



Music Performance and Education: A Case Presentation of Mindfulness Approach in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the application of mindfulness in music higher education. After a brief introduction to mindfulness, the first author, a practicing Chan (Chinese Zen) Buddhist and a performing pianist, shares her experience with mindfulness both as a performer and as a professor. The second author, also a Chan practitioner, a professor of psychology and a psychotherapist, offers commentary.

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In recent years mindfulness as a topic and practice has become part of the American mainstream. Time Magazine (Pickert, 2014) and the New York Times (Hochmans, 2013) reported on the application of mindfulness in different settings ranging from hospitals to schools to corporations.

Mindfulness meditation was introduced by Buddhist practitioners to the field of behavioral health in the United States as far back as 100 years ago. In the last three decades scientific studies have demonstrated its efficacy and usefulness.

(see, Germer, 2013; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

The founder of Buddhism was also known as the “Great Educator.” It is not surprising therefore to find that mindfulness is a valuable component in the teaching of many diverse subjects on many educational levels. Mindfulness interventions have been found to be useful for students at all ages. Mindfulness related programs have been adopted from grades K to 12 in educational systems across the United States (Greenburg & Harris, 2011) as well as in higher education (Bush, 2011; Diaz, 2013; Diaz & Silveira, 2012; Hart, 2004; and Sarath, 2003). In what follows, the first author will present her own use of

mindfulness in both her own performances and in her teaching in a higher education setting. The second author, who is a professor of psychology and a psychotherapist, offers commentary. Both authors are currently teaching in New York City. Each has developed a mindfulness community on campus.

A Music Professor's Experience with Mindfulness

Chang's Performance Experience

Many music lovers turn to music to relax and "liberate" their minds. However, this is not likely to be true for musicians. For most professional classical musicians and for students in conservatories, practicing their instruments, singing or composing is not calming! Listening to music to "unwind" does not work particularly well. A performing musician, after hours of teaching or rehearsals and practice, would unlikely to go home and listen recreationally to the same kind of music he or she performs.

Classical musicians seriously engaged in making music are required to pay constant and intense attention to their work. They are artists working in "time" and with "time." It could be said that Time is Music and Music is Time. Getting it right, precision, is crucial. There is no opportunity to relax within the work itself, no compromise, no

negotiation with passing time. As a performing musician, I need a more refined and effective method to work within the precision and the stress. Mindfulness practice offers a way for me as a musician to achieve better concentration and more relaxation when I perform.

Let me share a performance experience. When I started graduate school, I was invited to give a solo piano recital at Carnegie Weill Recital Hall. This would be "my New York debut," as I continually and anxiously reminded myself. I became obsessed with practicing. I lost sleep and I went back to practicing as soon as I awakened. Although my mind was not always there, I made myself sit in front of the piano. It was the only way I knew to reinforce my memory and improve my technique in the hope of making my music flow. I slept four or five hours a night and I was losing a lot of weight. Unaware of all the physical and psychological changes, I kept the same routine for at least four months until I noticed I had lost around 20 pounds. I lived in worry and fear, but the 85-minute live performance did go off smoothly and successfully. However, the whole experience made me painfully aware of what most musicians have to go through in becoming a regular performer and the life style they endure to get through the intensely demanding experience. A few years later, I began writing my dissertation. I found and began to write,

study and practice with mindfulness meditation. Not only did I learn a new way of being, two publications came out of this process (Chang, Midlarsky, and Lin, 2003; Lin, Chang, Zemon, and Midlarsky, 2007). In these two articles we explored a common problem musicians face: stage fright. We explore the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation on musical performance anxiety and quality. We applied Chinese Zen meditation (or Chan) as the mindfulness intervention. Our results, based on an experimental design, revealed significant and positive outcomes in reducing musical performance anxiety and improving performance quality.

