

EMOTIONAL SELF-MANAGEMENT AND TRANSFER  
OF LEARNING IN A CONFLICT RESOLUTION COURSE  
FOR ADULTS: THE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS

by

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## ABSTRACT

### EMOTIONAL SELF-MANAGEMENT AND TRANSFER OF LEARNING IN A CONFLICT RESOLUTION COURSE FOR ADULTS: THE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS

Susan Helen Fountain

Conflict resolution education tends to emphasize the analysis of conflict dynamics, and skills for communication and problem-solving. The role of emotions, and practical strategies for one's own emotional self-management have received less attention. Emotional dysregulation in conflict may interfere with the use of learned conflict resolution skills, thus reducing transfer of learning. The study explored the possible influence of mindfulness practice on emotional self-management, and subsequent transfer of learning in interpersonal conflict.

This modified qualitative case study involved 15 adult undergraduate students in the researcher's class on "Managing Conflict." Mindfulness practice was included in every class, and subjects kept a journal on their frequency of out-of-class practice. Subjects were interviewed before the start of the class on their ways of handling conflict, and were asked to describe a recent conflict they had been involved in. A post-class interview asked the same questions, as well as exploring subjects' experience of mindfulness.

Findings revealed that for this group of subjects, frequency of mindfulness practice had little influence on emotional self-management or transfer of learning. However, subjects' stance toward mindfulness, a qualitative descriptor, appeared to positively influence both emotional self-management and transfer of learning. Stance toward

mindfulness was described as focusing on either self-soothing or self-awareness.

Subjects reporting a self-awareness stance were more likely to report managing their emotions in conflict, regardless of whether their dominant emotion in a conflict was anger or fear. They were also more likely to report transfer of learning (specifically, the ability to identify causes of conflict and the other party's needs, to use receptive communication skills, and to incorporate mindful awareness in the negotiation process).

Self-awareness appeared to be a foundational capacity that supported emotional self-management and transfer of learning for this group of subjects. Possible implications for the field of conflict resolution, and directions for future research, are discussed.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, who deeply valued the transformative power of education, and set me on a path of lifelong learning;

And to the fifteen women who agreed to be the subjects of this study; their commitment to their own learning in the face of every imaginable obstacle inspired me to stay on this path.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I—INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background and Context.....	1
Research Problem .....	5
Approaches to Conflict Resolution Education for Adults .....	6
Emotions in Conflict Resolution Education .....	10
Mindfulness Practice: An Approach to Developing Emotional Self-Management.....	15
Research Purpose and Research Questions.....	16
Research Purpose .....	16
Research Questions.....	16
Research Design Overview.....	17
The “Managing Conflict” Class: Objectives, Content, and Methods .....	18
Researcher Perspectives.....	20
Assumptions of the Study .....	21
Rationale and Significance .....	22
Definition of Terms.....	22
Chapter II—LITERATURE REVIEW .....	25
Introduction.....	25
Sources of Literature.....	26
Emotional Intelligence .....	27
Approaches to Emotional Intelligence.....	27
Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Skills.....	31
Conflict Intelligence.....	34
Mindfulness.....	36
Defining Mindfulness .....	36
Neurophysiology and Mindfulness .....	37
Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence .....	40
Attention .....	41
Stress reduction.....	41
Empathy .....	42
Emotional self-management .....	42
Transfer of Learning .....	45
Defining Transfer of Learning.....	45
Transfer of Learning and Conflict Resolution Education.....	47
Transfer of Learning and Mindfulness .....	50
Summary.....	51
Conceptual Framework.....	53



Chapter III—METHODOLOGY .....	55
Introduction.....	55
Rationale for the Study Design .....	56
Areas of Information Collected .....	58
Overview of the Research Design.....	61
Phase 1: Informed Consent .....	62
Phase 2: Pre-class Data Collection .....	62
Phase 3: Data Collection during the Class .....	63
Phase 4: Post-class Data Collection.....	63
Phase 5: Data Analysis and Conclusions .....	63
Discussion of the Sample.....	64
Methods for Assuring Protection of Human Subjects .....	66
Methods for Data Collection.....	69
Literature to Support Design and Data Collection Methods.....	72
Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis .....	75
Validity and Reliability.....	79
Limitations .....	81
 Chapter IV—FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	 84
Description of the Setting .....	86
The Study Subjects .....	87
Prior Experience with Conflict Resolution and/or Mindfulness.....	88
Post-class Conflicts Described by Subjects .....	89
Finding #1 .....	93
Frequency of Mindfulness Practice .....	94
Frequency of Mindfulness Practice and Emotional Self-	
management .....	95
Frequency of Mindfulness Practice and Transfer of Learning .....	97
Frequency of mindfulness practice and transfer of analytic	
skills .....	97
Frequency of mindfulness practice and transfer of	
communication skills .....	99
Frequency of mindfulness practice and mindful	
awareness as an approach to conflict.....	100
Additional Quantitative Descriptors of Mindfulness Practice .....	101
Finding #2 .....	103
Group 1: Mindfulness as Leading to Self-awareness/Insight .....	105
Barbara and Rita: Two distinctive examples of the self-	
awareness stance .....	107
Group 2: Mindfulness as Self-soothing .....	110
Stance toward Mindfulness and Emotional Self-management .....	111
Stance toward Mindfulness and Transfer of Learning.....	113
Stance toward mindfulness and transfer of analytic skills.....	113
Stance toward mindfulness and transfer of communication	
skills .....	115

Stance toward mindfulness and mindful awareness in approach to conflict .....	117
Finding #3 .....	119
Managing Anger .....	119
Managing Fear .....	121
Difficulty Interrupting Habitual Responses to Conflict.....	123
Finding #4 .....	125
Emotional Self-management, Transfer of Learning, and Stance toward Mindfulness .....	126
Transfer of Analytic Skills.....	127
Identifying causes of conflict.....	128
Identifying the other’s needs.....	128
Use of specific course concepts to analyze conflict.....	130
Transfer of Communication Skills.....	131
Expressive communication skills: Assertiveness.....	131
Use of assertiveness and the avoiding approach to conflict .....	132
Use of assertiveness and the competing approach to conflict .....	133
Receptive communication skills .....	134
Attentive listening.....	134
Asking open-ended questions .....	135
Paraphrasing.....	136
Transfer of Mindful Awareness into Post-class Conflicts .....	137
Finding #5 .....	140
Emotional Self-awareness.....	142
Cognitive Self-awareness.....	143
Cognitive clarity.....	143
Ability to identify and take responsibility for own role in conflict .....	144
Physical Self-awareness.....	146
Chapter V—SYNTHESIS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS.....	149
Introduction.....	149
Analytic Category Development.....	151
Synthesis .....	151
Understanding Mindfulness through Quantitative and Qualitative Lenses .....	152
The Interconnection of Cognition and Emotion in Learning to Resolve Conflict.....	155
Anger and fear.....	157
Being “Mindful” in Conflict .....	158
Learning Methods in Conflict Resolution Education .....	161
Interpreting the Findings.....	163
Specificity of the Sample .....	163
Personality.....	165

Conflict Intensity and Complexity.....	166
Study Design.....	167
Revisiting Researcher Assumptions .....	168
Uncovering Researcher Bias.....	170
Conclusions.....	172
Conclusion #1 .....	172
Conclusion #2 .....	172
Conclusion #3 .....	173
Conclusion #4 .....	173
Conclusion #5 .....	173
Conclusion #6 .....	174
Conclusion #7 .....	174
Recommendations.....	174
Recommendations for the Design of Conflict Resolution	
Education for Adults .....	175
Recommendations for Conflict Resolution Instructors.....	175
Recommendations for Researchers.....	176
Recommendations for Future Research Topics .....	176
REFERENCES .....	178
Appendix A—“Managing Conflict” Course Syllabus.....	188
Appendix B—Informed Consent Form .....	195
Appendix C—Participant’s Rights Form.....	198
Appendix D—Demographic Information Form .....	200
Appendix E—Pre-Class Interview Protocol .....	202
Appendix F—Weekly Journal Form.....	205
Appendix G—Post-Class Interview Protocol .....	206
Appendix H—Sample Mindfulness Practice Script .....	209
Appendix I—Conflict Behavior, as Described in Pre- and Post-Class Interviews....	211
Appendix J—Initial Set of Codes .....	212
Appendix K—An Interim Set of Codes.....	213
Appendix L—Final Set of Codes .....	215
Appendix M—Interpretation Outline Tool.....	217
Appendix N—Analytic Category Development Tool .....	223
Appendix O—Emotional Self-Management in Post-class Conflict Descriptions:	
The Ability to Interrupt Automatic Reactions in Relation to Frequency	
of Mindfulness Practice .....	225
Appendix P—Transfer of Learning: Analytic Skills Reported in Post-Class	
Conflicts, in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice .....	226
Appendix Q—Transfer of Learning: Communication Skills Reported in Post-	
Class Conflicts, in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice .....	227
Appendix R—Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class	
Conflicts and Frequency of Mindfulness Practice .....	228
Appendix S—Length of Mindfulness Practice in Relation to Self Management,	
Transfer of Learning, and Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts .....	229

Appendix T—Length of Descriptions of Experience of Mindfulness in Relation to Self-Management, Transfer of Learning, and Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts .....	230
Appendix U—Emotional Self-Management in Post-class Conflict Descriptions: The Ability to Interrupt Automatic Responses to Conflict in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness.....	231
Appendix V—Transfer of Learning: Analytic Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness .....	232
Appendix W—Transfer of Learning: Communication Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness.....	233
Appendix X—Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts and Stance toward Mindfulness .....	234
Appendix Y—Self-awareness in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice....	235
Appendix Z—Self-awareness in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness.....	236

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
3.1	Areas of Information Collected .....	60
3.2	Overview of Research Design .....	64
4.1	Subject Demographics .....	88
4.2	Prior Experience with Conflict Resolution and/or Mindfulness.....	89
4.3	Post-Class Conflicts as Described by Subjects .....	90
4.4	Subjects' Frequency of Mindfulness Practice .....	95
4.5	Frequency of Mindfulness Practice and Ability to Interrupt Automatic Responses to Conflict .....	96
4.6	Transfer of Learning: Summary of Analytic Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice .....	99
4.7	Transfer of Learning: Summary of Communication Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice.....	100
4.8	Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts and Frequency of Mindfulness Practice .....	101
4.9	Study Subjects' Stance toward Mindfulness .....	105
4.10	Stance toward Mindfulness, Frequency of Mindfulness Practice, and the Ability to Interrupt Automatic Responses to Conflict .....	113
4.11	Transfer of Learning: Summary of Analytical Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness .....	115
4.12	Transfer of Learning: Summary of Communication Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness .....	116
4.13	Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts and Stance toward Mindfulness .....	117
4.14	Possible Links between Emotional Self-Management, Transfer of Learning, and Stance toward Mindfulness .....	127

4.15 Self-Awareness in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice  
and Stance Toward Mindfulness ..... 141

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.1	Potential Impacts of Incorporating Mindfulness into Conflict Resolution Education .....	16
2.1	Relationship between ESC Competency Clusters .....	30
2.2	ESC Clusters and Selected Competencies .....	31
2.3	Conceptual Framework.....	54

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal conflict resolution skills are needed in all walks of life. The field of conflict resolution education makes extensive use of conceptual and analytical approaches. Most texts used in conflict resolution education courses give little attention to the role of emotions, or to skills for managing one's own emotions in conflict. Including the practice of mindfulness in these courses may have potential to address this problem, as mindfulness practice has been found to support emotional self-management in a variety of contexts. Improved emotional self-management may in turn support transfer of learning of conflict resolution skills in actual interpersonal conflicts. For these reasons, this study explored the development of emotional self-management and transfer of learning when mediated by mindfulness practice in the context of an undergraduate-level conflict resolution course for adults. The study's results inform consideration of the usefulness of mindfulness practice as a possible educational innovation for improving the effectiveness of conflict resolution education for adult learners.

