núñez workshop, 2016, 'Swimming in the Inner Source', contemplative running was undertaken at the start of each session with the Degree students and at intervals, with the intention to generate communion, group ensemble discipline and energy. At the start of a session, participants would join in with running, intuitively formulating a circle, finding a group rhythm and pace; the breath naturally becoming closely aligned with the rhythm. Similarly, Stanislavsky was interested in connections between altered breathing patterns combined with muscular memory, in turn, igniting an actor's emotions. Merlin (2009) also recognizes this, 'It's not a trick: it's just another way of working psychophysically, this time outside in' (p 35). However, Foundation Degree students were still unable to connect to this contemplative activity and rejected this practice. This was evident in excuses given

'I smoke', 'I'm unfit', 'I'm dizzy', some would run but continued to chat, laughing and joking, making comments 'why are we doing this?'. Although, participant E expressed, 'when running it agitated me as I constantly focused on a pattern and the rhythm and when it went out of time it annoyed me, although it also soothed at the same time'. This suggested further work was required around control, discipline and work on flexibility when things don't go as expected. I remained determined and continued to work with this group and included other activities in the form of small drama exercises taken from a workshop held by Chamberlain (2016); which I refer to as 'Feathers, Balls & Scarves'. Feathers were used to bring about concentration and develop fluidity between being and doing, and to train placement of attention; it was also another attempt to develop a group ethos. The Degree participants would simply play with a feather with the aim to keep it afloat and to place their attention to it. Participants were asked to observe the feather and detail, such as rise and fall, shapes created, pace and timings, very much the same as observing sounds and thoughts, although, now a mind and body in motion training activity. I extended this activity with participants working in pairs, participant E recalls the benefits to actor training as, 'it helped me focus as I was concentrating on keeping the feather up, but also being imaginative in coming up with new ideas in how to pass the feather to my partner'. Participant E provided further advice on how to develop this activity further 'I believe if we had kept swapping partners we could have thought of new ways to keep the feather afloat'. Clearly, participant E was looking for the novelty in a simple focusing activity, whilst being open to other possibilities. This exercise promoted divergent thinking in some participants, and again, parallels with Stanislavsky and the System can be found through partner work and the need expand the trainee actor's circle of attention to include others. A discussion was held with this group about this exercise to identify what skills were gained, these were: focus, reducing distractions and eliminating nerves. Stanislavsky developed the fourth wall and 'circle of attention' based on mindfulness principles, and alike to the feather activity, Stanislavsky would advise training to be 'physical and fun: that's the key. Concentration of attention is about finding something physical and doing it with a sense of ease'. Merlin, 2007 (p 38). Finally, there was a sense of fun in the drama studio for this particular group, developed through physical and active exercises, which also supported the development of focus and discipline; essential skills for the trainee actor. This group were challenged by inward-directed work, and I believe this to be due to fear when attempting new approaches, as well as levels of maturity; although also due to time constraints the group could not see or feel the benefits.

### **Mindfulness – expanding the ‘Circle of Attention’**

The AS and A Level groups were much more receptive and demonstrated focus, discipline and full engagement with mindfulness activities offered. As such, to further expand circle of attention and to develop the ensemble I introduced 3ft long bamboo sticks into practice. Each participant physically connected by a stick, which was held by the index fingertip. The stick was held with some tension to prevent the stick from being dropped, although participants were advised to remain relaxed in body and mind. To increase the challenge, groups were invited to close their eyes and to sense the movement of each other through the sticks. Participants were guided to focus on the breath meditatively, and to increase self-awareness, and to access intuition. This created fun, whilst it also enhanced communion and ensemble, both necessary for theatre and performance work. When sticks were dropped, some participants sustained focus, whereas others dropped their stick and laughed. Afterwards, the group drew parallels with performance work as in if someone loses focus and the impact on the company, or an actor drops a line or doesn't go with planned material. As such, the participants decided it was necessary to move inward and reduce their circle of attention, whilst also providing support to fellow actors. There was a discussion held with participants about this exercise and how it increased energy, presence and a stronger sense of one another; characteristics essential within an ensemble.

### **Phase Three**

Due to self-preservation humans have a tendency to become emotionally averse and Penman states that this is a result from listening to the inner critic. This adversity impacts negatively on emotions and, sadly, drives us to close down to new opportunities and ideas. This can be detrimental in the drama studio where openness to new ideas and taking risks are necessary to promote divergent thinking and doing. Penman (2015) states that ‘Such emotional aversion closes down the mind, reduces creativity and leaves behind it a deep-seated sense of fear and caution’ (p 108). We can tend to avoid relating to our feelings until it is too late, which can result in a less experienced life. The trainee actor at Burnley College UCLAN was encouraged to fully embrace all emotions felt through in phase 3 and through practicing Penman's resilience meditation. This phase intended to improve emotional engagement and regulation, whilst in turn, supported main course content - Stanislavsky's ‘What if’ and ‘Emotional Memory / recall’.

The phase invited participants to investigate their emotional reservoir and possible aversion to more complex feelings, with the overarching aim to embrace and accept all feelings, and ultimately, to explore what it is to be human. Phase three supported this with a full exploration of the mind and body correlations, extending to participants gaining some control in attachment and non-attachment to emotions felt. Participants were invited to deepen their understanding of the intersection between mind and emotions within the body. The session started with bringing attention to the external, and moved to the body scan, followed by a 90 second breathing meditation to continue to train the mind and settle each participant; and promoted a relaxed, yet alert state. Following this, the trainee actors were asked to use their imagination or 'emotional recall', and to sense the feeling love in the body, along with kindness and compassion for a loved one. I invited participants to wish their loved one good things through expressing 'may they be safe and free from suffering, may they feel happy and healthy, may they live with ease, safe and fulfilled' Penman (2015). Participant responses were positive, therefore, I extended this activity to participants showing love to themselves, and to replace 'they' with 'I'. Taking part in this meditation participants started to fully embrace their emotional range and to ignite feelings within the body through imagination. There are clear parallels with Penman's exercise and Stanislavsky's 'what if', where the actor would ask 'what would I feel or think or do if I were that person or in that situation? How do I feel when feeling love? Example questions that are important to the actor who wish to play various roles and display complex emotions.

### **Progress and initial feedback on phase three**

Most participants were able and comfortable to feel and offer love towards themselves, evidenced in feedback, 'escaping and looking at yourself' 'I accept myself' 'kept me believing in myself'. 'Saying positive things about myself in meditation has helped confidence'. Feedback also demonstrated an increased confidence and self-belief, such as 'no longer judge & repress my thoughts. I just let them be' and participant G reported 'less hard on myself'. Additional feedback included 'to remain positive as you are the only one in control of your thoughts', and beautifully phrased by another participant as, 'I am more at peace with myself and the future'. Participants described the effect of this meditation as 'positive breathing to calm yourself' 'Internal, focused, personal, thought provoking, calm' and 'feel a complete sense of my own internal thoughts and struggles, and being able to channel to a sense of calming relaxation'. This suggested the participants had gained insight, awareness, and control, along with an enhanced self-esteem and grown confidence; therefore with an enhanced connection

between mind and body. It was noted by a participant that the studio environment was one of positivity, where 'we can naturally share feelings, and support one another'; which suggested a strengthened communion. Participant B enjoyed this meditation, feeding back, 'Positive - you are kind, you are caring, and I felt intrinsically happy. Regarding creativity, it made my mind at ease so I could work and focus more on placement of feelings, such as a warmth within my chest and tummy'. Participant B went on to use and extend this exercise in the development of a role, as a mum struggling with her child, which was achieved through a gained and deeper insight into the imagined mind set and emotions associated with this character. However, participant G, who struggled with anxiety, expressed 'I mostly feel like I don't work hard enough or that I'm not as good as some people'. At this point, participant G was unable to place attention elsewhere other than on self-criticism, fuelled by comparing himself to others. Following this meditation, I held a discussion with the group where participant G opened up further and demonstrated progress had been made, 'I dissected the meditation and understood the importance of placement of attention, and rather than comparing myself to others which fuelled self-criticism, I started to offer kindness towards others, which helped with my empathy'. At the end of phase 3, participant G summarised his progress in feeling more positive 'Meditation seems to have helped me feel less like this'. Participant G had started to change his internal truth and, in turn, this had impacted positively on his position within the group and his approach to acting. Directly connected to Stanislavsky's System and emotional recall, Merlin (2007) states, 'Stanislavsky was arguably the first person to systematise natural (and often unconscious) human responses and organise them into something which could be consciously applied to the artifice of acting' (p 4).

There were underlying issues with participant G, which I did account for in every session and involved the College health practitioner, Whelan, who reported, 'Lorraine, interestingly he mentioned he has found the meditation really helpful!'.

Baltzell (2016) used the term, 'performance dukkha', defined as internal suffering through a negative mind-set and self-criticism which impacts on external performance. In relation to the athlete, although, applicable to the actor, Baltzell prescribes Compassionate Mind Training, a process to self sooth, before a person can address the external. This would require the athlete or performer to recall a moment where success and positive affirmation was experienced and suggests this 'focuses on helping cultivate self-kindness, warmth, and support for self when facing difficult emotions'. In all

sessions beyond phase 3, it became important for the participants to offer love and kindness towards themselves and to develop a more positive narrative within the mind, prior to creative work.

Participants started to see and feel the world differently through altered thinking patterns, as one participant expressed 'to reach a state of calmness where you are able to live purely and to control a particular emotional state' and 'to me it is a way of taking a step out of everyday life and reflecting on what humans do'. A trainee actor is required to hold the ability to recall past experiences and memories, or use imagination to generate relevant emotions in the performance of a character. In the resilience meditation participants cultivated love for others and returned this back to themselves; the outcome of this training enabled participants to develop acceptance and emotional control.