I took mindfulness training with Chan Master Sheng Yen and began mindfulness meditation as a daily practice. My practice is to sit in cross-legged (“half-lotus” position) on a cushion in a quiet room and practice a mindfulness method called silent illumination (see: Sheng Yen, 2008; Sheng Yen & Stevenson, 2001; Guo Gu, 2014). For the last 14 years I begin every day with at least twenty minutes of practice – when my mind is fresh and rested. It is not a lot of time but doing it consistently builds up discipline and I develop a degree of tranquility. As a musician I find this Chan (Chinese Zen) method especially interesting. It is similar to and a predecessor of the Japanese Zen method, “just sitting” (Shikentaza). Initially, you just sit and know that you are sitting by simply paying

attention to body position. Your mind stays on this task with clarity and simplicity. When the mind is settled and calmed, awareness naturally opens up to include the environment. What I hear around me comes into the mind and is received by the ears without judgment or discrimination (this is the part that’s particularly interesting to musicians). The body is relaxed and the mind is open to the world’s music. Later on, as my performance career became increasingly successful, I realized that I had found a really useful tool to discipline my wandering mind and to cope with my anxieties.

Every concert is in a different hall, with a different piano, with different musicians performing a different repertoire covering a wide range of emotions. Our physical condition, mental status and mood all play a part in any given performance. A live performance is extremely intricate—memory, finger work, speed, and listening all combine. Many subtleties factor into the overall quality of the live performance. It became clear to me that with Chinese Zen meditation I am able to keep myself in a steady and stable state physiologically, mentally and emotionally; it allows me to perform at the level of excellence I expect of myself

Practice, of course, is preparation. How one practices is how one performs. If one practices with a scattered mind, it is likely that one will be scattered in the live performance. With hours of practice, focused attention is a must. Ensuring the

accuracy of memory with undivided attention is essential. Chan meditation also trains the mind to cultivate a sense of awareness of (one's inevitably) straying attention and to achieve the persistence to keep bringing one's wandering attention back to the music. Personally, I find this the most challenging task. In meditation, we train our mind to stay in the "present moment" and be aware of the environment in which we find ourselves. If the mind wanders, we learn how to bring it back to the present moment. It is important to say, the mind in the "present moment" is not dull, static or brain dead. Instead it is alive, active, and alert. As a musician, I adapt that alertness to listening and to playing the notes on the piano. In daily music practice and performance, the "present moment" is music. I sustain my attention to the music – in my heart, in my brain, in my hands and in my listening. When any part of my awareness is not on the music, I have learned to bring it back. I have also learned an important lesson: that some mistakes we make in performance occur during the moments the mind is trying to bring itself back to music once I realize the mind has already traveled away from the music (while fingers are still on the keyboard executing notes/music). These mistakes happen when the mind and fingers/physical body do not match, or when the mind is trying to get back to where the music is supposed to be. But more, while the mind

is coming back to the music, there is a kind of glitch when the mind is "patching back." The mind needs to come back from where it drifted to the present moment. The hands, which have been working automatically after hours of practice and training need to quickly synchronize with the brain. This is one of the times when mistakes or memory slips frequently occur. Unfortunately, when 'Time is Music', it is the one error musicians cannot afford to make in the middle of a performance.

According to Chan, one's body and mind are often not unified. For example, one reads that some professional musicians play music—let's say Beethoven 9th symphony, first movement— in the mind from the beginning while performing other duties such as washing dishes, and after 15 minutes have passed, when the performer's mind is back to music again and is aware of the music in her mind, the performer finds herself playing the 2nd movement of the music! Researchers talk about 'autopilot' repetitive and reactive action that does not involve one's conscious mind. (A Chinese expression is 'walking zombie' – a body that moves without a heart or mind). Trained musicians are the same. The 9th symphony, if one knows it well, can begin to play by itself in the background without one paying much attention to it. During that time, one's mind is elsewhere, which is very similar to students sitting in a classroom. Their bodies are there but

their minds are elsewhere. Minds can be split into doing multiple chores and can be separated from the bodies. Thus, a famous saying in Chinese Zen is – “*where your body is, your mind should be.*” A Chan method, such as silent illumination, helps to unify body and mind.

Of course, training the mind is not an easy task. Anyone who is a meditation practitioner or has taken any meditation training would agree. After I began to merge the techniques of silent illumination into my music practice and performance, I began to realize that training the mind to be present is a long path and, in a way, it has to become a *way of living*. The mind can't wander scattered all day long and hope to be able to settle down and concentrate on music for the few hours a day that practice/performance require.