#### **Background and Context**

Interpersonal conflict is a regular feature of life in home, workplace and community settings. According to Tjosvold (2008), "conflict pervades all the functional areas in organization.... Wishing for a 'conflict-free' work environment is unrealistic" (p. 20). Studies of the costs of unresolved interpersonal conflict in the workplace suggest



that it leads to decreased emotional attachment to the employing organization, less commitment to continuing employment, poor employee health outcomes, and negative attitudes toward the job, along with the financial costs associated with these types of outcomes (Thomas, Bliese, & Jex, 2005). De Dreu (2008) found that interpersonal conflict in organizations contributed to feelings of burnout, anxiety, frustration, psychosomatic complaints, and rigidity of thinking, along with loss of time on work-related tasks.

However, Tjosvold (2008) argues that when interpersonal conflict is managed constructively, it can lead to positive outcomes in organizations, such as improved understanding of issues, high-quality decision-making, and strengthened relationships. Jehn and Chatman (2000) found that task-related conflict (disagreement about work being done) within teams was positively related to both performance and group members' attitudes when the perceived level of relationship conflict (disagreements over personal and social issues not related to work) was low. Somech (2008) found that school management teams that employed an integrating style (emphasizing collaboration, concern with needs of all parties, and an approach to problem-solving that attempts to meet those needs in a win-win fashion) were more effective and productive than teams in which win-lose approaches to conflict were the norm.

Given the negative impacts of unresolved conflicts in the workplace, and the potential benefits to individuals and teams of effectively managed conflict, it is little wonder that employer surveys consistently rank the interpersonal skills related to effective conflict management as high priorities in employees. In reviewing competence models drawn from 121 organizations, Goleman (1998) found that "67 percent ... of the abilities deemed essential for effective performance were emotional competencies" (p. 31). These included skills that are necessary for effective interpersonal conflict management: skills in listening and understanding, teamwork, cooperation, self-awareness, and empathy. In a 2009 study, the American Society for Training and

Development (ASTD), the world's largest professional organization for training and development specialists, conducted a Skills Gap Study of 1179 organizations (Galagan, 2009). A "skills gap" was defined as a "significant gap between an organization's current abilities and the skills it needs to achieve its goals. It is the point at which an organization can no longer grow or remain competitive because it cannot fill critical jobs with employees who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities" (Pace, 2012, p. 43).

Over a third of the companies surveyed in the 2009 study identified a "skills gap" in the area of communication and interpersonal skills as being among the top three priorities in their workforce. In a 2012 ASTD study (Pace, 2012, employers identified the top five competencies they look for in new hires. Four of the five are related to emotional and social competencies, with two—effective communication and self-awareness—being directly related to conflict resolution. A third competency involved in effective conflict resolution, the ability to collaborate with others, was mentioned as one likely to be essential in the future.

Given the importance of interpersonal conflict resolution skills both in and outside of the workplace, it is essential to ensure that conflict resolution training and education enables adults to manage their emotions and those of others. These skills must be taught in ways that enable adult learners to actually use them in real life situations. This is referred to as transfer of learning (or transfer of training), defined as "the effective and continuous application by learners—to their performance of jobs, or other personal, organizational or community responsibilities—of knowledge and skills gained in learning activities" (Broad, 1997, p. 2).

The field of adult education has been criticized for paying relatively little attention to issues of transfer of learning, tending to assume that it will "just happen" (Caffarella, 2002; Merriam & Leahy, 2005). More attention to this issue has come from the fields of training and human resource development (Holton, 2003). In these fields, a widely cited estimate suggests that as little as 10 percent of learning results in transfer to the

workplace (Awoniyi, Griego & Morgan, 2002; Holton & Baldwin, 2003). It should be noted that most of the literature on transfer of learning focuses on cognitive or technical skills. According to Goleman (1998), "Technical training is easy compared to developing emotional intelligence. Our entire system of education is geared to cognitive skills. But when it comes to learning emotional competencies, our system is sorely lacking" (p. 244).

Relatively few studies on the successful transfer of learning of interpersonal conflict resolution skills are available (see Chapter II). However, if training in technical and cognitive skills results in low rates of learning transfer, and learning emotional competencies is more challenging than learning technical and cognitive skills, then understanding the factors affecting transfer of learning in conflict resolution education and training is imperative.

Literature on factors affecting transfer of learning has primarily focused on three broad areas: (1) the internal characteristics of the learner, such as motivation, sense of self-efficacy, and locus of control; (2) program content and design, including multiple instructional methodologies, post-training relapse prevention, adaptive feedback, and coaching; and (3) environmental supports, including the opportunity to use new skills, support from workplace management, social support, and a culture of continuous learning (Merriam & Leahy, 2005). The second of these areas, program content and design, is the one over which instructors have the most influence. This study examines the potential of mindfulness practice as an innovation in program content and design that may influence both emotional self-management in conflict and transfer of learning.

The remainder of this chapter articulates the research problem through an overview of widely used approaches to conflict resolution education. It identifies critiques of current program content and design, particularly the relative lack of attention to the role of emotions in conflict, and to emotional self-management. Insufficient attention to adults' need for emotional self-management skills may negatively impact transfer of

learning. The chapter also highlights research on mindfulness practice (further explored in Chapter II) that suggests its possible role in supporting the development of emotional self-management and learning transfer.

This is followed by a discussion of the research purpose and questions related to the potential influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management and transfer of learning. The main components of the research design used to investigate those questions are described. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the researcher's background and assumptions, and the implications of the study for creating a greater understanding of the role that mindfulness practice may play in conflict resolution education for adults.

### **Research Problem**

Current approaches to conflict resolution education tend to emphasize the analysis and understanding of conflict dynamics, along with specific communication and problem solving skills. The role of emotions, particularly the management of one's own emotions has until recently received less attention. Additionally, practical strategies for emotional self-management tend to receive little coverage, despite the inherently emotional nature of conflict. Emotional dysregulation in conflict may interfere with the use of skills learned in conflict resolution, thus reducing transfer of learning. Mindfulness practice is a possible means to address this potential problem in conflict resolution education, as research suggests that it supports the development of emotional self-management. If incorporating mindfulness in conflict resolution programs for adults allows them to better manage emotions in situations of actual interpersonal conflict, this may increase the likelihood that adults will recall and use learned conflict resolution skills and concepts in actual conflict situations. Thus, the focus of this study is the examination of adult learners' self-reports of the influence (if any) of mindfulness on emotional self-management in interpersonal conflict, as well as transfer of learning.

To more fully illustrate the research problem, literature relating to the current practice of conflict resolution education for adults is described below. This is followed by an overview of literature that argues for a larger role for the emotions, and particularly to emotional self-management, in conflict resolution education. Research on mindfulness is then summarized briefly for its potential relevance to supporting emotional self-management in adults; the literature on mindfulness research is examined in more depth in Chapter II.

### **Approaches to Conflict Resolution Education for Adults**

The field of conflict resolution is an interdisciplinary one, drawing on psychology, sociology, law, and international relations, among others. Social psychology has been particularly influential in understanding interpersonal conflict. Deutsch (2002) describes social psychology's contributions to the field as emphasizing such issues as the relative impact of cooperative and competitive processes on conflict, conditions that give rise to constructive or destructive processes in conflict, strategies and tactics that affect conflict outcomes, the role of third parties, intractable conflicts, the role of culture, and power. These concepts, an analytical problem-solving approach, and training in negotiation skills (such as distinguishing between positions and needs) tend to be essential components in the teaching of conflict resolution. A look at the topics covered by key texts on conflict resolution, and negotiation training models, confirms this orientation.

*Getting to Yes* by Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011, originally published in 1981) is a foundational text on negotiation. The approach of Fisher et al. is to help negotiators distinguish between positions and needs, and to negotiate at the level of needs, an analytical approach that has become central to much conflict resolution training and education. The authors argue for separating the substance of the conflict from the relationship, trying to understand the other's perspective, and using active listening skills. In this way, negotiators are able to "invent options for mutual gain" (p. 58). Creating

objective criteria for a fair solution ideally leads to a win-win solution, but negotiators are also encouraged to know their BATNA, or “best alternative to a negotiated agreement” if the negotiation process breaks down.

A training program developed by Kestner and Ray (2002) also reflects a primarily analytical approach to conflict resolution education. The program begins with an examination of the continuum of conflict resolution methods, followed by looking at the nature of conflict and conflict resolution styles. A substantial portion of the program focuses on communication skills. Values, perspectives and power are addressed briefly. The program then moves on to capacities related to problem-solving, such as creativity and consensus-building, and employing sequenced stages of negotiation.

The predominantly analytical approach is evident in the work of other authors as well. Pruitt and Kim (2004) focus on the analysis of conflict and its causes. They also emphasize strategic choices in conflict arising from the dual concern model (p. 41), which is widely used in conflict resolution courses. This model postulates that one’s choice of strategies in a conflict is the result of the degree of concern one has for both one’s own outcomes, and those of the other. Four strategies result—avoiding, yielding, contending, and problem-solving. The authors use this model as a basis for examining processes of escalation and de-escalation, issues originally identified by Deutsch (2002).

Patton (2005) describes seven key elements of negotiation developed at the Harvard Negotiation Project. These include the notion of interests (as differentiated from positions); legitimacy or fairness as a driver of both dispute and resolution; the nature of the relationship between the negotiating parties; alternatives to an agreement and BATNA; options that might be offered by either negotiator; commitments (agreements that might be made at the end of the negotiation, or at any point in the process); and communication processes that are used to approach the negotiation. Patton describes using these elements in a “circle of value” (p. 294) approach to negotiation, in which

exploring options for creating and distributing value is carried out with a collaborative, problem-solving mentality.