### **Progressing with Phase Three**

It had become apparent that some participants enjoyed feeling settled and positive, however some found it difficult to generate positive thoughts and feelings. This informed me that more work was required to enable the trainee actors to access a wide range and emotional deep reservoir to draw upon. Penman's resilience meditation, with a slight adjustment, intended to expand the emotional depth and capacity to strengthen the trainee actor's skill set. I invited participants to bring to mind three attributes about themselves and encouraged individuals to be less averse to diverse emotions and to dampen the inner critique. Feedback from participants was positive 'made me more confident, happier' 'I've learnt to stay positive and accept other feelings' 'I feel more focused, content & chilled'. Correlating with Baltzell (2016) who states 'we owe more to athletes and performers than just helping them learn to jump higher or perform better – the quality of their experience matters too' (p 73).

Within Post 16 education support is central to the success of every student and it had become clear, through application, that mindfulness practice in the drama studio had a positive impact on most trainee actors experience and self esteem. Participant's feedback included 'Sat on chair. Repeatedly said good thoughts. Loved feeling good about my life – showed myself love – let bad thoughts float away' 'made me feel good as I could keep them to myself, Meditation keeps me from not being bothered about what other people think whilst I'm acting / coming up with ideas'; this suggested a developed resilience. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) suggests we must loosen the shackles of society and stop pursuing external rewards, reclaiming experience, 'through control over consciousness, which in turn leads to control over quality of experience' (p 22). Participants had started to reclaim an internal

reward system through the exploration of feelings, without self-judgement, which, in turn, improved the environment and participants sharing without fear of negative criticism from the self and others.

### **Challenged by compassion**

Stanislavsky's System has a central focus for an actor to access and use a full range of emotions, Merlin (2007) writes 'the beautiful voice and versatile body, they also needed an accessible emotional reservoir' (p 158).

To access the emotional reservoir participants were invited to bring to mind a person who they had little contact with, but who they may see from time to time and repeat, 'may they be safe....'

Participants responded with no problem or difficulty when thinking about another person and to generate feelings through a specific narrative within the mind; again, observing the interconnection between body and mind. Interestingly, Participant C, who could not close his eyes in breathing meditation, found it impossible to say positive things about himself, but, was able to feel gratitude towards his group, he wrote, 'one expression, expressing love for our groups'. In group sharing he revealed deeper feelings 'I'm grateful for the welcome my group have given me since moving here and starting at this College'. The inner critic was softening, also recognised by Penman (2015) 'Your inner critic is doing its best to protect you by erecting barriers to keep out any signs of weakness' (p 117). There were no signs of weakness with the A Level group in sharing feelings of gratitude, and the benefits were immense, such as, emotional engagement and a stronger sense of ensemble and communion. The A Level group gained the ability to work past group conflict through intentional placement of attention and energy in the creative process. Participant A shared, 'lying down, being aware of the breath – love for myself & appreciation for group. Accepting of myself and others – ready to create. My willingness to listen to others – accept everyone's ideas – also less distracted'. Moreover, I arrived at the drama studio prior to the start of a lesson to find the AS group offering each other positive affirmations; mindfulness activity had extended beyond formal studio time and practice. However, in contrast, when invited to bring to mind a person who they may have conflict with or didn't like, there were mixed responses. Interestingly, A Level students were able to cultivate positive thoughts, and as an example, a group of three actors were in the process of devising a piece of expressionism, and faced attendance issues with one particular trainee actor; this is not uncommon in Post-16 education. Participant B, a high achiever, who placed great demands on herself and others,

reported back after the resilience meditation 'thinking about someone I didn't get along with in meditation helped me gain control of my frustration, made me realise that all I can do is try to understand their position, rather than feel negative towards them, coming from an empathic stance'. Following the activity in discussion participant B, summarised her experience 'I brought to mind my fellow group member and transferred empathy and compassion in her direction. I felt less angry and frustrated and began to let go of controlling her actions, but control my response. It has made me realise I can choose where to place my attention which informs what I feel and how I work with others in rehearsal'. Some trainee actors had acquired emotional regulation and the ability to cultivate feelings through imagination and 'what if; this is an incredible skill to hold as an actor. From this two participant's extended the meditative practice to devise material around the theme of 'greed'. Greed became the focus of the meditation, where the students started from seated position, although also moved as the mind manifested the subject matter; this was then used as material to work from in the drama rehearsal. The results were apparent in the material generated, greed manifested in student actor's bodies and voices; living and breathing the emotions around the stimuli presented in the mind.

I asked the AS participants if there were any meditations or mindfulness activity they didn't like? One participant said 'the one when we had to befriend' 'I didn't enjoy the meditation where we were told to think about friends + people you dislike. Thinking of people I dislike made me have a negative mind-set', similar to another participant' 'I didn't enjoy the befriending one. Made me feel uncomfortable' 'the befriending one – because I didn't want to wish someone well who I really didn't like'. Penman writes around a case study, 'I kept on finding myself veering between anger and feelings of guilt (for feeling angry), and then a deep sadness would set in'. Similar to an AS participant 'I didn't enjoy the one where we had to think about a person we loved & a person we didn't like – made me feel sad & angry with myself'. This suggested this participant was able to create emotions through attachment to a particular mind set, although the next step was for the participant to learn how to detach from those feelings; a necessary skill set for the actor but healthy for a person to have too.

The feedback from both the A and AS group informed me when and when not to take an exercise further dependant on the response from a trainee actor. As such it was necessary to provide certain exercise multiple times to allow time for the participant to gain control, in attachment and detachment, when working with the emotions; with the aim to do so with a sense of ease.

### **Phase Three continued**

Other drama games were offered that integrated mindfulness to enhance the programme; taking influence from Chamberlain and the symposium held at Huddersfield University, 2016. The simple task of a ball being passed and caught to generate focus, communion, placement of attention and to promote fluidity between the 'being' and 'doing' mode. I extended this exercise to support the A Level drama trainee actor's curriculum to development of their theatrical terminology and creative ideas. I asked the group to form a circle and together to throw and catch to keep the ball in motion, finding rhythm and flow, with an aim to integrate enjoyment and challenge. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggests we free up creative energy through diverting attention from the main goal or task.

To further extend the activity the recipient after catching the ball, to appreciate the moment and to increase capacity in focus and attention. Participant B articulated the creative flow 'numbed my conscious mind, let spontaneity flow, and hearing other ideas encouraged my own thoughts and ideas develop'. Similarly, participant D expressed less self-criticism, 'Instantaneous ideas – allowing me to say any ideas without the time to think about whether or not it would be acceptable'. This suggested the creative voice had risen above the inner critic and allowed ideas to surface. This same exercise was extended further through passing multiple balls, with the aim to increase concentration and attention, and to develop the creative flow through increased challenge, with enjoyment. One participant identified 'throwing multiple balls - helped concentration, like a longer meditation'.

To increase the stretch, challenge and enjoyment further, participants were invited to recall a theatrical word when the ball was caught; to replace the pause with a word. Amusingly, this resulted in balls flying in every direction, through sheer panic and overthinking, which also released the inner critic, 'I can't do this', 'it's too difficult', 'I don't know any drama terminology'. Through playing with multiple balls I renamed the game 'balls of compassion', with a group consensus to through with compassion; very much how the actor should be in ensemble performance work. Furthermore, I recalled previous learning from Phase One - breathing meditation and, when necessary, to increase and decrease attention and the 'circle of attention'.

To expand on this activity I replaced the theatrical word with creative ideas, to encourage free flow and spontaneity. Lots of ideas came about due to the participants being less conscious of the need to think before speaking, which in turn allowed body and mind to correlate. There were pauses,

laughter, silences, however, ideas were generated, and from this activity participants returned to their creative group to make material based on these ideas. This exercise reiterated to the participants to work without judgment of others, self-criticism and to accept silence, allowing a sense of freedom and flow to emerge, as well as generating new ideas for material. Positive feedback included 'Ball enjoyed' 'the ball throwing' 'breathing exercises, ball and feather'. In the discussion held afterwards participants summarised, 'it's ok to drop the ball'; the exercise had created an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion. As the teacher, it informed me when a student was not focused adjusted accordingly, prior to proceeding with curriculum based content.

#### **Phase Four**

An adaptation of Week Four, Penman's The Creative Programme - Insight, which encouraged participants to work at a deeper level around the creative cognitive process. Phase four involved a meditation to encourage participants to continue to acknowledge and move away from the bias of the mind and the familiar, and to find new ways to work and seek out ideas.

As always, we started with 90 seconds of breathing meditation to soften the internal landscape and focus the mind, prior to a longer period of meditation practice. Penman prescribes 20 minutes for the insight meditation, however due to classroom time restrictions, meditation practice was extended, although only to 15 minutes, as not to impact on main course curriculum delivery. Through longer periods of meditation, participants acknowledged thoughts as they arrived and left, which allowed for the subconscious to emerge, or when distracted to return focus to the breath to regain focus and, in turn, reducing circle of attention. It was noticed how positive and receptive most participants were to longer periods of meditation, and in particular, there was a developed curiosity around mind and body connections. Participants feedback suggested a curiosity, 'reflecting on stress and wondering why I get sad, exploring this in myself and others' 'it's made me look at things differently and don't over exaggerate situations, finding truth in my emotions and the situation'. Participants had gained a deeper understanding through self-analysis and to question their own behaviour and thought processes, whilst, in turn, to question what it is to be human. Worley (2001) suggests actors can feel liberated through exploring the 'character' we have created in life, 'since the study of acting begins by studying yourself and your actions' (p 36). However, some participants were not yet ready to look at themselves with such honesty and this reflected in feedback provided by an A Level participant who

expressed, 'usually regrets when its silent meditation – made me feel sad + made me remember that there's nothing I can do about the past + I should let it go'. There is an obvious sadness to this statement, however, the extended meditation had brought about a truth in this person. This participant had acknowledged clear connections to the positive attributes associated with mindfulness – being in the present moment and to let go of the past; thus, a decrease in psychological barriers through acceptance. An AS participant was adamant that she had not engaged with the practice 'I haven't enjoyed much'. Although in contrast positive feedback from another AS student, included 'No longer judge & repress my thoughts. I just let them be' and 'to remain positive as you are the only one in control of thoughts'. There was always going to be diverse experiences and different degrees of engagement, however, I remained conscious of this and ensured the curriculum was not diluted and individual progress was not impacted.