Daily morning silent illumination practice is like watching a weather forecast of body and mind. I check out my body condition, whether I slept well last night or whether my shoulder is tense; I check up on my mental status, whether I am focused or carried away by my thoughts and feelings. I observe my mood and remind myself to be extra cautious if I discover that I am agitated, for example. Not only is this helpful for my piano practice, it is a strong indicator that I need to be alert to signs that I need to adjust, readjust, cope and simply be aware –especially if I have a concert coming up.

The emergence of body and mind in silent illumination can be observed in one's music performance as well. Once the performer reaches certain level of concentration, the fingers execute the music in the mind of the performer seamlessly and the music flows in between the fingers as if they had their own mind. There is no differentiation of music and performer. Music at that moment is the performer and the performer is the music. During such moments of concentration, performers are keenly aware of their own existence and feel profound joy.

The great Irish poet, W.B Yeats in his poem *Among School Children*, remarked famously:

*“O body swayed to music, O brightening
glance,
How can we know the dancer from the
dance?”*

This is what, even as adult performers, we aim for!

Peter Lin's Commentary

One of the key challenges for a musician is precision and timing. A striving for perfection is part of the requirement of a good performance and even minor mistakes can be catastrophic. There is a common saying in Chinese: “*to have a five-minute good performance on the stage, it takes ten years of practice behind the scenes.*”

Beyond the performance itself, I think the anxiety about performing well is related to one's sense of identity and one's narrative of self. In fact,

it is reasonable to say, either from the Western or Eastern perspectives, the source of one's greatest suffering or distress has to do with the narrative of the self, a concept that we will discuss throughout the paper.

Avoiding the shame and guilt that follows a mistake during performance haunts many performers and drives them to perfectionism. Anxiety, perfectionism and self-confidence all interplay when one stands in front of audience, sometimes alone. Most people need psychological and mental preparation for such stress, not to mention musicians who must perform in front of their professors weekly as well as in frequent performance opportunities. The on-stage experience magnifies any issue a musician may have. Thus, building a healthy self-image and realistic view for a performing musician is a must. However, most education at school or conservatory offers little help with this.

The matter of concentration is essential. As we read from Chang's description, she found a new way of dealing with her wandering mind during practice and performance. As she says, typically one's mind is scattered and filled with many different thoughts which come and go. The fundamental practice of mindfulness is not to eliminate or terminate thoughts in order to keep the mind clear (a common misconception). One aspect

of mindfulness practice is to train the mind to perform a task wholeheartedly. To do a task wholeheartedly is: (1) to remember the task at hand in the present moment, (2) to know clearly when the mind wanders away (as well as what pulls the mind away), and (3) to be able to return to the task at hand. The attitude one takes in dealing with the wandering thought is crucial. Since both Chang's and my mindfulness practice derives from the Chan (Chinese Zen) tradition, I will be speaking from the Chan perspective.

Chan Master Sheng-Yen used to say, "*Chan is mindfulness.*" Mindfulness in Chan tradition is not just being "*here and now*" but being here and now without distraction or conflict. It is a quality of being wholly in the present, without vexations or opposition – opposition means having a subject-object dualistic perspective (The legacy of Chan, 2018). The Chan definition of mindfulness is somewhat similar to Jon Kabat-Zinn (2004)'s famous definition, "*paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.*" Kabat-Zinn (2011) has acknowledged that there are elements of the Chan approach in his mindfulness intervention program; the approach of non-doing and non-striving, or the 'method of no method' (another rubric which refers to silent illumination).

In Chan, one faces his or her scattered

mind with what is called a “*non-grasping, and non-rejecting*” attitude. Here’s an analogy: When one is aware of one’s thought process, one can see that thoughts are like subway cars that come and go. The cars are linked the way our thoughts are linked. The training gives us the ability to observe the coming and going of thoughts as if they were subway cars— without trying to jump on any one of them. One sees them, yet does not ride on any of them. This is the attitude of “*non-grasping, and non-rejecting*.”

If one just continues practicing letting the thoughts come and go, the mind will naturally clear up. There is no need to purposely cut off any thoughts or jump on to any thoughts. One does not even have the intention of clearing the mind. This is similar to shaking a Christmas Snow Globe. If you want the snow to settle and clear, just watch it and let it be. You cannot clear the snow by keeping on shaking it.

