

# **Music For Life Workshops**

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## Contemporary literature and research grounding:

A great deal of research has been done investigating how mindfulness training and yoga can be used in urban environments to help give students tools with which to modulate stress response. In the 2013 article “Implementing mindfulness and yoga in urban schools: a community-academic partnership” (Mendelson et al., 2013), the authors participated in an autoethnographic study investigating the challenges and benefits of a 6 week mindfulness and yoga program in 2 randomly selected Baltimore, MD city public schools. Through journal entries by the students, they found an overwhelming cry for tools with which to reduce their stress. Resistance to the techniques was uncovered by requirements at times to sit still. Wisner, 2013 also describes how students participating in compensatory alternative high school programs for behavioral problems derived great benefits in attention and mood improvement from an 8 week instructional program in meditation practices (Wisner, 2013).

We address this challenge through arts based integration of these techniques. Sussman et al. 2011 described in their paper “The wisdom of the inner life: Meeting oneself through meditation and music” how practicing and playing music can lead to deep inner wisdom and understanding of how oneself works. It is based on transpersonal psychology- the Western term for unitive experiences of completeness with oneself, others, ideas and the world. The paper outlines how meditation practices develop an understanding of embodied actions and how playing music assumes the role of embodied understanding. This means that by coming to understand how the body moves, breaths and responds to thoughts and actions through meditation, we can come to understand how the body moves, breath and responds to thoughts and actions through our making of sound in music.

The research in putting meditation and yoga together is compelling. The breathing practices of yoga are particularly compelling and a focus of this program. In Richard Ley’s 1999 article “The modification of breathing behavior- Pavlovian and operant control in emotion and cognition” the author describes how maladaptive cognitive states- stress, worry, doubt, fear panic etc- are associated with certain breath patterns. Conversely, so are positive cognitive states. The article outlines how simple Pavlovian conditioning can be employed to repeatedly disassociate maladaptive cognitive states with their accompanying breathing patterns and remove the attendant anxiety and discomfort through breathing therapies. When negative cognitive states are present, they are then associated with breathing patterns normally associated with positive states. When this occurs, the maladaptive patterns cease to be distressing (Ley, 1999). David Shannahoff-Khalsa in his 2008 research “Kundalini Yoga Meditation Techniques for the Treatment of Obsessive Compulsive and OC Spectrum Disorders” explores how specific yoga breathing meditations are effective in mitigating the effects of obsessive compulsive disorder. Ley’s research explains how the particular breathing patterns researched by Shannahoff-Khalsa work- as the practitioner experiences distressing thoughts, the accompanying breath patterns of those distressing thoughts are interrupted by the yoga breathing technique. Instead, the breath is controlled and

activates the parasympathetic (relaxing) side of the nervous system and removed the attendant anxiety (Shannahoff-Khalsa, 2008).

This is the concept of praxial musicing (music as a verb). This program is about a praxial- ie. real life, real situations, and real purpose- for music making. People make music all over the world for specific reasons- to celebrate, mourn, worship, enjoy or entertain (Elliott et al. 2015). Here, we are making music for skills for life. We are teaching students how to use their body and their capacity to move, breath and play for a purpose. When students leave, they will have the skills to play music with others, or alone, as well as a set of tools for modulating behavior response through yoga breathing and at the same time, through their instrument

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