### **Mindfulness and Making Theatre**

The meditations had a positive effect within the drama studio culture, positive sharing's, without judgment of self and others. Most participants had now gained the ability to place attention intentionally and to bring about key emotions through exploration of the human emotional reservoir. The programme had impacted on choices around the development of creative themes, such as, one group chose to devise around consumerism and greed, whereas another group chose to devise around power and control and the emotions associated with people in power; subject matters identifiable with what mindfulness and Buddhist reject. Conversations within the drama studio towards the topic of human behaviour and society became more prominent. It could be argued that this would have happened without mindfulness intervention, however, the studio had become a place of respectful debate, questioning personal behaviour and analysing the self and others; analysis essential to the role of the actor.

### **Moving beyond phase four**

Through the delivery and adapted exercises taken from Penman's programme, with additional drama mindfulness activity, participants had gained life skills and developed new ways to work creatively. Beyond Phase four, a mixed approach was taken when choosing which type and length of meditation was delivered in response to the needs of the group and curriculum. For example, where focus was required, 90 second breathing meditation was implemented, and to provide an example of a positive

outcome, when the AS group would not stop chatting, participants were invited to simply close their eyes. This small association with meditation cultivated instant placement of attention and silence; participants were instantly prepared for work. Overall, there was a definite shift in culture as mindfulness and meditation, cultivated Buddhist qualities, such as intentional placement of attention, acceptance, empathy and compassion; which was a result in the work on the self from the inside out and taking a psychophysical approach. Participant G, who struggled with anxiety gained the ability to 'use my instincts and to not worry about failure. I was able to clear my mind. This also helped me become more effective at the task that immediately followed meditative practice.' Feedback and observation presented most participants had deeper comprehension of mindfulness and meditation, and this had impacted positively on the trainee actors, at varying degrees. Participant B articulated the benefits, 'as if I could empty my mind of everything negative & was able to think about nothing. Completely relaxed and at ease with myself & surroundings. Creativity levels flowed more because I was highly concentrated'.

### **Other Findings**

I started each session with meditation which helped participants create and make theatre with increased focus. This brought about positive results and feedback included 'I've enjoyed exercises of movement alongside meditation, slow walking, light jogging, supporting my focus, but time spent in and out of consciousness brought new ideas, and deeper insight about the character I'm playing'.

Progress escalated when I introduced smaller exercises, such as, feathers and scarves which replaced the passing ball. Making use of the feather and scarves to stimulate imagination further in devising, A Level participants used the scarf to focus on and to include in their creative process. The feather became the focus rather than the breath and supported attention to make space within the mind which allowed the creative voice to emerge. One group imagined the scarf as money and materialism in a piece which contained themes of power and authority. Two actors used the scarf symbolically to represent the strangulation that materialism can cause. Additionally, mindfulness promoted discussion around life, philosophy and psychology, thus, in turn, promoted mutual respect and positive dialogue in the drama studio, and naturally brought about discussion around British Values.

To develop ideas through placement of attention with a prop helped to develop character personality, attributes and dialogue. Through a prolonged meditative period participants started to notice the detail of the prop, shape, form, colour, texture. From this, participants were asked to move out of the meditation into free writing, no expectations, spontaneous and free flowing. This extended on the theme of power, participant G wrote around leadership and corruption, 'the eyes tell lies', whereas participant B, wrote philosophical dialogue questioning death, regrets and pre-death behaviours; similar to that of the Buddhist philosophy around regrets on the death bed and what kind of death we have depends on how we lived. Participant G enjoyed 'the meditation exercise involving the development of our characters for our practical was interesting, bringing about detail we would have missed otherwise'. This particular comment refers to an exercise where, following extended breathing meditation, participants were asked to engage with all senses in the development of a character, and to imagine the characters smell, to consider the texture of the skin, an associated taste, visualise a colour associated and to breathe it in. This allowed the trainee actor to develop the physicality of the character through adjusting their body as each instruction was offered. At this point, concentration of attention was heightened, body parts visibly became isolated as the focus was drawn to different areas. Furthermore, this exercise released tension and encouraged a relaxed state, as the psychophysical character developed simple instructions provided. Merlin (2007) complements this in explaining 'Since so many of the tools in the kit combine our logic with our imagination, our bodies with our psychologies, and our conscious technique with our subconscious inspiration' (p 11).

Participant D, who initially struggled to lose her inner critic, which became a barrier to creativity and challenged when she attempted to emotionally engage with a character, found this meditation helped refocus her attention; in turn, she gained a deeper connection with the character's emotional state. This participant's journey and self-discovery was incredible to observe, and her feedback provided insight 'In the past I could not lose my inner voice. I managed to lose my inner voice, helped by focusing on my breath and a colour. I started to feel like the character, it was strange, like a shift, moving into another person'. Interestingly, she visualised the colour purple which was then included in the final devised piece; symbolic of emotions felt by the character.

Participant B, visibly and emotionally changed in this exercise, she wrote 'I felt like a vessel channelling the emotion of the character, deeper insight which translated through my body'. As the devising process progressed, she also expressed 'this process helped me to gain psychophysical

connections and feeling the emotion of my character, I felt it deepened my understanding being in a different state'. This participant also utilised meditation as part of her final performance exam, she was one of two actors who slowly emerged from underneath soil, surrounding a white, leafless tree, centre stage. To remain underneath the soil for so long, she said 'required a meditative state, focusing on the breath and, in turn, decreased performance nerves'. This training actor summarised her experiences 'meditation expanded my creativity and imagination as I was able to access thoughts/feelings/ideas that my mind is usually too busy to recognise. It connected my body and mind, brought about harmony in this way, allowing my mind to create without distraction'.

### **Pre-performance activity**

In pre-performance examination activity, participants were taken through a meditation to focus the mind and included a visualisation exercise to imagine the character's positions and journey in the performance space, manoeuvring around the set, sensing the space, imagining emotional sensations at different points. This is also reflected in Tcherkasski's (2016) writings;

Some claim that Sulerzhitsky introduced Stanislavsky to morning meditation about upcoming projects of the day, which was a part of Dukhobor practice: they would sit in a relaxed position and mentally, step by step, imagine and visualise how they would fulfil each task of the day that lay ahead. (p 31).

Participants responded well to this multisensory activity, which was evident in high quality performances, all eight students achieved grade A, and three students, including participant B, achieved full marks in the examination. Participant G, the young man who struggled with anxiety, performed very well, although it was apparent when he, momentarily, lost mental focus and physical balance in the body. However, as a result of continuous mindfulness training, he reduced his 'circle of attention' and regained control in his performance. Participant B sustained focus throughout her performance and lived and breathed the various personas undertaken in the moment. It was evident her performance was coming from an inward-direction and the activity within the mind was translating through the body; a psychophysical approach. Afterwards participant B, recalled her experience 'it was like mind and body were one being, no-one was there, just me and my partner, my attention was closed but I was still aware, amazing'. Finally, and interestingly, an A Level participant who took part in the study who had resisted and rejected most meditation and mindfulness activity, exclaimed after each exercise 'I didn't get anything'. However, part of this participant's pre-performance activity was to focus on a glass of water, a prop symbolising the invisible weight of mental health in his group

piece 'Dysmorphia'. Following the performance, he expressed 'I have noticed my preparation for a performance has altered, focusing and moving into a meditative state for a longer period has supported me getting into the emotions and the physicality of a character'.

The programme had impacted on all participants, although at varying degrees of emersion. The central finding was the importance to provide trainee actors time, prior to creative work, to critically look at themselves, to understand what it is to be human, flaws and all. Worley (2016) expressed 'there is one small step between off stage and on'.

## **Part Two: Exploring my own Creative Practice**

*'Suffocated with a pillow of paranoia, a pillow of imagined conversations, ripped feelings, attack of panic stopping the breath, the breathing, delegated to this confined space, my head, my mind, a suffocated thinking room taking over my peaceful sleep, sleep, sleep.....drowning, drowning, drowning, drowning in desperately wanting a sense of ease, drowning in this mindless dis-ease'.*

The above text is taken from the devised, autobiographical piece, '*Flamingoland, Pt 2, A Conversation with Death*', 2017, a solo performance I created to summarise my creative journey within this project. Flamingoland Pt 1 was performed 20 years ago. Pt 2 is documentation and performance of my journey and where I am now.

## **The Inner Voice**

I have reignited my passion as a performance practitioner and gained the courage to create and perform, through the study, practice and application of mindfulness. Worley (2001) correlates with this 'To act with inspiration we need to become free of hope and fear'. (p 37). Prior to the performance in June, stage fright, fear and self-esteem enveloped my creative experiences due to having not performed my own work, as a solo artist, since 1997. Excuses manifested my internal narrative, such as, 'students come first', 'limited time due to being a single working parent', and 'nowhere or nothing to perform', so far as, 'I have nothing worthy of public performance'. Creative output would manifest itself through the student work, although, now, on reflection, this was another excuse to not create my own work. This was reinforced by the perception that others would be negative, and the inner critic perpetuated a cycle of negativity.

## **Relating to another Artist**

Cook (2016 n.p) photographer and performance artist, in a blog entry related to the internal critic 'My internal conversation then answers these questions: You didn't do a good job. You're not good enough for this. You've produced a load of crap this time'. He goes on to describe these feelings as 'It is an aggressive cancer which constantly attempts to redefine who I am as a photographer, it's an artist's very own black dog'. Through the practice of mindfulness I started to recognise the power of my inner critic and the detriment to my life experiences and creativity. This was also reflected in my writing, which ran in conjunction with mindfulness practice. *'Made up feelings traveling from mind to body feelings, imagined feelings, desperate feelings, lacking in ease, mind making, creating, expanding feelings of dis-ease, dis-ease, dis-ease, dis-ease'*. *'Flamingoland, Pt 2, A Conversation with Death'*.