As one collects the mind and merges with the task at hand, the performing and the mind become calmer and what is actually there becomes clear. Like looking down at the bottom of the lake, when it is clear, everything is apparent.

As you become more familiar with Chan practice and the mind is calmer, you begin to realize patterns of grasping and rejecting. There are certain subway cars one jumps on more than others. With clarity, you can examine how thoughts

exist and perish. It is important to note that in Chan, one does not investigate mental contents with words and concepts. To describe, compare, and evaluate an inner experience may hinder a deeper observation. Giving a label to mental content actually prevents facing that mental content because there is an assumption that one already knows what it is. (In contrast, there are other mindfulness meditations using labeling technique, which have their own strengths and drawbacks). Without judgment and evaluation, one may discover that the trains one likes to hop on are related to one’s self narrative, and the narrative (what one tells oneself he or she is) is not necessarily who one really is. Seeing the narrative of self as fictional in this sense helps one to be free from the habitual tendency of jumping on to the story. As consequence, one’s mind can be more still with clarity because there is less energy invested in rejecting, defending, or grasping one’s habitual mental states.

With diligent practice, one’s awareness opens up to the present moment with clarity, and one is unified with the meditative object or the task at hand (especially if the task is simple) and the boundaries between body, mind, and world dissolve. It is often described as the state of unification or oneness, which is a very liberated state, at ease and peaceful. This state may be somewhat similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of

“flow” or Maslow’s “peak experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Maslow, 1994). For example, one Chinese Zen Monk, Venerable Chang-Wen (2014), in our Chan community was chanting, he was so focused that his body and mind felt lightness and ease, where joy permeated his whole being. *“It seemed as if space was limitless and there was just the sound of chanting”*. Likewise, there are deeper experiences reported by others, such as the *“limitless sound,”* where the sounds seem to come from within, a sound that is so harmonious and pleasant that it permeates the whole universe (Chang-Wen, 2014).

A caveat: Although this sense of flow, concentration or unification is a very good and peaceful state, ironically it is not the goal of Chan practice. This is because good experience too is transient, just as any state of mind would be. From the point of view of Chan, the overarching purpose of meditation is to develop inner wisdom and compassion that is not dependent on any state of mind—be it good or bad. (see Lin and Seiden, 2014.). In Buddhism, “method” is referring to a meditative object or technique. Chan advocates the “method of no method,” because Chan practitioners need to go beyond the limitation of fixing the mind on any meditative object or mental states and realize the mind that is free from self-centeredness (Chang-Wen, 2014).

From Chang’s description, we see that her daily Chan practice helps her mind to be less scattered and clearer. She is able to be more attuned to her physical and psychological condition because she is able to be with her experience without adding extra commentaries. A successful meditator is well aware of the connection between the mind, body and environment—and this is a way, as she says, not just of performing but of living. Chang’s Chinese Zen practice opens up a way of being for her.

In the Chinese Zen tradition, there are two major meditation methods: ‘critical phrase’ (*HuaTou*) and ‘silent illumination’ (*MoZhao*). Based on her description, it seems Chang has assimilated silent illumination with her professional skills and daily life. As a Chan practitioner, there is no real distinction between meditation practice and daily life; practice is daily life and daily life is practice (The legacy of Chan, 2018). She has more to say about the type, format, and length of the training she has received.

Chang’s Chinese Zen Experience

I began with basic Buddhist meditation training in 1999. The method I used then was called “counting the breath.” This method is to focus on the breath and count each exhalation, from one to ten. This method is widely used as an entry level method for meditation in many Buddhist traditions.

The counting the breath method gave me a good foundation before I started with my Chinese Zen practice. In 2003, I attended Master Sheng Yen's 10-day silent illumination meditation retreat, where I found his method to be very useful and effective. Since then, my meditation practice has become daily routine.