*Difficult Conversations* (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010, originally published in 1999) is another publication of the Harvard Negotiation Project. It outlines three essential “conversations” that underlie many conflicts. The first is the “What happened?” conversation, which examines truth assumptions, intention and impact, and the contribution system. The second is the “Feelings” conversation, which explores the ways in which unexpressed emotions can escalate conflict. The third is the “Identity” conversation, which addresses how conflict may challenge one’s core sense of self in ways that are difficult to make explicit. This publication is notable for its attention to and guidance on handling strong emotions, such as reflecting on the hidden roots of emotions, and bringing emotion into negotiation without “venting.” These are strategies that can contribute to emotional self-management; however, they still rely on a predominantly analytic approach, and may be difficult to use unless one can first interrupt habitual emotional responses that may be triggered before such strategies can be used.

Weitzman and Weitzman (2014) propose the PDSM approach to negotiation, an integrated model of problem-solving and decision-making. It involves (1) diagnosing the conflict, (2) identifying alternative solutions, (3) evaluating and choosing a mutually acceptable solution, and (4) committing to the decision and implementing it. They advocate for learning perspective-taking ability, and offer a developmental typology of perspective taking levels, from egocentric to unilateral, reciprocal and finally mutual; however, they offer little guidance as to how to move from one level to the next. They also advocate for training in the specific conditions that support willingness to engage in problem-solving. These include creating a positive psychological climate, and cultivating concern for the other, reflecting an acknowledgment of the role of emotions in the problem-solving process.

Raider, Coleman, and Gerson (2014), writing from a training perspective, describe the Coleman-Raider model. It emphasizes distinguishing between collaborative and competitive strategies, and employs a structural model of conflict that identifies both parties' positions and needs, reframing, and the development of alternatives. It also addresses pre-negotiation planning, communication behaviors, stages of negotiation, and cultural differences. Explicit discussion of the role of emotions in conflict, particularly anger, is included; this section of the training offers strategies for dealing with another's anger in negotiation. Some of these strategies include avoiding the "attack-defend" spiral (p. 867), listening actively, trying to understand the other's perspective, acknowledging differences, and working as a partner to solve the problem. A role play exercise gives learners the chance to try to put these strategies into action with an angry, verbally attacking partner. The training does not include specific guidance on managing one's own emotions in conflict.

Lewicki, Saunders, Barry, and Minton (2016) address similar themes in their text on negotiation. Key chapters cover negotiation strategy, leveraging power, and learning the stages of negotiation; these stages include problem definition, identification of interests and needs, generation of alternatives, and evaluation and selection of solutions. They expand the field by examining the role of perception and cognitive biases (negotiator's unexamined beliefs and assumptions) in negotiation. They also encourage a skills-based approach, recommending the practice of active listening, the use of questioning strategies, and role reversal.

This brief overview of literature on negotiation and conflict resolution, while not exhaustive, suggests that the field has privileged conceptual knowledge, and skills of analysis, problem solving, communication, and decision-making. This orientation to conflict appears to have influenced the content of conflict resolution education in the direction of rational and analytical approaches. Comparatively little attention appears to have been given to the role of the emotions, particularly to managing one's own



emotions, a challenge that frequently arises in negotiation. This lack has been the subject of considerable critique in the field, as the next section illustrates.

### **Emotions in Conflict Resolution Education**

Bordone, Moffitt, and Sander (2005), writing about challenges to the field of conflict resolution, identify research areas that they believe are most promising for the field. One of these is the role of emotions in conflict: "No one with experience in dispute resolution would deny that emotion plays a role. Yet until very recently, scholars have offered relatively little helpful advice to those who engage in dispute resolution regarding the roles of emotion" (p. 515).

Deutsch (2014b), often considered one of the founders of the field of conflict resolution, concurs, saying that "The important role of emotions during conflict has been much neglected until recently" (p. xxxvi). Schreier (2002) points out that in the field of conflict resolution and negotiation, especially prior to the year 2000, "the parties are viewed (unrealistically) as wholly strategic, seeking logical economic gain for their own interests with little or no influence from passion or emotion" (pp. 99-100). And according to Lewicki et al. (2016):

Research on negotiation has been dominated by views that have favored rational, cognitive, economic analyses of the negotiation process.... Negotiators are portrayed as rational beings who seem calculating, calm, and in control. But, this overlooks the role played by emotions in the negotiation process. (p. 157)

A look at the approaches to conflict resolution reviewed above bears out these observations. Kestner and Ray (2002), Patton (2005), and Weitzman and Weitzman (2014) make no specific mention of emotions in their models. Fisher et al. (2011) devote several pages of their book to this topic, advising negotiators to recognize and understand one's own emotions and those of others, identify the source of the emotions, make emotions explicit in negotiation, allow the other to "let off steam," and not react to emotional outbursts. They also suggest the use of "symbolic gestures"—such as

apologies or notes of sympathy to defuse emotions (pp. 31-35). While these approaches may indeed enable a negotiator to better manage their emotions, they still reflect a largely analytical orientation. No guidance is given, for example, on how to actually refrain from reacting to emotions expressed in a negotiation.

Pruitt and Kim (2004) discuss emotions such as anger and fear in the context of analyzing psychological forces in conflict escalation. Anger is described as a state that leads to “retaliatory spirals” in conflict, whereas fear leads to “defensive spirals” (p. 104). The brief treatment of this topic suggests no strategies for negotiators to manage their own or others’ emotions, although a later chapter on defusing emotion in mediation suggests allowing parties to vent, listening actively, and injecting humor when appropriate.

Lewicki et al. (2016) summarize research on the consequences of both positive and negative emotions for negotiation (pp. 157-162), but do not offer strategies for increasing positive emotions or reducing negative ones. They propose brief suggestions for responding to the negative emotions of the other party in negotiation, but do not address the need to regulate one’s own emotions.

In the face of this predominantly rational and analytical approach to the field of conflict resolution and to the very discussion of emotion itself, some researchers and practitioners have called for giving a more prominent place to the role of emotion in conflict resolution education. Much of the interest in the role of emotions arises from those working in the field of mediation. For example, Jones and Bodtke (2001) point out that emotions frame how parties in conflict define their reality, yet the role of emotion is frequently ignored in conflict resolution theory and practice literature. Maiese (2006) says that most training in negotiation and mediation reflects a biased view of emotion as being opposed to reason, and therefore emphasizes “the importance of skills training, conflict analysis, and process management capacities” (p. 188). Writing in the context of mediation training, Schreier (2002) conducted a survey of 175 mediation organizations,

and found that the majority of respondents felt that training did not adequately address how to work with strong emotions in mediation; the need for support in developing emotional self-awareness and emotional self-regulation were described as especially important.

When emotion *is* addressed in conflict resolution education, there is a tendency to focus on managing the emotions of others, rather than one's own. However, being able to manage one's own emotions is essential to being able to use conflict resolution skills effectively. Recognizing the need to become skilled at managing one's own emotions in conflict, and to find constructive, well-regulated ways of expressing them, Cloke and Goldsmith (2005) note that "emotions can distort or clarify our communication, escalate or de-escalate our conflicts, encourage us to act collaboratively or prevent us from doing so" (p. 75). In writing about the training of mediators, Jones and Bodtker (2001) discuss the risks of emotional flooding, "being swamped by emotion to the extent that one cannot function or think effectively" (p. 228). They caution that mediators must be prepared to handle emotional contagion, the taking on of other's strong emotions. Maiese (2006) critiques the notion that conflict can always be addressed through logical problem-solving processes, and points out that one's own strong emotions can skew interpretations of conflict and lead to "cognitive blindness" (p. 188). D. L. Shapiro (2005) goes further, stating that emotions are present in every human interaction and cannot be eliminated from conflict. He says that emotions have four potential effects in negotiation. They affect our physiology, causing increased heart rate and sweating. They affect cognition in conflict situations – strong negative emotions can narrow the scope of thinking. He says that emotions have an associated "action tendency," inclining us to act in certain ways in conflict. Finally, emotions affect a negotiator's subjective feeling about the conflict situation. Negative emotions tend to reduce one's sense of satisfaction with a negotiation, and may affect the achievement of instrumental goals in conflict. Therefore,

D. L. Shapiro asserts that negotiators should attempt to build relationship and positive affect between each other.

Fisher and Shapiro (2005) dissect the anatomy of emotions in conflict, arguing that challenging emotions arise when at least one of five core concerns of parties in conflict are not met: appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role. The ability to analyze and negotiate around these concerns form the focus of the book, but this still raises the question of whether the strategies suggested can be effectively employed if one's emotions have already been triggered. They do, however, recommend several strategies for "self-soothing", such as slowly counting backwards from ten, breathing deeply, visualizing a relaxing place, and adopting a relaxed body position (p. 150).

Researchers writing from a neurophysiological perspective have also advanced arguments for the need to develop the capacity to manage one's own emotions in conflict. Lindner (2014) highlights the centrality of emotion in conflict, along with its biological and cultural origins. She calls for developing the capacity to "constructively regulate our negative emotions of anger, fear and distress because they are the gatekeepers of any communicative effectiveness" (p. 301). Mischel, DeSmet, and Kross (2014) examine emotional self-management as an intrapsychic process, focusing on the "ability to inhibit impulsive, automatic, 'hot' emotional responses that ... threaten to undo the more valued but distant future goals one is trying to pursue" (p. 310). They locate the biological basis for these reactions in the amygdala, the brain structure that regulates the "fight or flight" response that is essential to survival. However, when the "fight or flight" response becomes an automatic way of reacting to perceived threat, it is difficult to access learned conflict resolution skills.

Thus, each of these authors argue for the importance of being able to manage one's own emotions in conflict, and make the point that an inability to do so can interfere with the use of learned conflict resolution skills in actual situations of conflict. In helping adults learn to manage their own emotions, a number of authors advocate for the use of

educational approaches that represent a departure from conceptual models and analytical problem-solving.

LeBaron (2002), for example, argues that logical analysis and problem-solving methods are not sufficient to resolve conflicts, and calls for the use of methods that develop empathy, relationship and spiritual connection between parties in dispute. She describes empathy as "a bridge across which our heart travels to enter another's path. As we suspend judgment and engage mindful receptivity, we increase our ability to understand another in context" (p. 133).

Jones and Bodtger (2001) suggest that mediators need to learn emotional self-management strategies (such as physical exertion, music, visioning), as well as understanding when managing emotional flooding or contagion may require taking a break. Mischel et al. (2014) advocate teaching the ability to take control with the reasoning capacity of the brain's prefrontal cortex, to override habitual responses to conflict. Lindner (2014) argues for teaching ways to slow down thinking processes in the heat of conflict, to cool down and critically assess those processes, and to get in touch with deeper emotions. Meditation, she suggests, is one way to do this.

This body of literature suggests that the cognitive and analytical nature of social psychology's framing of conflict resolution has provided a solid conceptual framework for the field, but has placed less emphasis on the importance of emotions in negotiation processes. Where emotions appear in this literature, they are dealt with from an analytical stance, with little guidance as to how to manage them in others, and even less on how to manage them in oneself. The field of conflict resolution education may benefit from the incorporation of approaches like mindfulness practice, as a possible means of developing emotional self-management.