A continuous barrage of internal criticism cultivated by internal misunderstandings, fused with delusions, not uncommon in artists. Placing work in the public forum is placing yourself, and, as such, opened up external judgement, of which, resulted in pre-empting feedback, translated into inner criticism and anxiety, before the work was produced. Treymayne and Morgan (2016) reiterate the need to focus on the present moment, 'Individuals with mindless habits tend to focus on the past or develop anxiety about the future, limiting their ability to focus on the present moment'. (p 390).

An increase in meditation was required, as well as, following Penman's The Creative Programme, which also allowed me to gain deeper insight into the trainee actors experience. I found the Creative Programme, overall, reduced my inner critical voice, and further enhanced self-compassion and the ability to self-soothe. At the same time, I gained confidence and a deeper understanding of minds workings, perceptions and illusions; I continue to remind myself 'I am not my thoughts', and to refocus and consider alternative perceptions of truth. Dartnell recognised the growing attention towards meditation and mindfulness, which was clear in his workshop, 'Freedom from Expression' 2016, where the focus was to 'investigate the paradoxically contradictory and complementary pulls between meditation, personal expression and performance'. Dartnell opened up possibilities through questions around the use of mindfulness in the performance domain, and in particular in voice-movement. The workshop was for creative artists who wished to move in a different direction, rediscover or get to know themselves better. Additionally, the workshop provided time to rediscover my creative being and to embrace my inner creative source. It was refreshing to return to practice, without distraction and to find who I was, creatively, outside the Post-16 education environment. I recognised the value to

spend time on myself and explore how mindfulness can support body and voice, coupled with a loosened grip the inner negative voice held. Worley (2001) from a similar stance, 'It asks us to stop speeding around, simply to sit down, to take an honest look' (p 12).

Dartnell initiated practice through an invitation to pass a ball in pairs, and when the ball was caught each pair would allow a moment of stillness to encourage appreciation of the pause; this particular exercise was used in the project, at Burnley College UCLAN, with my students. As I caught the ball, I initially became conscious of being watched as though in performance, however I acknowledged this and moved inward to be present in the moment. This resulted in a freedom within my mind, with an increased awareness and attention, losing thoughts of dropping the ball or being watched, and simply experiencing the sensation of throwing the ball in support of my partner. This promoted mind and body in action and I started to notice more detail in shifting weight and positions in response to action and partners; additionally, the exercise promoted compassion and communion.

Another exercise Dartnell offered encouraged spontaneity through decreased thoughts and to simply paying attention to sensation. With eyes closed, working with a partner, who gently placed their hand on my back, began to trace my spine which initiated movement. This released my body in space and I discovered an internal and external freedom, without self-judgement and psychological barriers within my practice; this exercise was one of liberation.

### **My voice**

My voice has been on quite a journey since childhood and in groups my inner critic can overpower and close off my voice. The voice would be present at times, strong on occasion, particularly in Drama, although in other settings the breath shortened and my voice would disappear. In Dartnell's workshop I explored my voice in a physical way, which started by letting go physically, literally. I gave my weight over to a kneeling partner, his hands against my chest bone, the position released any tension and I enjoyed the sensation of not thinking or doing, just being. This exercise allowed me to self-soothe through exploration of the voice body combined and to letting go of self-doubt, which, in turn, released my voice. The activity brought out the depth and full range of my voice, from screeches to screams to whispers, in conjunction with varied and extreme emotions; I recall feeling tearful as though there had been a release in mind and body. I remembered 'I do have an expansive vocal range, to the depths of my tummy, reaching beyond the body and out into the space'. I generated

sounds almost akin to an animal, as though my voice had returned to an authentic place and released from the shackles of the mind and self-imposed conditioning in the belief I should not be heard. It was at this point I recalled Patsy Rodenburg 'The Right to Speak', a book I was drawn to on my degree which provided similar exercises. These moments in Dartnell's workshop released emotions and my voice by just letting them be, without judgment. An invaluable workshop where I recognised the freedom I had lost in my voice, body and mind, but where I was supported to re-establish courage and a curiosity within myself, as a person and as a creative artist.

### **Transference of energy**

Another experience at Dartnell's workshop where I was asked to stand in a relaxed position, amongst the rest of the group who were also individually stood in the studio space. Our eyes were closed, but relaxed, and Dartnell guided us into meditation through placed attention on the breath. I progressively moved towards a meditative state and focused on bringing energy into my body, and allowed this to escape and transcend into the studio. I projected energy into the space, internally I felt the 'prana' rise, headspace filled with lightness and joy, colours floating, yellows, purples, behind the eyelids, feeling connected to multiple energies, although not knowing who's energy I was sensing. I can recall 'a wonderful feeling, liberated, enlightened' as though I had reached a new and higher state of being. Dartnell then asked us to open eyes and to gain contact with the first person we could see, directly transferring the energy generated towards that person. At this point, myself and another participant locked eye contact, palms and body parallel, conscious of the breath and energy being passed between the two of us. Merlin (2007) acknowledges Stanislavsky's appreciation of the levels of immersion in actor training, 'Now the process goes deeper, it goes down from the realm of the external, the intellectual, into that of the inner, spiritual life'. (p 25).

As I looked into my partner's eyes the energy and emotions increased within me, tears began to fall as they started to fall from my partner's eyes, as though telling stories of past pains, an authentic expression. I would define this experience as a spiritual encounter and deep connection with another being. As I engaged in this practice I became open and less self-critical, and experienced an awakening, as I embraced the beauty of the emotions felt; just letting them be. This experience translated in my creative writing, '*Awaken from this illusion. Awaken from my truthful illusion. Awaken from this perception.*' Flamingoland pt 2.

## **Meditation as performance**

Dartnell brought to our attention 'meditation as performance' through an exercise where half the group lay on the floor, whilst other participants observed. This raised questions for me, who is meditation for? Is it not a private practice? Could a person meditate under observation? I found observing others in this practice became a meditation in itself and generated an increased focus within me. Furthermore, a warmth and energy developed inside me as I observed the movement of the rib cage, the natural expansion of the tummy from the diaphragmatic movement, the brief pause before exhalation traveling through the body, reaching the tip of the nose. I was curious and drawn to the simplicity and the presence it offered, growing more inquisitive towards the bodies' landscape, the energy it projected; there was no need for words. Schechner (1994) discusses the role of the audience who are no longer simply watching a production 'the role as a trampoline, an instrument with which to study what is hidden behind our everyday mask – the innermost core of our personality' (p 194).

When moving into the position of meditator and potentially about to reveal my inner core was fascinating, although also ignited the inner critic and raised questions within me 'do I meditate like others? What if I do it wrong? Self-judgmental and unnecessary questions, which required a refocus of attention on the breath. Sensations were as they usually are, of warmth, the space expanded within the mind, energy flowed through the body and outwardly, eyes closed but seeing vivid colours behind the eyelids, streaming purples and yellows, a feeling of the body rising into space as though out of body; I recall the feeling as 'pure bliss'. Following the activity and in discussion, a fellow participant who meditated close to me, described her experience 'generating colours purple and yellow, and feelings of my body raising from the floor'. We were both pleasantly surprised and inquisitive about this shared encounter and questioned the concept and possibility of moving between bodies? Schechner (1994) writes extensively around body mind being one and shared experience, and the need to 'free performers from the bonds of the single-bodiedness – for people are single-bodied in the same way that they are single-minded'. (p 221). This activity generated an enthusiasm to explore multi-bodied experience through the use of meditation in/as performance, as such, taking it back to the drama studio in my own performance preparations.

The workshops attended, with extended meditation practice and implementation of Penman's Programme whilst working on the self, I gained the courage to take the decision to perform work in progress and to test the inner voice. The location a shopping arcade in Huddersfield City Centre and an audience that consisted of the public and performance artists. To prepare for this performance I applied an exercise taken from a workshop with Worley, at the Performance & Mindfulness International Symposium. Worley invited the participants to sit comfortably in a position held with dignity, hands resting on lap, eyes closed, and softly introduced breathing meditation; and asked to observe and focus attention towards the breath. This encouraged a relaxed and focused body and mind, as I chose where to place my attention before experiencing what could be called, 'a sphere of attention'. Worley asked participants to draw attention to the space in front, to either side of the body and to the back, moving towards an imagined, translucent bubble that surrounded my body; including above and underneath. A meditative practice to support emotional balance, focus and attention, followed by moving attention to the outer world, although not too far, but enough to isolate the body and mind in space. Evidently this meditation draws parallels with Stanislavsky's System, 'circle of attention', Stanislavsky (1980).

An actor on stage lives inside or outside of himself. He lives a real or imaginary life. This abstract life contributes an unending source of material for our inner concentration of attention. The difficulty in using it lies in the fact that it is fragile. (p 87).

I implemented this exercise prior to performing at the arcade and throughout the performance before in moment and vocal delivery, which was supported through a sustained focus and enjoyment of the sensations that performance brought about; now, confidently, holding a space as a solo artist. My confidence had returned, and in turn, excuses lost and an increased commitment to performing my own material. It was at this point within my project I could fully appreciate how mindfulness had allowed me to rediscover creative channels within myself.