As a daily practitioner, I attend 7-10 day intensive retreats at Dharma Drum Retreat Center in New York annually. Chan methods, such as silent illumination, are only taught in retreat settings. The typical Chinese Zen retreat schedule involves waking up at 4am and retiring at 10pm. The majority of the day is spent in multiple sitting meditation sessions (40 minutes each) with breaks in between. Between each sitting session, one also practices silent illumination through either walking meditation, mindful yoga, or work practice. There are usually one to two lectures in a day on the method and theory. In the retreat, everyone respects 'noble silence,' where one does not engage in reading, writing, or conversation with others - or with oneself. Master Sheng Yen often described it as "*having a date with yourself.*"

For readers who may be interested in meditation, I believe it is important to attend retreats because such intensive practice can help to keep up the momentum of daily practice. In addition, retreat centers often have activities that integrate meditation and special interests. For example, at

Master Sheng Yen's New York Dharma Drum Retreat Center, there was an activity called "Dharma Drum Circle." After a one-day Zen retreat, participants were invited to join in a circle and play different music instruments such as drums. Participants learned to listen and harmonize with others through this Chan practice. Similarly, at Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village, monastics play classical music together with retreatants. In Chinese Zen, music (especially chanting) is always part of Chan meditation training.

Chan Master Sheng Yen received transmission from two Chinese Zen lineages – the *Linji* school (*Rinzai*, in Japanese) and the *Caodong* school (*Soto*, in Japanese), and he taught me silent illumination from the Caodong school and the critical phrase method from the Linji school. However, I believe silent illumination is more beneficial to my musical performance, so it has become my daily routine. Although Master Sheng Yen originally came from Taiwan, his teaching and charity foundation, Dharma Drum Mountain, has taken root in many Western countries, such as the US, England, Poland, and Croatia. There are musicians from other continents who are also inspired by his teaching (see: Chang-Wen, 2014; Ter, 2015).

According to Chinese Zen, the purpose of practice is to "*cultivate the mind.*" Specifically, there are two aspects of the mind one can cultivate -

focus and clarity. With practice, focus becomes stillness, and clarity leads to insight. Clarity provides insight into the nature and constitution of the self. Silent illumination is a method of cultivating stillness and clarity, or quiescence and luminosity, simultaneously. Roughly speaking, the practice of silent illumination can be divided into three stages according to Master Sheng Yen – (1) *the concentrated mind*, (2) *the unified mind*, and (3) *no-mind (or no self-referential mind. Also known as Satori or enlightenment in Japanese Zen)*. These are not necessarily sequential and each stage has its particular characteristics. To begin this formal sitting practice, one focuses on just knowing that one is sitting. The field of awareness is the totality of the body, not particular place within. By focusing on this method, one will begin to experience different levels of stillness and clarity (Guo Gu, 2012; 2014).

In daily life, one practices silent illumination informally by integrating this stillness and clarity with the task at hand (e.g. walking, eating, teaching, playing music). Although intense retreat and sitting meditation are important in Chan, daily life as practice is even more important. The key attitudes that silent illumination cultivates are: (1) knowing and fully experiencing the totality of one's present moment, (2) being wakeful and alert, and (3), most importantly, exposing one's attachment and self-

narratives. The purpose of daily life practice is to free our mind from self-centeredness and actively cultivate virtues (Guo Gu, 2014).

The exact detail of silent illumination is beyond the scope of this paper, partly because it is also a more advance training in meditation. As a general principle, the more detailed the method (e.g. listening to guided instruction and visualizing certain mental images), the easier to practice. The easier the method (e.g., just knowing that you are sitting), the harder to train. One can read Master Sheng Yen's books (2001; 2008) on silent illumination for further details.

Peter Lin's Commentary

In general, there are two major forms of mental training in all schools of Buddhism. The first form is concentration meditation, or focused attention meditation. The key instruction in this form of meditation is to focus on a single object (internal or external), and the natural outcome of this method is calmness and stillness. Concentration meditation is also shared by other spiritual traditions, such as Transcendental Meditation. The second form of meditation is insight meditation, or open-monitoring meditation, which emphasizes the cultivation of meta-awareness and non-attachment. Meta-awareness means that one is aware of anything that occurs in the present moment without attaching to any fixed experiences. From this approach, one

begins to see the transient nature of mental objects. The boundary of self-awareness also expands. These experiences help to examine the nature of the self.

In traditional Buddhist practice, one starts with concentration meditation and then switches to insight meditation. In addition, traditional insight meditation is guided by the sutra of mindfulness, or 'the Four Foundations of Mindfulness,' where meditators practice contemplation meditation on four different personal experiences (body, sensations, mind, and mental objects).