## **Mindfulness Practice: An Approach to Developing Emotional Self-Management**

Studies of the effects of mindfulness practice on emotional self-management show promising results that may be relevant for conflict resolution education. A brief overview of selected studies is provided here and will be more fully developed in Chapter II.

Research suggests that a regular program of mindfulness practice has positive impacts on emotional self-management for a range of populations. Self-reports of improved emotional self-management have come from studies of nursing students (Beddoe & Murphy, 2004) and social work students (Birnbaum, 2008); both groups experienced an eight-week program of mindfulness instruction. Similar results were reported in eight-week studies of adults diagnosed with ADHD (Zylowska et al., 2007), and depression (Ramel, Goldin, Carmona, & McQuaid, 2004).

Even mindfulness interventions shorter than eight weeks appear to have positive impacts. Solloway and Fisher (2007) found improved anger management in a group of students in a six-week pre-college academic readiness program. Secondary school teachers reported less emotional distress compared to a control group after only four weeks of mindfulness instruction (Winzelburg & Luskin, 1999).

While the number of studies on mindfulness and emotional self-management is limited, and sample sizes are small, they suggest that mindfulness practice may support the development of emotional self-management. There has been little research, however, that specifically looks at whether and how mindfulness practice may influence emotional self-management in actual situations of interpersonal conflict in adults' lives. This study aims to address this gap. It explores how the inclusion of instruction on mindfulness practice in a conflict resolution course for adults that includes the types of analytic content described above may influence emotional self-management. Additionally, it explores whether possible changes in emotional self-management may in turn enable greater transfer of learning to take place in actual situations of conflict. This potential process is suggested below:

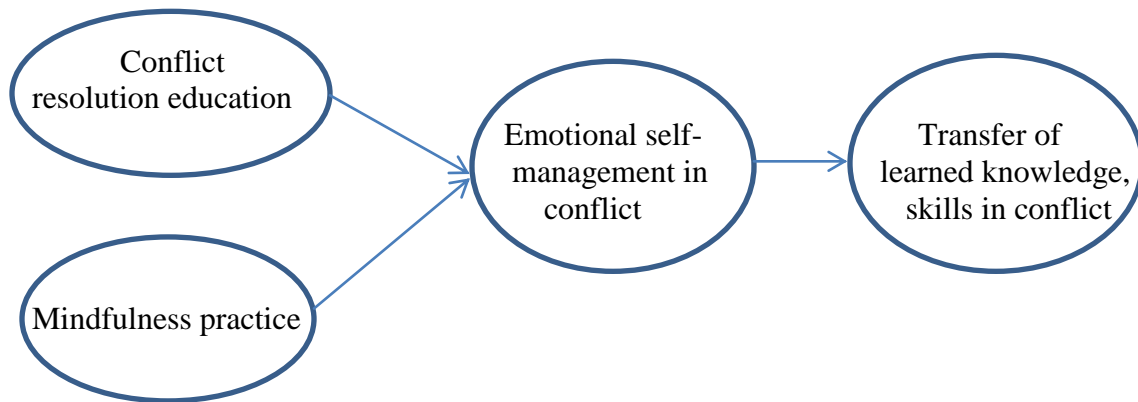


Fig. 1.1. Potential Impacts of Incorporating Mindfulness into Conflict Resolution Education

## Research Purpose and Research Questions

### Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of emotional self-management and transfer of learning when mediated by mindfulness practice in the context of a conflict resolution course for adults. The study's results inform consideration of the usefulness of mindfulness practice as a possible educational intervention for improving the effectiveness of conflict resolution education courses for adult learners.

### Research Questions

The study's research questions are:

1. Do adult learners' descriptions of their emotional self-management and transfer of learning appear to be influenced by self-reported higher vs. lower frequencies of mindfulness practice during the course?
2. How do adult learners in an undergraduate conflict resolution course describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) on emotional self-management during situations of interpersonal conflict?

3. How does this group of adult learners describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) in supporting the transfer of learning of conflict resolution skills from the classroom into actual conflict situations?

### **Research Design Overview**

The research was designed as a follow-up study of adult learners in two sections of a class on conflict management taught by the author at a large public university in an urban setting in the northeastern United States. The modified case study design (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009) examined the learners' perceptions of the influence of mindfulness practice on their capacity for emotional self-management in situations of conflict, and on the transfer of learning of conflict resolution knowledge and skills to actual conflicts.

The site for the study was a conflict resolution course taught in a university program for non-traditional-aged college students. This program provided undergraduate level courses to working adults who had not previously had the opportunity to go to college. In this program, approximately 95% of the students were women, and 98% were African-American, Latina/o, or Asian-American at the time of the study. Additionally, 95% of the students enrolled in the program were paraprofessionals in the public school system of the city in which the university is located. Paraprofessionals serve schools in different roles: assisting teachers as general aides in the classroom; working one-on-one with special needs students; or functioning as "crisis paraprofessionals" who intervene with children whose behavior cannot be managed in the classroom. Fifteen students agreed to participate in the study.

Data were collected on subjects' (1) perceptions of their approach to conflict, before and after the course; (2) frequency of mindfulness practice during the course;



(3) experience and descriptions of mindfulness practice; (4) perceptions of the influence, if any, of mindfulness practice on their ability to manage their emotions in conflict situations; and (5) perceptions of the influence, if any, of mindfulness practice on the transfer of learning from the conflict resolution course to situations of actual conflict.

Three main methods were used for data collection:

1. **Interviews:** Interviews were conducted before and after the course. The pre-course interview explored learners' perceptions of their approaches to conflict. The post-course interview examined learners' perception of how those approaches may have changed, descriptions of experience with mindfulness practices, and perceptions of the influence of mindfulness practice on emotional self-management and transfer of learning.
2. **Journals:** Learners kept a journal on the frequency and length of their mindfulness practice during the course, along with any reactions to it.
3. **Field notes:** The researcher kept field notes on each of the class sessions, to supplement information gained from the previously-mentioned methods.

Interview data were transcribed and coded using the techniques of descriptive, topic and analytic coding described by Richards and Morse (2013). Journals were analyzed for frequency and duration of mindfulness practice.

### **The “Managing Conflict” Class: Objectives, Content, and Methods**

The course that was the focus of the study was an undergraduate psychology class for adults called “Managing Conflict.” It was based largely on the concepts and approaches of Fisher et al. (2011) and Raider et al. (2014), described above. The course objectives were to enable students to:

- identify different styles of approaching conflict, and their own style preference;

- become aware of, think critically about, and begin to change habitual ways of responding to conflict, as well as beliefs/assumptions about conflict;
- distinguish between positions and needs in conflict;
- understand differing points of view in conflict;
- better handle anger and other emotions in the negotiation process (one's own and others');)
- reframe conflicts that appear to be "win-lose" situations;
- recognize the role that culture, including organizational culture, plays in conflict;
- use active listening skills to promote perspective-taking;
- communicate needs and concerns without judgment or blame; and
- identify the stages necessary to successful negotiation.

These objectives summarized the types of knowledge and skills that could potentially be transferred into actual situations of conflict.

The course syllabus can be found in Appendix A. The course outline in the syllabus shows that topics covered included elements of a collaborative approach to conflict resolution (including the distinction between positions and needs/interests, reframing conflicts as mutual problems to be solved, and win-win solutions), anger and other strong emotions, managing anger and "centering" in conflict, processes of escalation and de-escalation, communication skills (including active listening, and informing without blame or judgment), negotiation skills and stages, issues of culture and identity in conflict, and handling difficult behaviors in conflict.

In addition to reading and written assignments, students were engaged in a variety of teaching and learning methods. These included lecture and whole group discussion, pair and small group discussion, problem-solving exercises, analysis of conflict scenarios, completing self-assessment instruments on conflict styles and communication

styles, video, role plays, leading discussions on the readings, work in “home groups” on a personal conflict of the students’ choice, and a final group presentation.

All students, regardless of whether they consented to participate in the study, engaged in all of these activities. The only different activities for students who consented to participate in the study were a pre-class interview and a post-class interview. These were conducted outside of class time, and are discussed in more detail in Chapter III.

### **Researcher Perspectives**

The researcher has over 20 years of experience teaching conflict resolution to adults in schools, universities, non-profits and UN agencies. While working as a volunteer community mediator in 1998, she began practicing mindfulness meditation as a way to manage her own strong emotions that were often triggered during mediation. She found this highly effective, leading to her interest in the connection between mindfulness practice and conflict resolution.

In teaching a graduate-level course on “Conflict Resolution in Schools” in 2007, the researcher, who by this time had a regular mindfulness meditation practice, introduced ideas on “contemplative education” as a way of supporting the development of emotional self-management. The response from the students was overwhelmingly positive. Based on this experience, she began introducing mindfulness in her undergraduate courses later that year. The undergraduate students often reported that in actual situations of interpersonal conflict, their automatic emotional responses would “take over,” and they would “forget” skills taught in the class. As students were gradually exposed to mindfulness practice in class, the researcher began receiving spontaneous, anecdotal reports from students that using mindfulness helped them stay calm in conflicts, and allowed them to recall and use what they had learned in class. This led to

her interest in carrying out a more systematic study of the role that mindfulness practice might play in conflict resolution education for adults.

The researcher's own positive experiences with her personal practice of mindfulness can be a potential source of bias in this study. However, as Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007) point out:

When mindful, the activity of conceptual thought can be engaged and disengaged more choicefully, and because one can be aware of thoughts as thoughts, and their accompanying emotions as simply reactions to them, thoughts are less likely to be colored by beliefs, prejudices and other biases that are not supported by objective or experiential evidence. (p. 213)

The researcher intentionally used the practice of mindfulness itself during the study, as a means of self-monitoring, and to heighten her awareness of when personal biases might be operating, including those about the benefits of mindfulness.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

This study was shaped by several assumptions that arose from the researcher's personal and professional experiences. One was that conflict resolution education/training would be more effective if learners were offered effective tools for managing their emotions, in addition to concepts, analytical skills, and communication techniques. A second assumption was that the capacity for emotional self-management could be learned if education or training specifically addressed this as a desired outcome. A third assumption was that adults could learn and incorporate mindfulness into their daily lives to some degree—that the ability to practice mindfulness was not dependent upon possessing certain personality traits, learning styles, or types of intelligence. A fourth assumption was that when mindfulness practices are taught in a secular way, without connecting them to any religious or spiritual tradition, they could have beneficial effects on capacities such as attention, awareness, and emotional self-management. A fifth

assumption was that regular and frequent mindfulness practice would result in improved emotional self-management, which could in turn positively impact transfer of learning.