### **Altered States of Consciousness**

Attending the workshop entitled 'Small Exercises in Performance and Mindfulness', Chamberlain offered drama exercises integrating mindfulness, to benefit the actor. Many activities were enjoyed, although, one task filled me with dread, when Chamberlain introduced a song 'hey-a-nana', which included similar and repetitive lyrics, with a strong rhythm. My inner critic was powerful and cultivated thoughts of the past and not classing myself as a singer, 'I'm useless and rubbish at this'. However, I

embraced the exercise and attempted to overpower the negative thoughts. I learnt the song in a standing position, stamping out the rhythm, some words were easy to remember, some were not and I continued to trip over sounds and became frustrated in an attempt to retain the song; feelings escalated to angst and irritation. I persevered, the group were invited to kneel and tap the beat out on the floor with their hands, this helped but still overly challenged by my thoughts. I made a conscious decision to increase concentration and to move into a meditative state, with an increased focus on the sensations within my fingertips. Naturally, the group became physically closer and the side of our hands in contact, this reinforced group rhythm and communion; moreover it added a tingling sensation in my fingertips. Chamberlain indicated through action the pressure we should apply through the fingers and to move from a hard pat on the floor to a soft and light touch. It was at this point I was immersed in the song and action, in a bubble, highly concentrated focus and attention, and an evolved, higher meditative state. This is all I remember, until I came out from this deeper state and returned to the room with my hands raised in the air, whilst the group's hands were still in motion on the floor, the group stopped and looked at me, I laughed, and asked 'did I go somewhere?' In an attempt to gain an objective viewpoint on this, I asked Chamberlain to recount his perception on this experience, (June 2016 pers.comm), 'We were singing 'hey-a-nana' and beating out the rhythm on the floor. I was stretching it out a bit to take it beyond the everyday. By quietening both voice and hands I was looking to open up the possibility of entering a meditative/contemplative place. I noticed that our hands were making a circular pattern of shadows on the floor and I had quite a soft eye focus. You were in my peripheral vision and I was aware of your presence. Then something led me to turn my head to look at you, I think it was your hands seeming to pull back and not be in contact with the floor in the same way. As I looked at you, you began to laugh and then a few seconds later said something like "did I go away?" and then you were (mostly) back with us.

You had clearly entered some kind of Altered State of Consciousness, but quite mild — not extreme at all. It may have been the slightly hypnotic effect of the song and rhythm combined with the shadows'. Chamberlain further suggested 'There are also extreme states where you lose the ability to comment on what's happening and I'm not sure if that happened to you for a few seconds — if so that was a kind of a mild 'possession' (don't think of it in Christian terms). Shamans move in and out of different ASCs and move 'between worlds'.

This experience provided a wonderful euphoric feeling and I do believe I left the space in an 'Altered State of Consciousness'. I felt, and could see my hands rise and my fingertips draw together, as though I wanted to intensify the rhythm and feeling, and to continue to enjoy the expansion of space opening up within my mind and body. I did have a headache directly after the happening and I needed water and a slight break - which helped to re-engage with the 'real' world. Afterwards, during other exercises, I felt a distance but still present and could see the face of man on the floor, I also presented the image in my drawing at the end of the session, as a conclusion of events; a year later, unafraid, I saw the image of this man's face in a tree, as I meditated in a field. This leads to comparison between the shaman and the performer, meditation as ritual, to act as a conduit to alternative spaces, only acknowledged in the subconscious. Schechner (1994) points to the shaman 'similarly for the performer who trains himself to accept trance and possession; and to find the ways into and out of unusual states of consciousness and doingness.' (p.191).

Due to this experience of an alternative state, there is an excitement the known and unknown potentials, which reinforced gained freedom and an ease I have acquired in myself and in my creative practice. It brought about questions with regards to different dimensions and the possibilities held within the creative artist in meditative practice; questions I will continue to address beyond this project.

## **Flamingoland Pt 2**

Mindfulness practice and exercises experienced have acted as a catapult to create and perform from the inner source. I have embraced different perceptions and views of the world, developed courage and become inquisitive about myself and in creating new work; hence, the final devised piece being symbolic of this incredible journey. *Flamingoland Pt 2, A Conversation with Death*, at Burnley College UCLAN, June 2017, open to the public, friends, students, colleagues and other teachers of drama and the arts. In performance I experienced an improved awareness and sensed each moment, every intricate movement, listened and understood every uttered word and sound, firmly placed in the present moment through an enhanced skill set and heightened emotional engagement and control. I implemented breathing meditation prior to, and during performance, coupled with a sphere of attention to retain focus; I wasn't distracted by the audience or by thoughts. My body, up centre stage, dressed in a white hospital gown, to the left of me a set of orange boxing gloves, black yoga

matts circled to create places for observers / participants, with a basic lighting washed over the stage, freestanding seating in what would normally be the fourth wall. The theatre door remained open to suggest people could come and go as they wish, along with FOH to ensure all participants felt safe and secure. The piece started with a hour long meditation that one colleague described her initial experience as 'You were the focus at first – I was interested in how someone could close their eyes for an hour and be awake – I sat in the theatre from the beginning, interested in the mood'. As meditation began, the usual settling of thoughts came about through placement of attention and a refocus towards the breath, although initially conscious of being watched I tried to guess how many people might be present, observing or participating. Eventually I moved into a joyful mind space, body at ease and I felt light and energised, and sensed people come into the space and leave; I became drawn to people's energy and gravitated towards this, without force. A colleague confirmed this in saying 'the atmosphere was calm, you looked calm, at times your body moved towards other people'. Many participants communicated the feeling of calm in the atmosphere; one student said 'It was calm but powerful at the same time' whereas another student said 'the piece worked well because of how calm it was at first'. One colleague wrote 'I very much enjoyed the extended meditation from the beginning. Usually the meditations I have done, last around 20 minutes maximum. I joined in and managed about 45 minutes. It was the first time I had meditated publicly at work and I found the experience liberating'. Meditation offered a calm within me and towards the people in the theatre, a connection, something not usually viewed at Burnley College UCLAN theatre. I was conscious of my experience in Chamberlain's workshop, the ASC took me by surprise, however meditating within a 'performance' environment, I became mindful to not mentally leave the space and aimed to retain security within myself, and the benefit to the observers / participants. As I came out of meditation and into dialogue and action, my attention was on point and I had a greater sense of control due to the 'sphere of attention'; aware of the audience but not influenced by what they might be thinking. My eyes remained closed and my left hand slowly, and with precision reached out towards the boxing gloves to suggest the calm atmosphere was about to be broken. The intention was to communicate that we can control our mood, but we must be conscious and aware; the meditation juxtaposed with the boxing gloves to the side of me, symbolic of this. At this point my sensations of touch were heightened as I focused on the texture of the surfaces I touched; as I walked my fingers across the floor and onto the boxing gloves onto the surface of the gloves in

conjunction with delivering the first line 'sleep, sleep, sleep, slept....'; meditation and silence broken. The atmosphere had now altered, which correlated with a colleague's comment 'I was impressed by the conversation/argument section and your commitment to it'. I was able to fully commit due to freedom I felt within, and a shift to a calm and controlled place, again, due to the liberated feeling gained from meditations and training. I sensed this in the performance and, in particular, when I performed material on the power of the ego and fear within all humans. I communicated this in my performance through breaking and demolishing the fourth wall, in close proxemics with the audience and direct eye contact with each observer. This, coupled with physically taking up positions of a boxer, with accompanied gestures and fierce facial expression as I shouted 'fuck im angry, fuck you for making me angry, fuck you for making me angry', the emotions were placed within my body, truthful in delivery, mindful of each moment. I felt my full body connect to the vocal stream of dialogue, derived through interconnections to my mind's narrative which, in turn, generated feelings of fear and anger. Consciously and with control, I moved out of this and into a new emotional state to present the death of the ego, 'Shite and bollocks to being there when you die, to mourning you, and to cry, cry, cry my heart out for you' as I punched my head with fists in the boxing gloves; all of which in contrast to what was the calm in meditation, thus offering alternative ways to live. The last line spoken, with a sadness, filled with regret, body and mind defeated, with the intention for each observer to question the way they choose to live, and 'Can I plan my death? What kind of death will it be? A dramatic, slow, intense death, regretful, cruel, torturous, remorseful.....of the way I should have lived?' One colleague expressed 'I found the parts I could relate to personally quite emotional and felt you were brave to present the piece at work'. Whereas another observer found the experience, 'Acute of awareness of time, of loss. This is not easily recountable. Loss – clear awareness of having no time to think due to external responsibilities' and 'I had to consciously stop myself from entering into what felt like some kind of letting go scenario.....after making the deliberate decision to 'wake up' I focussed on the performance aspect of the piece'. Worley (2001) identifies with this, 'As actors we are students of reality. We need ways to clear our channels, to become empty vessels through which the truth of the human condition can be revealed to our audience and to us' (p 12).

It wasn't an intention to create a performance around the human condition, however, the piece emerged parallel to the project and application of mindfulness, and intentional re-engagement with

myself and my creative self. I recognise I continue to be drawn to what makes us human and this has always influenced the work I make, this includes the autobiographical, devised performance *Flamingoland Pt 1*, in 1997.

The journey throughout this project has been one of immense learning about myself and others, owing this to Buddhism and mindfulness.

## **Conclusion**

There are many strengths and benefits mindfulness offers to the trainee actor, studying drama in Post-16 education. My initial motivation was to ease the internal struggles of students, as a result from a fast paced society, instant digital communications, although struggles predominately due to the inner dialogue and perceptions created within a young person. The majority of students reported an ease and a softening of the inner voice that created a more enjoyable experience in the drama studio and within the ensemble. The resilience meditation was significant and identified various levels in emotional awareness, which in turn, supported the trainee actor in performance delivery. Evidence strongly suggested mindfulness had improved happiness levels, increased communications around life and difficulties faced, as such, increased support in the drama studio and produced a stronger sense of communion. Stanislavsky's System and the parallels with mindfulness became more prominent, and to return to Goldstein's question 'what is it that actors do?' I now firmly believe mindfulness is what actors do and this became more apparent as the project progressed for myself and my student participants. The majority of my students now identify with mindfulness in drama and this has become central in their practice and in the creation of material and in preparing a role. Mindfulness has increased participant's attention, coupled with an enhanced emotional capacity, which has run parallel with a developed empathy for other people. Participants enjoyed mindfulness in motion, as such, following sitting meditation physical activity would take place, which greatly improved focus and positively altered the atmosphere and energy produced by the participants.