However, in the Chinese Zen tradition, one cultivates both stillness and insight simultaneously. Instead of using two meditation methods, only one method is practiced to develop stillness and insight. Using music listening as an analogy, traditional techniques train one to hear the sound, beats, rhythms, and pitches separately [the Four Foundations]. The Chan approach trains one to listen to music as an integrated and wholistic experience.

To illustrate this further, silent illumination refers to both the nature of wisdom and the technique of recognizing it. In silent illumination, silence refers to the fact that our minds are originally free from all narratives and constructs of self. Illumination is the natural functioning of the mind and its openness, which is its dynamic ability to change, accommodate, and liberate itself. There

is stillness in insight, and there is illumination in silence. Silent illumination is often called the method of no method because the meditator does not purposely focus on any specific objects (physical or mental). It is not just a meditation method but also a metaphor for wisdom (Guo Gu, 2014). Using another analogy, in modern mindfulness practice, one pays attention to whatever arise in the field of experience, mentally notice it and give a word label to that experience such as '*remembering*' or '*hearing*.' This is like having a flashlight; the practitioner uses a flashlight to shine on whatever appears. The Chinese Zen approach is like having sunlight; the field of awareness is natural, complete, clear and stable.

In earlier literature, mindfulness meditation was synonymous with Buddhist insight meditation. However, in current mindfulness literature, mindfulness meditation can come from all different spiritual traditions and be either concentration meditation, insight meditation, or loving-kindness meditation (Germer, 2013).

Given that there are many different forms of mindfulness meditation from many spiritual traditions, Lutz et al. (2015) have proposed a phenomenological model to understand the functions of mindfulness better. In general, they propose that mindfulness meditation has three independent dimensions. The first dimension is object orientation. This is refers to the ability to

orient one's mind toward an experience or object. The object can be either present or absent, such as when searching one's car key. The second dimension is de-reification. Mental objects such as thoughts and feelings are interpreted as mental processes instead of being viewed as an accurate reflection of reality. A special case of de-reification is dis-identification, which is the ability to see that the mental content is not an accurate reflection of oneself. One's identity is not fused with the mental content. The third dimension is meta-awareness. The easiest way to explain this dimension is the awareness that can realize the mind has wandered away from the task at hand. It is the precursor of introspection. From Chang's description and my personal Chan practice, silent illumination trains one's mind in all three dimensions.

The Chan training of these three dimensions helps one to be more familiar with one's own self-narrative. In general, our personality is influenced by the story we tell ourselves; who we think we are dictate our emotional habit of thinking, feeling and acting. In addition, our narrative has both a leading character and supporting characters. It is an internal emotional theater that we are living in, and we unconsciously invite others to participate in our repetitive emotional dynamics according to the story we have fabricated. For example, if a woman sees herself as Snow White, she will

inevitably attempt to get others to play the evil step mother or the seven dwarfs. Chan practice helps us to become more familiar with this kind of internal emotional drama, so we have the capacity to notice it but not act it out. Liberation from one's own self narrative is the insight that Chan practice hope to achieve.

Based on Chan's perspective, an ideal music performance is liberating. The musician can play without the "self" getting in the way. All states and habits that represent the obstruction of self-centeredness are removed from that actual playing (Chang-Wen, 2014). There is no "performer;" there is no "audience," and there is no concept of "performing." It is clear that Chang's Chinese Zen practice has helped her tremendously with her music performance. She will now tell us how she applies her Chan training in her college teaching, a path from self-compassion to compassion for others.

Application of Mindfulness with Music Students in College

Chang's Teaching Approach

As a performer, I struggle to focus my mind and relax my body in my practice and performance. I see the same problems in my students during performance workshops, and also in their class work. In the beginning of the semester I do a

simple breathing meditation (as an entry level mindfulness practice) with my performance class students. A two-minute silent breathing exercise can feel like an eternity to most of them. Lacking much performance experience, many of them experience a range of anxieties from a little stage fright to extremes where their whole body shakes. I teach them breathing exercises in which they relax their body and focus their attention on breathing, and teach tools other than meditation which are based on empirical research findings to help them combat performance anxiety. Moreover, I also teach them ways to practice by themselves to cultivate a helpful attitude: how they practice is how they perform. Extending and sustaining concentration in their practice is part of the goal. I do not think any of my students practice daily meditation. However, a few of them use it when necessary and a number have taken classes in mindfulness meditation –especially, to help them through their transfer auditions to other colleges in City University of New York (from our community college to four-year colleges).