### **Rationale and Significance**

The study has potential benefits to students of the university's "Managing Conflict" course, as it sheds light on the usefulness of mindfulness practice in promoting transfer of learning in future courses. This could benefit the field of conflict resolution education as a whole, providing information on whether and how incorporation of mindfulness could potentially improve course outcomes. It may also have implications for the incorporation of mindfulness practice in other content areas, particularly those which involve teaching/learning about social-emotional competencies, or emotionally charged content. Finally, the study helps inform an growing area of mindfulness research, that of "interpersonal" or "relational" mindfulness, which looks at how mindfulness practice influences functioning in interpersonal relationships, rather than focusing solely on one's inner experience (Cohen & Miller, 2009; Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009).

### **Definition of Terms**

**Conflict:** In the field of social psychology, conflict has been defined as a "sharp disagreement or opposition, as of interests, ideas, etc." or a "perceived divergence of interest, a belief that the parties' current aspirations are incompatible" (Pruitt & Kim, 2004, pp. 7-8). Conflict may take place at a number of levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup. In the course that is the subject of this research, the focus is on interpersonal conflict.

**Conflict resolution:** A process of finding a solution to a conflict or disagreement.

Deutsch (2014a) points out that processes of conflict resolution can be either destructive or constructive. A destructive conflict resolution process is one that is based in “a competition or struggle to determine who wins and who loses” (p. 14). A constructive conflict resolution process is “an effective cooperative problem-solving process in which the conflict is the mutual problem to be resolved cooperatively” (p. 14). In general, the use of the term “conflict resolution” assumes reference to a constructive approach; in the course which is the subject of this research, the focus is on the teaching and learning of constructive conflict resolution processes.

**Emotional intelligence:** The ability to “recognize and regulate emotions in oneself and others” (Goleman, 2001, p. 14). Goleman adds that emotional intelligence comprises four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. While this definition emphasizes the performance of specific competencies, other definitions emphasize abilities and/or personality traits.

**Emotional self-management:** The ability to keep one’s impulsive feelings, particularly negative ones, under control. Goleman’s (1998) Emotional Competence Framework defines emotional self-management as the capacity for “managing one’s internal states, impulses, and resources” (p. 26).

**Mindfulness:** A psychological process of nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling or sensation that arises is acknowledged and accepted as it is. According to Bishop et al. (2004), this involves both “the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment” and “adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (p. 232).

**Transfer of learning:** The ability to apply what is learning through training or education to relevant situations in real life. Broad (1997) defines transfer of learning as “the effective and continuous application by learners—to their performance of jobs, or other personal, organizational or community responsibilities—of knowledge and skills gained in learning activities” (p. 2).

## Chapter II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter I, current practice in conflict resolution education for adults was described as emphasizing conceptual and analytical thinking. Despite the inherently emotional nature of conflict, comparatively little attention appears to be given to the role of the emotions, and practical strategies for handling them, in conflict resolution education. This is especially true for emotional self-management strategies. Without the capacity to manage emotions, the ability to actually use learned skills in situations of conflict may be limited. Theorists, researchers and practitioners have called for greater attention to be given to managing emotions in conflict resolution. This study explores the possible influence of mindfulness practice as an intervention that may support emotional self-management, and ultimately transfer of learning.

The selection of literature reviewed in this chapter is guided by this purpose. In the next section of this chapter, models of emotional intelligence are examined, as they illustrate the central place of emotional self-management. Literature that specifically examines the association between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills is also highlighted.

In the second section, studies of mindfulness practice are reviewed for insight into various definitions of this concept. Research on the neurophysiology of mindfulness, and research findings on the social and emotional impacts of mindfulness practice are also discussed.



As the study examines the influence, if any, of mindfulness practice on adults' ability to use concepts and skills from the "Managing Conflict" class in actual situations of conflict, a third area of literature that is reviewed deals with transfer of learning/training. This section addresses definitions of transfer of learning, and factors that support it. Literature on the transfer of learning in conflict resolution education is discussed, and the question of whether mindfulness practice may influence learning transfer is raised.

### **Sources of Literature**

Literature searches were conducted in databases including Academic Search Premier, APA PsychNet, Education Full Text, and ERIC. Search terms included:

- Emotional intelligence AND conflict
- Emotional intelligence AND conflict resolution (or conflict management)
- Emotional intelligence AND Negotiation
- Emotional intelligence AND mindfulness
- Emotional self-management AND mindfulness
- Mindfulness AND transfer of learning (or transfer of training)
- Conflict resolution AND transfer of learning (or transfer of training)
- Negotiation AND transfer of learning (or transfer of training)
- Emotional intelligence AND transfer of learning (or transfer of training)

Individual journals related to conflict resolution, such as *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, were also searched using the above terms. Articles from the *Mindfulness Research Guide*, an online database of mindfulness research, were also searched.

## Emotional Intelligence

In this section, definitions and models of emotional intelligence are described, with emphasis on the Emotional and Social Competency (ESC) model as being particularly well-suited to the purposes of this study. While the study does not attempt to measure emotional intelligence or its influence on conflict resolution competencies, some research has directly investigated this relationship. These studies are briefly reviewed in order to support the inclusion of the concept of emotional intelligence in the study's conceptual framework.

### Approaches to Emotional Intelligence

In a review of the development of the concept of emotional intelligence, Goleman (2001) identifies a number of ways in which this concept has been approached. Three approaches that have been widely used in research on emotional intelligence are briefly reviewed below.

Salovey and Mayer approach emotional intelligence as the “ability to monitor one's own and other's feeling and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action” (Goleman, 2001, p. 17). Their model has a cognitive emphasis, distinguishing it from models which focus on traits or behaviors. It is an *ability* model that views emotional intelligence as the narrowly-defined ability to think about feelings, rather than simply perceive or regulate them (Caruso, 2004). In assessing capacities to work with emotional information through cognitive processes, they focus on four broad ability areas:

- (1) Perceiving emotions (the ability to correctly identify how others are feeling);
  - (2) Using emotions to facilitate thought (the ability to integrate one's feelings into one's thinking);
  - (3) Understanding emotions (the ability to understand the causes of emotions);
- and

- (4) Managing emotions (the ability to create effective emotional strategies to help one achieve a goal, rather than being negatively affected by emotions) (Caruso, 2004).

A second approach to emotional intelligence was developed by Bar-On, who focuses on social-emotional knowledge, personality traits, and behaviors and skills that affect an individual's ability to cope with the demands of his/her personal and social life (Goleman, 2001, p. 17). This is a *mixed* model that considers:

- (1) Intrapersonal abilities (self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-actualization);
- (2) Interpersonal abilities (empathy, social responsibility, interpersonal relationships);
- (3) The ability to manage stress (stress tolerance, impulse control);
- (4) Behaviors such as adaptability (reality testing, flexibility, problem solving);  
and
- (5) Traits such as general mood (optimism, happiness) (Bar-On, 2002).

Boyatzis and Goleman (2007) developed a third approach to emotional intelligence, the Emotional and Social Competency model (ESC). This model is a theory of performance that emphasizes emotional competence, defined as a “learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work” (Goleman, 2001, p. 27). The model focuses on four clusters of emotional-social competencies, and one cluster of cognitive competencies that lead to actual behavioral outcomes:

- (1) Self-awareness (emotional self-awareness);
- (2) Self-management (achievement orientation, adaptability, emotional self-control, positive outlook);
- (3) Social awareness (empathy, organizational awareness);

- (4) Relationship management (conflict management, coach and mentor, influence, inspirational leadership, teamwork); and
- (5) Cognitive competencies (systems thinking, pattern recognition).

For the purposes of this study, Boyatzis and Goleman's ESC model appears to be the most useful, as it is a *competency* model which focuses how emotional and social intelligence are actually enacted in real life situations. This aligns well with the focus of the study, which has to do with the influence of mindfulness on how adults actually manage their emotions in conflict, and transfer learned skills into practice. Salovey and Mayer's model, by contrast, takes a more narrow approach, looking at how cognitive capacities may be used to process and understand emotional information, without looking at what learners actually do with that information. Bar-On's model is perhaps too broad for the purposes of this study, addressing not only knowledge and competencies, but also personality traits. Although personality factors may be involved in the extent to which adult learners participate in and are influenced by mindfulness practice, this was not the primary area of investigation for this study.

A second reason for the appropriateness of the ESC model as part of the conceptual framework of this study has to do with the dynamic relationship that exists between the clusters of competencies. In the ESC model, self-awareness is the foundational emotional and social competency. Self-awareness is necessary for the development of two clusters of competencies, self-management and social awareness. These two clusters are in turn necessary for the development of relationship management, as suggested by Figure 2.1 below:

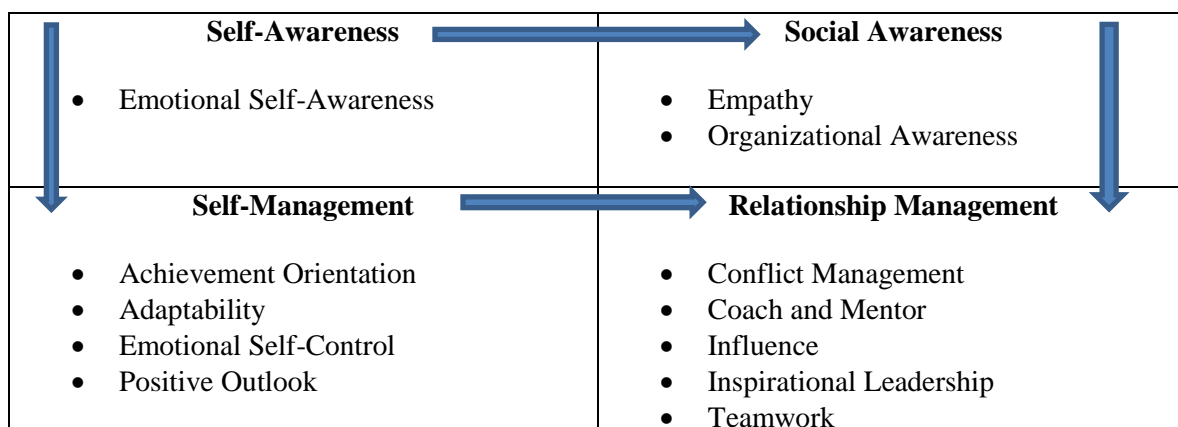


Figure 2.1. Relationship between ESC Competency Clusters (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2007)

Thus, according to this model, an individual who is lacking skill in an area of Relationship Management such as Conflict Management, could actually have underdeveloped competency in the Self-Management cluster (such as Emotional Self-Control) or in the Social Awareness cluster (for example, Empathy). These underdeveloped competencies may in turn be a result of inadequate development of Self-Awareness, and specifically of Emotional Self-Awareness. As self-awareness is foundational to the ESC, the model is well-suited to a study of the influence of mindfulness, which may play a role in the development of self-awareness (see next section of this chapter). The model also specifically addresses emotional self-management, a focus of this study, and conflict management, the performance competency which conflict resolution education aims to develop.