Positive communications increased from student to student and from teacher to student, although always from a professional stance, however, now with an ease and fun, similar to that of Bush's (2016) experience in the US. Mindfulness activity increased fun and a playfulness in the drama studio, which increased the taking of risk, thus, expanded creative opportunity. There were challenges with a few participants, who could not or had difficulty in taking part, whilst some resisted

and were negative towards the practice. As such, it was essential to provide the option to not participate; or to disguise mindfulness practice through drama games; mindfulness doesn't have to be delivered through formal meditation. I have listened to student feedback and observed them in the practice of mindfulness and meditation, as well as adapted drama games to promote mindfulness. This informed my practice as a teacher and creative artist, always conscious to adapt to support the experience, enjoyment and challenge for the needs of the group, the individual and in delivering National curriculum. For future development, mindfulness practice will naturally find its place in my teaching of drama, as meditation is a great start to sessions to focus the mind, to learn about psychophysical interconnections, whilst accessing the inner emotional landscape; all in benefit of the actors skill set. I will remain flexible and inclusive in my approach when embedding mindfulness, as the majority of participants fully engaged, with a minority who rejected this new practice in the drama studio. Mindfulness is what actors do, and the project has provided clear evidence of the intersection between this ancient practice and the role of the actor.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A – Participant Profile**

Burnley College UCLAN is a further and higher education establishment located in Burnley, Lancashire; a heavily socially deprived area, with a population of approximately 73,000, of which 2000 study at the College and University.

Providing courses at levels 1 – 6, in the Division of Creative Industries and Computing where students from this particular division can undertake - AS and A Level Drama and Theatre Studies as part of a study programme, or BTEC Start, Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 - Extended Diploma in Performing Arts, potentially moving on to the Foundation Degree in Theatre and Performance progressing to a third year 'top-up' in Community Theatre Practice.

Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Level Drama and Theatre Studies (11 students in total). Undertaking their first year at the College on two-year study programme, comprising three or four subjects, each subject studied for 5.5 hours per week. This group was shared with a Post-Graduate trainee teacher, resulting in access of approximately 3 hours contact time, per week. The course content covers investigating theatre practitioners, including Stanislavsky, Brecht and Artaud, whilst exploring a range of texts. Eleven students, who, prior to this course, attained five GCSE qualifications at C grade and above, although each individual differing in social background and in ability (practical and written), with some, but not all of the group gaining a qualification in Drama, at GCSE level. The limitations here, being contact time and demanding course content.

Advanced Level (AS) Level Drama and Theatre Studies (9 students in total). As the teacher, taking over this group part way through their first (AS) year, due to another member of staff sickness, the work conducted formed part of their year two. The course leans significantly towards the final written paper at 60%, and 40% devising and performing new material, which has an open choice of stimuli

and style; delivered in 5.5 hours per week. Some limitations with time, although the majority of work conducted was with this group.

Foundation Degree in Theatre and Performance (13 students in total). Students enrol onto this course with prior attainment, with either an A Level or BTEC qualification, although some students enter with industry experience. A range of modules are taught and my responsibility, as teacher, is to deliver the module Devising and Performing in the first term, a tutor led project, 'Self as a Source', taking place throughout semester one, every Monday, for three hours, per week. A mixed ability group, some students with seriously poor mental health, and social barriers, and some with little experience or training in drama. Again, limitations come from time constraints, although, in the case of this particular group, problems came from individual difficulties requiring great attention from all course staff. All of which will be discussed further in data analysis and findings.

Certain participants will be referred to by a letter, allowing the reader to follow the experience of separate individuals. Below are these participants, with a brief summary of character -

Participant A – an A Level student, who embraced mindfulness from the offset, practicing out of College time.

Participant B – an A Level student, a high achiever, who became fascinated by existential questioning and discussion.

Participant C – an A Level student, who joined the group as part of year 2. Struggled with depression and anxiety.

Participant D – an AS Level student, who struggled with emotional engagement.

## Appendix B – Questionnaire Content

- What is mindfulness to you?
- What is meditation to you?
- Can you describe what meditation feels like?
- Are there any particular meditation exercises you have enjoyed or found interesting?
- Are there any particular meditation exercises you have enjoyed or found interesting in terms of your response?
- How would you describe your attention and focus, before, during, after meditation, and after the lesson?
- Can you identify any mindfulness / meditation moments / exercises that have increased your focus and attention? Your creativity? Your imagination?
- Can you describe how mindfulness meditation practice might have supported your creativity?
- Can you describe how mindfulness meditation may have encouraged you to respond with connecting your body and mind?
- Do you think there are any connections between mindfulness and Stanislavsky?
- Has mindfulness / meditation supported your exam preparation?
- Has mindfulness / meditation supported you during your exam?
- Has mindfulness / meditation supported you after your exam?
- Has mindfulness / meditation supported you in preparation for your written exam paper?
- Has mindfulness / meditation supported you in your study programme?
- Has mindfulness meditation supported you in other areas of your life?
- Has mindfulness meditation changed or altered your mind-set?
- Has your internal narrative / inner voice altered or changed?

- Has mindfulness / meditation altered or changed the way you feel or think? Decreased worries or concerns?
- Do you have any comments on my vocal expression or the language I have used in delivering meditation?
- Please feel free to write / email or tell me about your experiences or thoughts?

## Appendix C – Student Feedback

### Question and comments - What is mindfulness to you?

#### Awareness

- 'Clarity of mind and body. Awareness of surroundings'
- 'Being aware and calm in the present moment'
- 'Getting rid of all the negative thoughts that bother you and become more relaxed and aware of things such as your surroundings and feelings'
- 'Awareness / acceptance / peace'

#### Calm

- 'Having a calm and steady mind'
- 'Mindfulness feels a complete sense of my own internal thoughts and struggles, and being able to channel to a sense of calming relaxation.'
- 'Allowing the mind to rest, and to calm yourself'
- 'Calmful/relaxing'
- 'Becoming completely calm and relaxing mind & body'
- 'Positive breathing to calm yourself'
- 'Internal, focused, personal, thought provoking, calm'
- 'The feeling of content and peacefulness'
- 'Feeling comfortable and content'
- 'Meditation - being peaceful & not thinking'
- 'Peaceful'
- 'Mindfulness – clearing the mind, quiet time, breathing'
- 'Mindfulness = quiet time'

#### Relaxed

- 'Relaxation of the mind, body and soul'
- 'Peacefulness. An energy of relaxation'

#### Developed understanding of self

- 'Feeling good about yourself and your situation'
- 'Reflection on life'
- 'Being comfortable in your own mind'
- 'A way of inner reflection'
- 'Escaping and looking at yourself'
- 'Visibilities of yourself and others, no clouded judgements'
- 'Reflecting on flaws and trying to stop them'
- 'To be in control of your minds activities whether they are positive or negative thoughts. To find balance of stability'
- 'Your mind is full of thoughts'
- 'When you think positive'
- 'It's a chance not to care'

**Present moment**

'Thinking about decisions at a correct time'

'I believe mindfulness is having a mind filled only with the things that matter in the present moment'

'I believe mindfulness to be how purely you see the world, without your mind telling you lies'

**Question and comments -****What is meditation to you?****Focus / Attention**

'Focusing on breathing and relaxing'

'Focusing on the breath, being comfortable, relaxing the mind'

'Meditation to me, is a focus exercise, clearing the mind of thought. This is mostly effective for me but sometimes I struggle to focus'

'Controlling your breath + focusing the mind'

'Calm activity in switching off distraction and becoming completely focused on the mind and body'

'On your own with concentrating on nothing but breath'

**Understanding the mind / body**

'Allowing all bad thoughts to leave your body replacing them with good ones. Breathing in and out'

'I believe meditation is the unloading of the mind of all important thoughts that cloud the mind'

'Almost like resetting your brain'

'Replenishing mind and body. No feeling'

'To clear bad thoughts from your mind'

**Relaxing**

'Calming down, relaxing'

'Relaxing, exiting the worries of your mind'

'Meditation is when you relax and are clear thinking'

'Allowing the mind to rest, and to calm yourself'

'Meditation – energy of relaxation'

'To all zone out into a state where you can gather thoughts'

'Positive breathing to calm yourself'

'Peace in oneself – finding a quiet place to calm – open up'

'Calming the mind'

'Peaceful'

**Present moment**

'Forgetting worries and being in the now'

'Meditation: to reach a state of calmness where you are able to live purely'

**Life and self**

'To me it is a way of taking a step out of everyday life and reflecting on it'

'Breathing and reflecting on stress & worries etc in order to overcome them'

'Having a peaceful mind and soul'

'Relaxation of the body and soul'

'Escaping and looking at yourself'

'It allowed me to calm myself and stop stress (the Stanislavski meditation)'

'Meditation – being at peace with myself, being able to close my eyes & feel calm instead of being scared to be on my own'

'It's a chance not to care'

'Not too good, I think about my regrets during meditation'

**Question and comments -****Can you list or describe worries you may have /or had? Has mindfulness meditation changed / altered feelings?****Positive impact**

'To be less sad'

'Family troubles, falling behind in college work, failing mock exams, relationship troubles – seems to have slightly helped relief from these'  
 'Feeling lack of control about where I am going in life – feel like I have let go more – significantly'  
 'Stressed – work / college / family – be calm, achieving, more focus, mental'  
 'Stressed – work. Relax, pause and take control'  
 'Yeah used to stress over irrelevant things & now I don't – it just makes me feel calm and happy'  
 'They made me feel more curious and inquisitively' 'Stress' 'Stress! Failure!' 'College work'  
 'work / course worries too much'

**Reasons and some negative impact**

'Made me think about a lot, so much, maybe too much'  
 'On the whole, not really'  
 'None'

**Question and comments -**

**How do you feel about yourself? Has mindfulness meditation changed / altered these feelings about yourself?**

**Positive impact on self**

'I accept myself'  
 'Kept me believing in myself'  
 'Made me more confident, happier'  
 'It made me calmer'  
 'I feel more focused content & chilled'  
 'Saying positive things about self in meditation has helped confidence'  
 'Less hard on myself'  
 'Yes'  
 'Not really, just helped'  
 'A little, I've learnt to stay positive'  
 'I mostly feel like I don't work hard enough or that I'm not as good enough as some people. Meditation seems to have helped me feel less like this'  
 'A little bit'

**Negative / no impact**

'NA'  
 'Not really'  
 'Not really felt / reflected on this when doing it'