In my theory class, students' attention naturally strays during a two-hour class. I pay extra attention to the wanderers. Even when they look like they are looking at me, I usually can tell when their minds are millions of miles away. I call their names to ask questions. I remind them to use their time well in the class so they can understand the

topics and try their best in in-class exercises.

As a teacher and meditator, I find myself becoming more flexible, creative and sensitive in the way I teach my class. There is a saying from my Chinese culture, 'you teach the way your students need you to'. I observe my students intently. I offer different methods for fixing problems which include building up confidence. In terms of building relationships with my students, I see myself as more open, more practical and I try to be more personable and approachable. Chan Meditation has trained me to view things from various angles, and made me observant of my habitual thoughts and views. I can be more neutral, inspiring and positive in presenting materials and teaching to my students.

Of course, Chan meditation is not just a mental exercise, it also offers the opportunity for deep existential learning. Sometimes I ask my class 'What is the purpose of life?' Students give me different answers, but I manage to bring them back to what the Dalai Lama said, "*The purpose of life is to be happy*". How do we aim for that? Answer: To engage at the present moment and to make the best of the present moment, simply because what is present is the only thing we have right now. I tell them that the present is the past of what will be the future and also that the present is the future of what was once the past. Since the present is the only thing we have, if we can make the best out of it, it

will turn out to be a great past and it will give us a better chance to build a brighter future. One practical application: students are trained to follow the professor closely, encouraged to ask questions immediately, and put the newly learned material into practice exercises right away and not to wait until getting home to review the material and figure out the homework on their own because they will have forgotten what was said in class.

Peter Lin's Commentary

In general, there are three ways that Chan can be integrated in an educational setting, and these are similar to how mindfulness can be integrated in a psychotherapy setting (see, Germer, 2013). The first way is to have a **practicing professor**. When a professor practices meditation on a regular basis, he or she is more present in the classroom setting. The second way is to use **mindfulness-informed teaching**. The classroom discussion may be informed, expanded, and enlivened by the insight and knowledge derived from Chinese Zen meditation, but the professor does not actively teach the students meditation techniques. The third way is to use **mindfulness-based teaching**. In this approach, a professor actually teaches the students meditation or related techniques. From Chang's description we can see how she was able to apply all three approaches interchangeably.

As a Chan practitioner, Chang's teaching demonstrates how contemplative practice can be integrated into music higher education.

Beyond all this, it should be said, the main purpose of Chinese Zen training, is to cultivate compassion. Compassion means empathy towards others' distress, along with the wish to alleviate it—and it begins with and extends to oneself. Chang is able to generate an understanding about and kindness to herself with regard to her physical and mental struggles. In consequence, she is better able to extend the same depth and openness to her students.

In addition, Chang's mindful presence in the classroom helps her to identify students who need more attention and to engage them in the class activity. The existential conversations she brings to her class (talking as she says about, "*the purpose of life*") demonstrate mindfulness-informed teaching. Leading a conversation on existential concerns can engage students in a more meaningful discussion of both music and life. This is crucial because mindfulness interventions should be more than just stress-reduction or clinically prescribed lifestyle change, it should provide ways to enrich students' existential awareness (Middleton, 2017).

Finally, to help her students deal with their stress and anxiety, Chang is able to teach

meditation techniques. She teaches her students a very basic yet powerful technique – the method of following the breath. In this method, one is instructed to just observe the breath - noting the sensation of the breath passing in and out of the nostril, appreciate it, and follow it. The attitude cultivated is relaxed, natural, and clear. When the mind wanders away, the student is instructed to just gently bring his or her attention back to the breath. The natural consequence of this practice is better relaxation and better focus. Importantly one's breath is easy to focus on. One can use such focusing as an anchor at almost any situation. In addition, it would be inappropriate to teach silent illumination in classroom, because it is an advanced technique that requires a good theoretical and experiential foundation, as well as the proper meditation environment.