Figure 2.2 below indicates three of the four clusters of competencies from the ESC that are the focus of this study, and the specific selected competencies with which they are associated. (The fourth ESC cluster, social awareness, is also relevant, but is beyond the scope of the current study.)

Figure 2.2 suggests that emotional self-awareness supports the development of emotional self-control, which in turn may lead to improved conflict management.

ESC Cluster	Selected Competency Relevant to the Study
Self-awareness	Emotional self-awareness
Self-management	Emotional self-control
Relationship management	Conflict management

Figure 2.2. ESC Clusters and Selected Competencies

### Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Skills

Despite the fact that conflict and its resolution are inherently emotional subjects, there is relatively little research on the connection between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. While this study did not attempt to assess a relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution competency, research on this topic suggests that such a relationship may exist.

A study by Schutte et al. (2001) looked at the impact of emotional intelligence on a variety of aspects of interpersonal relations. The subjects were adult university students, teaching interns, and other university and public school employees. Findings indicated that participants who scored higher in emotional intelligence also had higher scores in empathic perspective taking, self-monitoring in social situations, and cooperative responses in a “prisoner’s dilemma” problem-solving task. While conflict resolution skills were not explicitly addressed, the findings all related to skills that could be involved in the process of negotiating and resolving conflicts.

In an empirical study of the influence of emotional intelligence on the actual performance of conflict resolution skills, Jordan and Troth (2004) administered a measure of emotional intelligence to 350 respondents, who were then placed in a team problem-solving task. Upon completion of the task, they were asked to reflect on the conflict resolution skills used. Findings were analyzed at both the team and individual levels. At the team level, teams that scored higher in emotional intelligence were more likely to use

integrative tactics (defined as tactics that seek mutually advantageous gains by both parties); teams that scored lower on emotional intelligence were more likely to use avoidance tactics (withdrawing from the conflict). At the individual level of analysis, those who scored higher in emotional intelligence tended to use integrative and competing tactics to complete team tasks. In explaining the finding of competing tactics, the authors suggest that emotionally intelligent individuals may have felt that because the group task was timed, at a certain point a more dominating approach was necessary to complete the task. They further suggest that this behavioral flexibility may in fact be a characteristic of emotional intelligence, and that this is an area that should be researched further. Jordan and Troth also found that the ability to manage one's own emotions significantly contributed to performance on the team problem solving task, while the ability to deal with others' emotions did not.

Clarke (2010) carried out a phenomenological study of 80 MBA students working on small group projects. Using diary methods to examine aspects of team learning in the small groups, he found that two aspects of emotional intelligence—emotional awareness and emotional management—influenced a range of critical reflection processes, and were linked with communication and conflict management processes that prevented conflict from spiraling out of control.

A study by Pulido-Martos, Lopez-Zafra, and Augusto-Landa (2013) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and effectiveness in negotiation. The authors administered questionnaires on emotional intelligence, negotiation effectiveness and personality traits to 123 individuals whose roles in their organizations involved significant amounts of time in negotiation (e.g., union representatives, project managers, those responsible for commercial transactions). The emotional intelligence questionnaire focused on three dimensions—attention to emotions, emotional clarity, and emotional self-regulation. The authors found that the capacity for emotional self-regulation was

linked to negotiation effectiveness, in particular to the skills of balancing power differences and creating procedural flexibility.

A meta-analysis of 20 studies of the relationship between emotional intelligence and constructive conflict management among individuals in leadership positions was carried out by Schlaerth, Ensari, and Christian (2013). Constructive conflict management was defined as involving six dimensions: (1) a collaborative/integrative approach (including high concern for self and others, strong cooperation and assertiveness; (2) open and direct communication about creative problem-solving; (3) expressing concern for own and others' problems, and exchanging information about priorities; (4) willingness to make concessions in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution; (5) willingness to accommodate, and emphasize commonalities when needed; and (6) a positive solution-oriented approach. The authors found that higher levels of emotional intelligence—both the ability to deal with one's own emotions, and those of others—were associated with stronger constructive conflict management.

These studies suggest that emotional intelligence may enhance the use of constructive conflict resolution competencies. If this is the case, it lends support to the idea that the development of emotional intelligence should be one of the goals of conflict resolution education courses for adults. In fact, in fields directly related to dispute resolution—law and mediation—there has been a considerable call for greater attention to emotional intelligence in the training of professionals who regularly deal with people in conflict. Riskin (2002) says that “law schools tend to over-emphasize analytical reasoning at the expense of developing interpersonal skills” (p. 10). He argues that greater emotional intelligence would allow lawyers to become more self-aware, listen more effectively, and manage their emotions. Reilly (2009) concurs, calling for law schools to teach students to be more aware of indicators of emotions in others, self-awareness of the internal sensations of their own emotions, and skills for coaching others through emotional conflicts. Rock (2005), writing in the context of mediation, points out



that a mediator's awareness of his/her own thoughts and emotions is necessary in order to maintain the neutrality that is essential to arriving at a just outcome.

Riskin (2004) goes on to advocate for the use of mindfulness practice in legal education to support the development of emotional intelligence, claiming that it can allow a negotiator to "insert a wedge of awareness" (p. 86) between emotions and responses, allowing time to consider what the most appropriate response might be. Rock (2005) offers a similar rationale for mindfulness practice, which he says

cultivates one's ability to observe one's thoughts and to recognize the emotions that arise from those thoughts. This ability of observation and recognition gives a person a choice of whether or not to act on an emotion, or a thought. In this way, practicing mindfulness meditation can result in a freedom to act in non-habitual ways. (p. 353)

Freshman (2005, 2006) also argues for mindfulness in the educational of lawyers, saying that it promotes both awareness of one's internal thoughts and emotions, and greater awareness of the emotions of others. These authors, writing in the context of professions that deal with conflict on a daily basis, anticipate that mindfulness practice may have a role to play in influencing emotional self-management.

### **Conflict Intelligence**

Conflict Intelligence (Coleman, 2018) is a "meta-competency" that has areas of overlap with emotional intelligence. As part of a larger framework that includes "systemic wisdom" for addressing intractable intergroup conflicts, Conflict Intelligence is defined as: "the set of competencies and skills used to manage different types of normative conflicts in diverse or changing situations effectively and constructively" (p. 14). These competencies and skills include:

- Self-knowledge and regulation;
- Knowledge, skills, and attitudes for constructive conflict resolution;
- Conflict optimality, the ability to manage different or competing motives and emotions; and

- Conflict adaptivity, the ability to use different strategies as appropriate to different types of conflict, in a way that achieves goals and fits the demands of the particular conflict.

There is considerable alignment between these core competencies and those described in the ESC model. Self-awareness, particularly emotional self-awareness, is the foundation of the ESC model, similarly to self-knowledge in the Conflict Intelligence model. For Boyatzis and Goleman, self-awareness supports self-management and emotional self-control, similarly to self-regulation in Coleman's model. In the ESC model, relationship management and conflict management are built on self-management competencies, and the remaining three competencies of the Conflict Intelligence model align with this quadrant of the ESC.

Of significance for the field of conflict resolution education, and for this study, is Coleman's recommendation that because Conflict Intelligence is a "practical" form of intelligence, analytic and conceptual teaching/learning methods should be combined with more experiential ones, such as role play, simulations, case mapping, etc. Though mindfulness is not specifically mentioned as an experiential component of education in Conflict Intelligence, it is one that may have potential to support the first core competency in this model, that of self-knowledge and self-regulation.

This section has described the nature of emotional intelligence, and research linking it to effective management of conflict. The dimensions of emotional self-awareness and emotional self-management, both part of Boyatzis and Goleman's Emotional and Social Competency model, seem to be potentially influential in leading to competency in conflict management, and have parallels in the Conflict Intelligence model. In the next section, literature on mindfulness practice is discussed, along with consideration of how it may influence emotional and social competencies.

## **Mindfulness**

In this section, definitions of mindfulness will be reviewed, including a definition that guided the study. The neurophysiological basis of mindfulness will be discussed briefly. Findings from mindfulness research that are relevant to emotional intelligence, in particular emotional self-management, will then be reviewed.

### **Defining Mindfulness**

Mindfulness can be a difficult concept to define. As Hayes and Wilson (2003) point out, literature on mindfulness variously treats it as (1) a specific technique, (2) a collection of techniques, (3) an outcome in and of itself, and (4) a psychological process that produces particular outcomes.

Kumar (2002), writing about mindfulness as a specific technique, points out that the present-centered awareness developed by mindfulness “is directed toward all thoughts, feelings and sensations that occur during practice.... The practice of mindfulness does not seek to ‘empty the mind’; instead, it is a much greater feat to observe, with acceptance, how full the mind actually is” (p. 42). Brown and Ryan (2003, p. 822) define mindfulness as a psychological process involving receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as an outcome, “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 145). However, reflecting the challenge of achieving conceptual clarity, he also goes on to identify mindfulness as a specific technique that is the foundation of Buddhist meditation practice. At times he uses the term mindfulness to describe meditative practices that are found in many other traditions as well; his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, developed at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, includes yoga and tai chi, reflecting the use of the term as a “collection of techniques.”

A definition proposed by Bishop et al. (2004) has been widely used in research on the impact of mindfulness practice. They define mindfulness as a psychological process, a kind of nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling or sensation that arises is acknowledged and accepted as it is. They go on to elaborate a two-component operational definition of mindfulness:

The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. (p. 232)

Because this definition is specific enough that it can be operationalized, and because of its widespread use by mindfulness researchers, it is used to frame discussion of mindfulness in this study.

Despite the different conceptualizations of mindfulness as technique(s), psychological process or outcome, there is a consistent emphasis on attention to immediate experience, awareness, and lack of judgment. Though mindfulness practice is rooted in contemplative practices that can be found in many wisdom traditions, and in Buddhism in particular, it is important to note that the definitions above, and the majority of research studies on mindfulness, approach it from a secular perspective.

### **Neurophysiology and Mindfulness**

The neurophysiology of mindfulness is a rapidly growing area of research. While an exhaustive review of this research is beyond the scope of this chapter, some mention of foundational research can help illuminate the biological basis of mindfulness.

A study by Lazar et al. (2005) provided some of the first evidence of the biological impact of sustained mindfulness practice. Lazar and her team studied 20 experienced mindfulness practitioners (averaging approximately 9 years of mindfulness practice, and approximately 6 hours per week of practice) and 15 controls that were matched for age,

gender, race, and years of education. MRI studies were used to compare the thickness of various regions of the cortices of both groups. They found that the brains of the mindfulness practitioners were thicker in the prefrontal cortex and right anterior insula, specifically in regions of the brain that are associated with attention, interoception (sensitivity and attention to stimuli originating inside the body), sensory processing, and the integration of emotion and cognition.