**Question and comments -**

**Can you consider the language I use in the drama studio and does this impact on your thinking, doing or feelings?**

'When meditating, the nice comments'  
 'Yes, I can sometimes, if not I ask'  
 'Speaking calmly helps me'  
 'We were asked to feel certain areas of our body against the surface of the floor'  
 'It is helpful can be from a teacher point of view but also chilled point of view'  
 'Not really'  
 'It's more relaxing as you're never stressed and always calm'  
 'Yes, nice and slowly = better reflection'  
 '?'  
 'You always use big words – helped to expand my vocab'  
 'Yes, motivated – positive – encouraging – not stressful!  
 'In a soft and thoughtful way, the voice helps me to calm'  
 'I believe the language used is completely fine, it helps me understand and respond correctly'  
 'Very clear with words, simple instructions'  
 'It was very relaxing'

'When meditating, the nice comments'  
 'Yes, I can sometimes, if not I ask'  
 'It is helpful can be from a teacher point of view but also chilled point of view'

'Not really'  
'?'  
'You always use big words – helped to expand my vocab'  
'Very clear with words, simple instructions'

**Question and comments -**

**Can you identify any mindfulness meditation moments / exercises that have increased your attention and focus?**

**Ball n feather enjoyed**

'The ball throwing'  
'Breathing exercises, ball + feather'  
'Working with the feather'

**With movement / doing**

'Ones synced with movement'  
'When we stood up'

**Guided meditation**

'When there's someone speaking'  
'When Lorraine is speaking making us feel good when our eyes are closed'  
'Breathing and given things to think about'

**Breathing meditation**

'Slightly on some days, helps decrease stress, which helps me focus'  
'Meditating alone'  
'Motivated! Block out negativity'  
'The first ever one'

**Colour exercise**

'One sat down on spread out seats in the lecture theatre, able to see warm colours, felt loved warm and happy – content'

**Body scan**

'Feeling of sleeping yet still awake + picking out body parts to feel. Clearer and more awake, softened. Attitude to working'

**Compassion towards self and others**

'The 3 nice things made me feel good as I could keep them to myself, Meditation keeps me from being bothered about what other people think whilst Im acting / coming up with ideas'  
'Class examples – usually Thursday lessons in the large space – theatre. Made me feel very peaceful and respectful of myself – mindfulness. Positive 3 things. Helped slightly to improve productivity in class but can easily make me much more tired'  
'One expression, expressing love for our groups.  
'Sat on chair. Repeatedly said good thoughts. Loved feeling good about my life – showed myself love – pushed out bad thoughts'  
'Lying down, being aware of the breath – love for myself & appreciation for group. Accepting of myself and others – ready to create. My willingness to listen to others – accept everyone's ideas – also less distracted'

**Positive**

'Sat down on the theatre seats'  
'All of them'  
'Liked it all'  
'Liked them all'

**Befriending (AS)**

'The Friday one when we had to befriend'  
'I didn't enjoy the meditation where we were told to think about friends + people you dislike. Thinking of people, I dislike made me have a negative mindset'

'I didn't enjoy the befriending one. Made me feel uncomfortable'  
'I didn't enjoy the one where we had to think about a person we loved & a person we didn't like – made me feel sad & angry with myself'  
'The befriending one – because I didn't want to wish someone well who I really didn't like'

**Negative experience**

'Haven't enjoyed much'  
'Okayish'  
'Usually regrets when its silent meditation – made me feel sad + made me remember that there's nothing I can do about the past + I should let it go'

**Creativity**

'Honest. Clears my mind – doesn't help with creativity as it clears the mind'  
'Positive meditation: where I came out of it clear minded. Its helps me see things without a stressed mind. I think it has helped me creatively'

**Question and comments -**

**Can you describe how mindfulness meditation might have supported you in your college study programme?**

**NO**

'It hasn't'  
'No'  
'No'  
'Not really'  
'No, not yet'  
'Kept calm but sometimes actually more stressed'  
'Not really'  
'No'

**YES**

'Helps calm me down so I'm not stressed'  
'Keeps my mind clear'  
'Yes, made me feel more fresh and focused'  
'The time we visually used 2 benches + put the things stressing us out on one bench allowed me to be less stressed about all the work I had to do'  
'I feel less stressed about exams, understand I can only do one thing at a time'  
'To help my focus and decrease stress has helped me deal with problems'

**Question and comments -**

**Can you describe how mindfulness meditation might have supported you in other areas of your life?**

**Positive**

'Boys'  
'When I'm stressed I focus on the breath + the positive things in my life at that moment'  
'After a stressful weekend or family troubles, meditation helps ease upset'  
'I become less angry and argumentative when in tune with myself'  
'Helped cope in stressful situations to gather thoughts for a clearer mind'  
'Helps me become less stressed for example I have a lot of hours at work next week but I am not stressed in this moment because of the 'power of now'  
'Yes, made me calm down a lot more'  
'More sleep'  
'I'm calmer'  
'Meditation before sport helps to focus, remain calm'  
'To take a breather and look back and to look forward'  
'Accepting how I feel & not judging my thoughts'  
'I've learnt to think of better things rather than my problems'  
'I have been helped by having a clear mind every Monday morning'  
'Helpful – coping with relationships, more appreciative'  
'I now do it before bed to relax + sleep better, release stress. App – Headspace'  
'Impacts me to stop being hard on myself. Helped me sleep at night'  
'Impacted on me – made me clearer, made me realise negative people aren't worth it'

'I think better of myself'  
 'I want to carry on as I think its helping'  
 'It has impacted on my actual life as I feel more in control of what I am sad / happy about. LOVE IT'  
 'I like it all to be honest. It cleansed me'  
 'I have meditated once or twice at home if I get stressed'  
 'I don't know yet! I really enjoy it and intrigued in where it can take me as a person'  
 'Helps relaxing at home'  
 'Told my mum about how good my experiences were so she tried it with me too – trying to relieve stress and complex thoughts. THANK YOU LORRAINE'

**Negative**

'No'  
 'No'  
 'No'  
 'Hasn't done anything for my personal life outside of lesson meditating, but I have sometimes thought of ideas when I'm not feeling great or productive and it gives me a small boost'  
 'Sadly not'  
 'No'  
 'I don't think so'  
 'This has not impacted me out of college (except the saying 'Everything your mind says isn't true). I feel the more I meditate the more it loses its effect'

**Question and comments -**

**Can you describe how mindfulness meditation might have changed or altered your mindset?**

**Positive**

**Inquisitive / curious**

'Reflecting on stress and wandering why I get sad'  
 'Yes, it's made me look at things differently and don't over exaggerate situations'

**Acceptance**

'No longer judge & repress my thoughts. I just let them be'  
 'To remain positive as you are the only one in control of thoughts'  
 'I am more at peace with the future'

**Calm / focused**

'Given me a calmer mindset'  
 'Relaxed'  
 'More laid back and ready to listen to others'  
 'Calmer'  
 'Calmed me down on a very rushed morning or a stressful week to feel more internal positivity rather than external negativity'  
 'Overall I think I concentrate slightly more'

**Negative**

'Not yet'  
 'No not really, just taught me how to relax'  
 'No'

Project aim one: To explore mindfulness in alleviating barriers within the performer, in creative and performance practice.

Sub-question two: Does mindfulness alter the creative setting for the training actor, therefore altering internal perceptions?

**Question and comments -**

**Feelings before meditation exercise, immediately after meditation and after lesson?**

Before meditation –	Immediately after meditation	After lesson –

<p>'Shit' 'Content' 'Below average, usually stressed'</p> <p>'Bad – focus on the wrong things get stressed out etc'</p> <p>'Most days, a lot has been going on, and I have been rather stressed'</p> <p>'The time to find a comfortable position on a solid floor (sat down with back straight) is difficult for me but do-able after finding position'</p> <p>'Distracted, thoughtful mind'</p> <p>'Relaxed, focused' 'Hectic'</p> <p>'Stressed' 'Rubbish' 'Cloudy &amp; stressed'</p> <p>'Depends on whether I've eaten or slept well that night, also the mood' 'Stressed and tired'</p> <p>'Unfocused'</p> <p>'Fidgety' 'Content'</p>	<p>'Okayish' 'Distracted/tired' 'Very tired and not so focused, but relaxed' 'Slightly better but I find it hard to lose my thoughts and to concentrate' 'After I seem to think about things from a rational stand point, helping against stress' 'I feel slightly more productive on a creative level, but not so much in the physical sense, I fall asleep very easily' 'More focused, sometimes feel sleepy' 'Tired' 'A bit less hectic'</p> <p>'Cleansed' 'Calmed' 'Sometimes not stressed, sometimes nothing has changed' 'I feel less focused and I clear my mind' 'Relaxed and calm'</p> <p>'Peaceful'</p> <p>'Calm' 'Rather distracted'</p>	<p>'Much better' No response 'Focused and happy if we've meditated' 'Feel better and more focused and ready to work/learn' 'After a lesson, I usually felt a small sense of accomplishment'</p> <p>No response</p> <p>'No significant change'</p> <p>'More confident my ability' 'Feel like I know more than I did before' 'Motivated' 'Back to being stressed' 'relief'</p> <p>No response</p> <p>'Calm and steady with straight mind (clear headed) 'Productive'</p> <p>'Creative! Happy' 'Depends on the lesson'</p>
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Project aim two: To investigate the relationship between creativity and mindfulness when training actors.

Sub-question three: Is it possible to change / alter the body mind relationship within the training actor?