From Chang's description, she has demonstrated that Chan can be integrated with classroom setting in several different ways. Her experience is entirely in accordance with the literature of mindfulness. Furthermore, Chang is not the only Chan practitioner who applies Chinese Zen in higher education. In Taiwan, Master Sheng-Yen founded a liberal arts college, where the mission, curriculum, and teaching of the college are based on Chan philosophy.

Chan masters always remind their students that ultimately, the practice of Chan is the

practice of great compassion. Teaching is a great vehicle for Chinese Zen training because teaching is compassion in action. Given that Chang has reported successful application of Chinese Zen with her students, it will be interesting to hear more on the details of her teaching methods.

Chang's Teaching Methods

There are a few things I do with students, which I list below. However, I find Chan meditation ultimately benefits me as a coach who can become more respectful, sensitive, aware, mindful and, optimally, insightful. I build emotional connections with students. I watch them more objectively and openly therefore it is more comfortable for them to communicate with me on their psychological, emotional and mental challenges.

When I work with performance students, I always introduce Chan meditation concepts and methods, and offer a lecture that includes the most current researches on music performance anxiety issues and methods psychologists adopt for their patients. I guide them in simple breathing meditation exercises and familiarize them with the concept of mind, body and attention, and I encourage them to practice daily. It is a theme I bring up constantly in coaching, in their performance, in their rehearsals and in their own personal practices throughout the entire semester – relax your body, clear your mind and focus on your task at hand (breathing or music). Once I get to

know each of them, I take note of the pattern of anxiety specific to each student: from shortness of breath, pauses in the middle of a song/piece, sweating, nervous affect, shaking hands, atypical body gestures, dropping lyrics/passages for music and etc. Some exhibit different level of anxiety and symptoms each week. I ask them to rate from 1 to 10 of their anxiety levels as well as their comfort level when I observe their experience and/or when they express their experience verbally to me.

Circumstances like public performance before juries or formal concerts certainly trigger anxiety. The essence of Chan teaching is to reveal that Chan is a 'way' of life and it is about 'present' moment practice. Students' preparation for public performance involves the same attitude. How they practice and rehearse on their own, and perform in response to coaching, is how they will perform publicly. Chinese Zen practice in music is minding the act of performing, staying with that reality from moment to moment to moment. Providing understanding, empathy and sympathy to students in mindful ways makes students more willing to explore and discuss their own emotions and the personal issues that they bring to their performances. When private conversation does not satisfy the student and issues simply do not get resolved, or when things sometimes become more complex and intricate, then it is time for referral to

professional help or psychotherapy.

Peter Lin's Commentary

Compassion for others starts from self-compassion. What is implicit in Chang's description is her own performance and meditation experience. Chang's teaching skills rely heavily on her meditation training. The ability to provide instruction in mindfulness and to conduct guided Chan meditations can only come after years of practice. This is the final topic I would like to focus on. I believe in order to apply a Chinese Zen approach in a classroom setting, the instructor needs to have an adequate history of individual practice and theoretical study. To provide basic lessons in mindfulness, one needs to have a strong grasp of the mindfulness literature, as well as a good foundation of psychology, including Buddhist psychology. In addition, daily meditation practice is necessary in order to understand the common challenges that one may experience during sitting meditation. With a strong theoretical understanding and experiential practice, empathy will naturally develop because when we are more familiar with our own internal emotional theater, we are also more empathic and sensitive towards other's emotional struggles. It is important to note that one should train with a good teacher and a strong meditation community. Although there are many self-guided meditation training, such as a

meditation app or a plethora of mindfulness books, mindfulness training, especially Chinese Zen training, is hard to complete through self-practice. This is similar to learning piano; one cannot become a good pianist by self-practice alone. Without strong training, we may end up offering “*McMindfulness*” to our students, a quick fix that is neither helpful to the teacher nor the participants.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been to introduce the potential value of Chinese Zen in secondary music education. We supported this view through personal experience and anecdotes shared by two Chan practitioners. Our hope is that readers will be inspired to explore Chinese Zen and mindfulness literature further.

More than 100 years ago, William James, stated that “*the faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over, and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. ...An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.*” (as cited in Bush, 2011). However, he also stated that “*it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about.*” Chan practice is one possible approach to reaching this ideal.

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