Treadway and Lazar (2009), in their review of studies on the neurobiology of mindfulness, found a consistent series of findings indicating that mindfulness practice activated the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex of the brain, an area associated with decision-making and attention. They also note findings of mindfulness practice affecting activation of the anterior cingulate cortex, a region of the brain involved in integrating attention, motivation and motor control. The authors suggest that given the processes of directing attention (usually to the breath) and awareness of bodily sensations employed during mindfulness practice, these findings support the idea that mindfulness practice can lead to long-term changes in brain function.

Siegel (2009) says that the practice of mindfulness promotes increased integration and linkage of different parts of the brain. He cites studies that indicate that the practice of mindfulness results in the growth of fibers in the middle prefrontal area of the brain. According to Siegel, this area of the brain is key because of its centrality—it directly links the cortex (the portion of the brain involved in analyzing, reasoning, decision-making, planning and attention), limbic areas (which are involved with attachment, memory, the appraisal of meaning, and emotions), and brainstem (which provides the brain with direct input from the body) (pp. 142-143). Mindfulness practices appear to strengthen the integration of these various structures, which are involved in thinking, emotions and bodily awareness. This, Siegel argues, promotes not only greater attunement with the self, but increased interpersonal attunement as well.

Goleman (2006) describes one of the biological foundations of social intelligence, the mirror neuron system. Neuroscience research indicates that the mirror neuron system is activated by observing the actions of others—the neurons activated in the observer are the same ones that are activated by the other who is performing the action. For Goleman, the mirror neuron system is the basis for primal empathy, defined as “feeling with others; sensing non-verbal emotional signals” (p. 84). He goes on to say that “to understand what someone else experiences—to empathize—we utilize the same brain wiring that is active during our own experience” (p. 59). Siegel (2007) hypothesizes that the strengthening of intrapersonal attunement brought about by the practice of mindfulness also strengthens interpersonal attunement and empathy, as both depend on the engagement of the mirror neuron system.

Two studies of the neurophysiology of mindfulness stand out for their relevance to its influence on emotional self-management. Hölzel et al. (2010) looked specifically at the impact of a mindfulness-based intervention on the amygdala, which is responsible for detecting emotionally arousing stimuli, including the experience of stress. Hölzel and her team studied 27 individuals who reported high levels of stress prior to the intervention. Sixteen participants received a standard Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (23 hours over 8 weeks, with 40 minutes of daily homework), while 11 participants received a shorter version of the program (12 contact hours over 8 week and 20 minutes of daily homework). MRI scans of each participant’s amygdala were carried out before and after the intervention. The research focused specifically on the density of the gray matter of the amygdala, which increases under stress due to increased activity in this brain structure. The findings indicated that larger decreases in perceived stress were associated with larger decreases in gray matter density, indicating that improved management of emotions may actually change the structure of the brain.

In an extensive review of literature on emotion regulation and mindfulness, Hölzel et al. (2011) describe the process of emotion regulation as involving the executive

functions (higher level cognitive functions such as directing attention, organizing, reasoning, problem-solving, strategizing, and decision-making) of the prefrontal cortex modulating the emotion-generating functions of the amygdala. The neuroimaging studies reviewed showed that mindfulness practice led to increased prefrontal cortex activity, combined with decreased activity in the amygdala, clarifying the possible biological process by which mindfulness impacts emotional self-management.

These findings on structural and functional changes in the brain as a result of mindfulness practice provide a foundation for understanding research on behavioral impacts of mindfulness, which are discussed in the next section.

### **Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence**

While a complete review of current research on mindfulness is beyond the scope of this chapter, there are a number of findings that relate directly to emotional intelligence that may be relevant to learning and using conflict resolution skills.

Chu (2010) studied 351 working adults in Taiwan who had a wide range of meditation experience, from none at all to over 5 years. In administering measures of emotional intelligence to this group, Chu found that meditation experience was positively associated with higher emotional intelligence. The study also included a small intervention involving teaching mindfulness to a group of 10 graduate students, with 10 controls. After the 8-week mindfulness course, the intervention group scored higher on measures of emotional intelligence and social skills than the control group.

Schutte and Malouff (2011) administered measures of trait mindfulness and emotional intelligence, positive and negative affect, and satisfaction with life to 125 university students (including a number of adult returning students) in Australia. They found that higher levels of mindfulness were associated with greater emotional intelligence, positive affect and life satisfaction. They theorize that cultivation of two characteristics of mindfulness, attention and non-judgment, support development of

emotional intelligence, suggesting that “mindfulness training could provide a practical means of increasing emotional intelligence” (p. 1118).

Miao, Humphrey, and Qian (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and trait mindfulness. While effect sizes across the studies varied, they found an overall positive relationship. The authors also noted that while gender did not appear to mediate the relationship, age was a factor, with stronger relationships between emotional intelligence and trait mindfulness found in older adults.

While these three studies use broad measures of emotional intelligence, other studies focus on more specific dimensions of this concept, including attention, stress reduction, empathy, and emotional self-management.

**Attention.** A number of studies have focused on the impact of mindfulness practice on attention. Improvements in attention as a result of mindfulness practice have been noted by Bishop et al. (2004), Jha, Krompinger, and Baime (2007), and Valentine and Sweet (1999), among others. It is possible that improved attention may support the development of both self-awareness and social awareness, as one must be able to attend to subtle physical and emotional cues in order to “read” one’s own emotional state. The ability to attend to visual and auditory cues in order to “read” another’s emotions is also necessary, particularly in conflict situations.

**Stress reduction.** The role of mindfulness in the reduction of stress has also been investigated. A number of studies of the practice of mindfulness have indicated that even relatively short-term interventions can lead to a reduction in stress (Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 1999; Chu, 2010; Deckro et al., 2002; Gold et al., 2010, Newsome, Christopher, Dahlen, & Christopher, 2006). Mischel et al. (2014) point out that managing stress is an essential aspect of emotional self-management. As conflict is inherently stressful for many people, it seems plausible that reducing stress might lead to better emotional self-management, and improved handling of conflict.



**Empathy.** The capacity for empathy is a key aspect of emotional intelligence, one which is foundational to effective conflict management. Siegel (2009) defines empathy as the capacity to put oneself in the mental perspective of another person (p. 138). For Goleman (2006), primal empathy involves feeling with others and sensing nonverbal emotional signals, while empathic accuracy “builds on primal empathy but adds an explicit understanding of what someone else feels and thinks” (p. 89). Research suggests that mindfulness practice may have an impact on empathy. For example, a study by Wachs and Cordova (2007) assessed levels of mindfulness of 33 married couples. They found that couples high in mindfulness also scored high on measures of empathy and overall relationship health. The authors state that “attunement and concern for another’s feelings is another skill set that may be associated with attention to the present moment” (p. 467).

Shapiro, Schwartz, and Bonner (1998) note that scores on measures of empathy decline over the first year of medical school education. In an experimental study, they examined the impact of an 8-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program on pre-medical and medical students. The 78 participants were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. Among the findings were a decrease in anxiety, and an increase in measures of empathy for the experimental group. The authors also indicate that the intervention helped participants develop compassion and improve listening skills. They conclude that integrating mindfulness practice into medical education may foster a greater sense of connectedness with others.

**Emotional self-management.** Central to this study is the question of whether mindfulness can influence emotional self-management in situations of conflict. According to Brown et al. (2007), “the fuller awareness afforded by mindfulness facilitates more flexible, adaptive responses to events, and helps to minimize automatic, habitual, or impulsive reactions” (p. 223), by inserting a “gap” between stimulus and

response. If this is the case, then mindfulness training may increase emotional self-management. Research on this topic is limited, but suggestive of an impact.

For example, Zylowska et al. (2007) conducted a feasibility study of an intervention for adults and adolescents with ADHD. Participants carried out a daily program of mindfulness meditation over eight weeks. Significant changes in self-report measures of emotional self-management were found.

Ramel et al. (2004) conducted an experimental study of the impact of an 8-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program on 23 individuals with a diagnosis of depression. When compared with a waitlist control group of 11 individuals, the intervention group showed a significant decrease in rumination, suggesting an improved capacity for regulating one's own emotional responses.

Solloway and Fisher (2007) studied the effects of mindfulness meditation practice on 129 recent high school graduates from low-income and minority groups during a summer academic readiness program (prior to beginning college). The six-week program involved daily mindfulness practice, journal writing, and coaching by the instructor in meditation practice. One striking result of the study was the absence of physical altercations among the intervention group (which had frequently been reported prior to the introduction of mindfulness techniques), and improved management of anger. The study is notable for the size of the intervention group, the use of randomized control groups, and its combination of qualitative and quantitative measures.

Birnbaum (2008) did a qualitative study on the impact of an 8-week mindfulness program on a group of 12 social work students. Results included an increase in emotional self-management, specifically the ability to handle fear.

A pilot study by Beddoe and Murphy (2004) investigated the impact of an 8-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program on a convenience sample of 16 racially and ethnically diverse nursing students. Participants reported decreased stress and decreased

tendencies to take on others' negative emotions, which suggests improved emotional self-management.

In a study of 15 secondary school teachers (half of whom were randomly assigned to a control group, Winzelburg and Luskin (1999) studied the impact of a 4-session (45 minutes per session) meditation training. Subjects in the intervention group reported a significant decrease in symptoms of emotional distress, suggesting an improvement in the ability to manage emotions. Impact on participants' reports of self-efficacy were mixed and not considered significant. The study is notable for focusing on a population without a previous attentional or emotional disorder, but the small sample size is a limitation.

Lykins and Baer (2009) collected data on emotional intelligence from demographically similar groups of 182 mindfulness practitioners and 78 non-meditators. They found that the group regularly practicing mindfulness scored significantly higher in their ability to regulate their emotions. They also scored lower on measures of rumination and fear of emotions. There was no significant difference between the two groups on overall measures of emotional intelligence, a fact that the authors attribute to the nature of the sample. Both groups were made up of highly educated mental health professionals; therefore it is possible that this created "floor or ceiling effects such that there is little room for meditation experience to influence ... emotional intelligence beyond the effects of higher education and work in the mental health field" (p. 237).

Gallegos, Lytle, Talbot, and Moynihan (2013) conducted a study of a mindfulness program for 25 low income women who were exposed to various types of trauma. The eight-week program resulted in a measurable decrease in emotional dysregulation.

This group of studies suggests that mindfulness practice may positively influence social and emotional outcomes. While some of these studies are based on different definitions of mindfulness, and while there is not consistency across all the studies in the type of mindfulness interventions carried out, the findings taken as a whole nonetheless lend support to the idea mindfulness practice may have potential to support the

development of attention, reduce stress, increase empathy, foster emotional self-management, and enhance overall emotional intelligence.

This section has reviewed research suggesting that the practice of mindfulness may support the development of a range of emotional and social competencies that may be conducive to effective conflict resolution. The next section turns to the literature on transfer of learning to explore the issue of whether those learned skills will be applied in actual situations of conflict.