<p><b>Question and comments –</b> <b>Were there any particular mindfulness / meditation exercises you enjoyed? Found interesting in terms of your experience or response?</b></p> <p><b>Breathing meditation</b> 'Sitting down, relaxing method' 'Focusing on breath to distract the mind' 'Lying on the floor thinking of situations which upset you and letting them go through breathing' 'Breathing and reflecting on stresses and worries etc in order to overcome them'</p> <p><b>Self-compassion</b> 'The 'we are kind' one'</p> <p><b>Colour</b> 'Breathing in 'positive' colour'</p> <p><b>Balls of compassion</b> 'Throwing multiple balls - helped concentration'</p>
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**Body Scan**

'Pin pointing body parts, never realised you could feel things individually'

**Meditation in movement**

'I've enjoyed exercises of movement alongside meditation, slow walking, light jogging etc'  
 'The meditation exercise involving the development of our characters for our A2 practical was interesting'

**Locations / positions**

'led down meditation – it allowed me to truly let go of any worries'  
 'When you sit down & speak to us'  
 'I like when we got to lie in our position to what was comfy'  
 'One sat on the chairs in the theatre, kept my body focused and mind active'

**Non-specific**

'All of them'  
 'Not a specific exercise, but the fun process usually leaves me with a clear head at the end'

**General positive experiences feedback – (red connecting to creativity)**

'Felt as if I could empty my mind of everything negative & was able to think about nothing. Completely relaxed and at ease with myself & surroundings. Creativity levels flowed more because I was highly concentrated'  
 'Becoming completely calm & relaxing mind & body – second time. Focused my concentration'  
 'I liked the calmness and it worked best for me and it helped me lose stress and at the end I felt tired. I felt positive the rest of the day. I was actually less focused.'  
 'It allowed me to calm myself and stop stress (the Stanislavski meditation). Calm and peaceful. It made me more focused. More focused and allowed me to concentrate.  
 'A moderate amount – impacted on concentration & focus'  
 'My most positive is when Lorraine said the three good things. Calm, happy & relaxed. Don't know'  
 'It's was alright. I never felt anything major it was nice to get a bit of the worries out of my head. Okayish. Not really nope'  
 'Positive- you are kind, you are caring, I felt intrinsically happy. Creativity – made my mind at ease so my brain could work / focus more'.  
 'Yes, positive but there are sometimes negative thoughts. Uncomfortable but still fairly relaxed. It put me in the mind set to be creative but not to sit down and do work. I felt a bit too relaxed and out of it to focus properly'  
 'The Stan one. It made me focus and relax. It helped me to concentrate'  
 'Positive meditation – forgetting about problems -trapping out bad thoughts. Made me feel cleansed and fresh. Impacted on my creativity. YES! Focus on the future, forget about the past. Sat on chair. Repeatedly said good thoughts loved feeling good about my life. Showed myself love. Pushed out bad thoughts. Creativity – don't let bad thoughts in. Create your future'  
 'Circle of attention'

**General negative experiences feedback – (red connecting to creativity)**

'It seems hard to think well about myself in these meditations. I think my thoughts are regularly negative. Don't know'  
 'Personal depression and anxiety made some exercises distressing. Uncomfortable in self, nothing against your technique. Darker mood creates darker ideas for better or worse'  
 'Saying 3 things about yourself positively, sad couldn't think of it – stupid. Don't know'

**Question and comments –****Can you describe how your internal narrative might have altered / changed?****Changed / altered – self-awareness increased**

'More inquisitive'  
 'The clouds have gone & it is always (nearly always) sunny'  
 'It's is more relaxed instead of uptight & stressed'  
 'Think over things – no longer a rash decision maker'

'I have become more confident by looking at my good qualities'  
 'More positive – less pressurising to achieve through stress'  
 'Calmed me down on a very stressful morning or a stressful week to feel more internal positivity rather than external negativity'  
 'A slightly more positive view point may have taken over'

**Unchanged / unaltered**

'Not really'  
 'No'  
 'No'  
 'No'  
 'No'  
 'No'

**Question and comments –**

**Can you describe how your mindfulness meditation might have encouraged you to respond with a connected body and mind?**

'Thinking and focusing on body parts'  
 'A clearer focus helps me connect body and mind'  
 'It helped me to feel in contact with the pains of the body'  
 'Made me want to breath and relax more'  
 'Has made me able to engage with my body in ways I haven't previously'  
 'More in tune'  
 'It's ok to feel'  
 'It's helped connect body and mind to stay in control'  
 'Thinking about how they link to each other'  
 'In touch with my body instead of displacing / repressing feelings'  
 'Breathing as you're thinking'

**Other**

'I am unsure'

Project aim two: To investigate the relationship between creativity and mindfulness when training actors.

Sub-question four: Can mindfulness meditation enhance creativity?

**Question and comments –**

**Can you identify any mindfulness mediation moments / exercises that have increased your imagination and creativity?**

**Imagination**

'I can imagine better situations for myself'  
 'Lying down / or how our bodies felt comfortable'  
 'General meditation via calming the mind'  
 'When we do breathing'  
 'When you evolve the character / play'  
 'Breathing in colours + having / holding your own separate space'  
 'Focusing on the career I want'

**Creativity**

'Breath through your hands'  
 'In the circle meditation'  
 'listening to Lorraine'  
 'Before a practical'  
 'When you evolve the character / play'  
 'Breathing in colours + having / holding your own separate space'  
 'About being individual and making my own choices'

<p>'The throwing the ball – helped me pick ideas as stimulus'</p> <p>'Transforming characters – development of understanding – body &amp; voice'</p> <p>'Breathing, focus and character / theme imaging help both with this'</p> <p>'Thinking of a negative colour – purple – used in my piece when someone died'</p> <p>'Closing our eyes and clearing our mind'</p>	<p>'Transforming characters – development of understanding – body &amp; voice'</p> <p>'Visioning the colour of the breath – then relating the mood of these colours to the pieces'</p> <p>'Breathing, focus and character / theme imaging help both with this'</p> <p>'Thinking of a negative colour – purple – used in my piece when someone died'</p> <p>'Closing our eyes and clearing our mind'</p> <p>'Made me aware of improvements and new creative ideas, but sometimes not. Yes, it has helped me be more creative'</p> <p>'I believe your feelings influence your creative work'</p> <p>'Downer mood creates darker ideas for better of worse. Acknowledgement can help teamwork and spacial work'</p> <p>'Mindfulness frees ideas of subconscious – exposes desires – motives etc'</p> <p>'Having an open mind opens up your brain to have more creative ideas'</p> <p>'Circle of attention'</p> <p>'Creativity – Don't let bad thoughts in. Create your future'</p> <p>'It helps to focus'</p> <p>'It helps you feel more creative'</p> <p>'Creativity – made my mind at ease so my brain could work / focus more. Creativity and mindfulness – I think as you are at ease with yourself, it makes it easier to work as you aren't distracted'</p> <p>'Don't know'</p> <p>'Yes'</p> <p>'If I'm happier, I can create more'</p> <p>'Mindfulness helps boost creativity, and meditation gives you a positive and focused mindset'</p> <p>'Yes, it can make you positive'</p> <p>'There is a strong connection'</p> <p>'Need the concentration from the mindfulness to creativity'</p>	
<p><b>Question and comments –</b>  <b>Can you describe how mindfulness meditation might have supported your creativity in anyway?</b></p>		
<p>'Made me think of better things'</p> <p>'It helps me to think straighter &amp; feel more relaxed'</p> <p>'Helped me think of ideas'</p> <p>'Ideas for stories, characters and environments, have seemed to be more frequent during meditation'</p> <p>'No because I do not find them effective'</p>		
<p><b>Preparing for the practical examination</b></p>	<p><b>During the practical examination</b></p>	<p><b>After practical examination</b></p>

<p>'Destress and calming down'</p> <p>'Helped get me into the right frame of mind. Helped nerves'</p> <p>'Mind becomes clearer after meditation, which helps me focus slightly on the task at hand'</p> <p>'Maybe for a sense of calm before the storm type of exercise but not so much towards attitude to practical'</p> <p>'Helped in the development of caricatures – pushing characters to limit'</p> <p>'Practicing my opening scene alone helped me get into character'</p> <p>'Keep calm – takes away some nerves'</p> <p>'Made me realise I need to think of my own happiness before others'</p> <p>'Kept me focused'</p> <p>'Not as stressed as I was before'</p> <p>'Calms me down'</p> <p>'Given us the time needed to think about individual body parts and how they are controlled'</p> <p>'I know how to calm myself down and get out of my bubble'</p>	<p>'Making me feel less nervous'</p> <p>'Nothing'</p> <p>'No notable experience'</p> <p>Helped me stay calm, not to panic under the soil – focus on the present'</p> <p>'Self-reflection alone'</p> <p>'Still nervous – which is good – adrenaline rush'</p> <p>'Wanted to do well to prove I am good at what I love'</p> <p>'Kept me calm as I carried on focusing on breath'</p> <p>'Keeps me calm'</p> <p>'To relax ourselves'</p>	<p>'Less worried'</p> <p>'Too excited to meditate'</p> <p>'A sense of relief and joy, not sure if meditation supported this'</p> <p>'Felt I did my best through meditating before the exam'</p> <p>'Amazing'</p> <p>'Go home, do work, revise, take long walks! Be productive'</p> <p>'Liberation – a sense of accomplishment'</p> <p>'Nervous of how I did'</p> <p>'Makes me feel confident'</p> <p>'To have a clear mind and focus'</p>
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**Preparing for the written exam / coursework?**

**Yes**

'Hopefully with more practice it will help me focus and help me clear my mind'

'Reminded me not to stress'

'Focused'

'Post it notes, be prepared, meditate anxiety thoughts out'

'To have a clear mind and focus'

'Makes me feel calm and confident'

'Brainstorming – eyes shut'

**Other**

'Unsure'

'No felt any yet'

'Haven't done it'

**Question and comments –**

**Do you think there is a connection between Mindfulness and Stanislavsky?**

'It's naturalistic'

'He wanted to discover the truth and what better way than discovering the truth than reflecting'

'It allows you to step out of your life, making it easier to be someone else'

'Naturalistic movements, very still and not exaggerated'

'Helping mind focus on what is most real'

'Naturalistic – its ok to feel a certain way'

'Naturalistic'

'Allows you to think – what you would do in situations'

'Emotional connection'

'Stanislavski's System involves taking personal feelings and projecting them onto stage – meditation is similar in the awareness of personal emotions and the body'

'Unsure how to respond'

'Clearing mind of personal thoughts to really connect with the character being played'

'Connecting to yourself properly'

'Focusing on your own circle of attention'

**Other**

'No – I'd say it's more Brecht, now you can relate it to connecting / reflecting to past memories for action influence'

'?'