### **Transfer of Learning**

The previous section of this chapter suggests the possibility that mindfulness practice may support the development of emotional and social competencies that are relevant to the process of conflict resolution. But they do not answer the question of whether those competencies, and learned conflict resolution skills, will transfer into actual situations of conflict. Nor do they address the question of whether the practice of mindfulness may have an influence on any such transfer of learning.

This section of the literature review presents a definition of transfer of learning. Selected research findings from this field, particularly those pertaining to the transfer of learning of skills related to conflict resolution, are reviewed. A limited number of studies suggesting a possible influence of mindfulness practice on outcomes related to transfer of learning are also discussed.

#### **Defining Transfer of Learning**

Transfer of learning has been defined as “the effective and continuous application by learners—to their performance of jobs, or other personal, organizational or community responsibilities—of knowledge and skills gained in learning activities” (Broad, 1997, p. 2). Much of the literature on transfer of learning comes from the fields of human

resource development and training, where lack of learning transfer is seen as a major problem. A widely cited estimate is that only 10% of learning transfers into performance; despite this, Holton and Baldwin (2003) argue that transfer is not necessarily resistant to intervention (p. 6).

Literature on transfer of learning has primarily focused on three broad areas: (1) the internal characteristics of the learner, such as motivation, sense of self-efficacy, and locus of control; (2) program content and design, including multiple instructional methodologies, post-training relapse prevention, adaptive feedback, and coaching; and (3) environmental supports, including the opportunity to use new skills, support from workplace management, social support, and a culture of continuous learning (Merriam & Leahy, 2005).

The second of these areas, program content and design, is the one over which instructors have the most influence. Perkins and Salomon (1992) have identified five conditions that should be considered in program content and design in order to facilitate transfer of learning. Two of these are particularly relevant to the current study. The first is active self-monitoring; according to the authors, “metacognitive reflection on one's thinking processes appears to promote transfer of skills” (p. 6). The second is “arousing mindfulness”; here the authors draw on Langer's (1989) definition of mindfulness, which they summarize as “a generalized state of alertness to the activities one is engaged in and to one's surroundings, in contrast with a passive reactive mode in which cognitions, behaviors, and other responses unfold automatically and mindlessly” (Perkins & Salomon, 1992, p. 6). It should be noted that this is a different, though related, definition of mindfulness from the one that has been used in this study. The implication, however, is that mindfulness as defined in this paper by Bishop et al. (2004) may support the development of this state of alertness to one's surroundings, as well as the metacognitive reflection that can enhance the transfer of conflict resolution skills acquired in adult learning settings.

McGinty, Radin, and Kaminski (2013) recommend creating “brain-friendly learning environments” to support learning transfer. Two recommendations around emotions and stress seem relevant to the content of conflict resolution courses, and to this study. They recommend, for example, that since emotions play a role in learning and retention, instructors should engage learners by addressing content that relates to real-world problems. They encourage integrating positive emotions in the classroom through the use of simple rituals. Additionally, they discuss the role of excessive stress in inhibiting learning. They encourage educators to strive to create a state of “relaxed alertness” (p. 54), which combines high challenge and low threat. They advocate for creating a safe learning community, the use of classroom routines and rituals, and beginning the class with a “coming to presence” activity, among other strategies. The use of mindfulness practice could be part of a classroom ritual or “coming to presence” activity. Descriptions of outcomes of mindfulness practice often include states very similar to the notion of “relaxed alertness.”

While program design and implementation make contributions to transfer of learning, so too do the internal characteristics of the learner. No studies of transfer of learning were found linking the most frequently mentioned characteristics (motivation, sense of self-efficacy, and locus of control) and mindfulness practice. The potential impact of mindfulness on these characteristics in the context of learning transfer is an area for possible future research.

### **Transfer of Learning and Conflict Resolution Education**

Literature on transfer of learning specifically in the context of conflict resolution is sparse. Honeyman, Hughes, and Schneider (2003) raise questions about the effectiveness of teaching and training models in the field of conflict resolution; they cite issues such as the failure of educators to stay up to date with research findings, and training designs being influenced more by convenience than by sound pedagogical decisions. Schneider

and Macfarlane (2003) argue that classes that use a mix of role play, discussion, lecture and other exercises may miss the fact that “the classroom furnishes the location for, and the class process offers the substance of, a multiparty negotiation” (p. 456). They argue that if instructors modeled the negotiation skills that they teach by constructing learning environments that encourage learners to share responsibility for the classroom process, learning would be more effective.

A study by Avella (2008) examined transfer of learning in the context of a multi-faceted intervention to increase emotional intelligence in restaurant customer service staff. Study participants were given an assessment of emotional intelligence, and received feedback and coaching based on the results (as well as results from other measures). They participated in workshops on goal setting, empathy, empathic listening, stress tolerance, impulse control, assertiveness, conflict management, and connecting with customers. Subjects showed significant increases in emotional intelligence, measured four months after the intervention. As managers were supportive of the intervention, conditions for transfer of learning were ideal, and subjects reported regular use of the skills taught in interviews conducted 4-5 weeks after the intervention. This study suggests that under these conditions, skills related to emotional competencies can be improved through a high quality intervention, and that these skills can transfer into the workplace.

Two studies specifically focusing on transfer of learning in conflict resolution education were found. Zweibel, Goldstein, Manwaring, and Marks (2008) studied 102 residents and faculty at two Canadian medical schools after a two-day conflict resolution workshop to assess their reporting of knowledge, skills and attitudes immediately after the two-day session, and one year later. The participants reported a high degree of transfer of positive attitudes toward conflict, ability to determine positions and needs, and use of communication skills. The study focused on “what” transferred, and not on the mechanisms or processes by which transfer occurred. However, data relevant to this study emerged from this research. Participants described learning that they could take a

step back from conflict, analyze it, and choose an appropriate strategy; one participant referred to this as “permission to take a breath” (p. 328). Another important experience described was an increase in self-awareness as a result of the course—this included self-awareness of habitual patterns for dealing with conflict, and personal “hot buttons.” This suggests that an effective workshop in conflict resolution can contribute to the capacity for metacognition about conflict, as well as self-awareness. Increased metacognition and self-awareness are two outcomes that have also been found in research about mindfulness, raising the question of whether the addition of mindfulness in the training would have “added value” to the approach being used.

Taylor, Mesmer-Magnus, and Burns (2008) noted the paucity of research on outcomes of conflict resolution courses, and on post-training transfer. They conducted a study of two samples. The first was a group of 37 MBA students before and immediately following a 14 week conflict resolution education course. The second sample consisted of 57 students who were surveyed about the same course 6-18 months after its completion. The course covered topics including collaborative negotiation, framing and judgment bias, use of third parties, multi-party agreements, and cross-cultural issues. Assessment was based on self-report instruments and peer ratings. Subjects reported a significant increase in their self-confidence in negotiation, and actual use of conflict resolution strategies taught in the course. Interestingly, none of the strategies mentioned specifically involved managing emotions; given that the course appears to have been based on conceptual and analytical material, it may be that issues of emotional self-management did not come up in the data collection. Subjects also reported significant decreases in their use of competitive styles of negotiation, and significant increases in their use of collaborative styles. This study, like that of Zweibel et al. (2008), indicates that transfer of learning occurs following a course in negotiation that is based on classic social psychology concepts. The question as to whether mindfulness would influence these outcomes requires further research.



### **Transfer of Learning and Mindfulness**

No studies were found specifically linking mindfulness and transfer of learning. However, some studies of adults have found that mindfulness practice appears to positively influence cognitive abilities related to attention, memory and executive functions. Executive functions include higher order cognitive abilities such as problem-solving, planning, decision-making, and concept formation (Chiesa, Calatti, & Serretti, 2011). These abilities can be considered types of “internal characteristics of learners,” one of the areas identified by Merriam and Leahy (2005) as influencing learning transfer. Thus, if mindfulness practice influences these cognitive abilities, it could potentially also influence transfer of learning.

In a meta-analysis of 23 experimental studies of effects of mindfulness on cognitive abilities, Chiesa et al. (2011) found evidence that mindfulness-based interventions improved sustained and selective attention. Attentional abilities appeared to be greater in long-term mindfulness practitioners. Mindfulness practice also appeared to enhance working memory. Some measures of executive function also appeared to be strengthened by mindfulness practice. It should be noted, however, that testing was laboratory-based. Whether these abilities would transfer from an experimental context to a real-world setting remains an open question.

Shapiro, Brown, and Astin (2011) also reviewed research evidence on mindfulness in relation to traditional goals of higher education. They cite studies showing beneficial effects on attention, as well as information processing, defined as “the ability to attend to, remember, and mentally manipulate information” (p. 501). They note that research in higher education contexts is limited, and that there is a lack of clarity as to how improved attention and information processing abilities might translate into academic performance.

In a study by Helber, Zook, and Immergut (2012), the executive functions of 16 traditional-aged students in an upper level undergraduate sociology course were compared with those of a similar control group. The class involved 10 minutes of

mindfulness practice in each session; students were encouraged to practice on their own outside of class and keep a journal about the frequency and duration of their practice. Both groups were given tests of executive functions before and after the class. The authors found that there was no significant difference between post-intervention test scores between the two groups, a fact they attribute to the familiarity with the tests. However, the intervention group had a larger increase in scores between the pre- and the post-tests, with those reporting more time in mindfulness practice outside of class having the greatest change. This study suggests a possible impact of mindfulness on cognitive function, but again, it does not indicate whether and how cognitive changes would transfer outside of the classroom and experimental context.

The review of this body of literature suggests that transfer of learning is an important and under-researched area in conflict resolution education. There are transfer of learning strategies related to experiential and emotional learning, as well as stress reduction, that may be well-suited to the content of courses in conflict resolution. Some evidence suggests that mindfulness may support the development of cognitive abilities that may be related to transfer of learning in experimental contexts. But the question of whether mindfulness can be effective as an intervention to support transfer of learning of conflict resolution skills from the classroom into work or personal contexts appears to be one that has yet to be formally studied; the current study may help address this gap.

### **Summary**

This review of the literature on emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and transfer of learning directly addresses the study's three research questions, forms the basis of the study's conceptual framework, and guides the processes of data collection and analysis. A brief summary of key findings relevant to this study follows.

While models of emotional intelligence may vary in their emphasis on abilities, traits, and behaviors, all of the models reviewed above include recognition of the importance of emotional self-awareness, emotional self-management, and the ability to use those competencies in interpersonal relationships. Research also suggests a possible specific link between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills.

The influence of mindfulness practice on these competencies is a central focus of this study. Most definitions of mindfulness practice emphasize the intentional direction of attention to thoughts, emotions and sensations, with openness to the experience and without judgment. The literature reviewed indicates a possible association between mindfulness and emotional intelligence, perhaps arising from the self-awareness that may result from this type of focused attention. Critically for the purpose of this study, a number of research studies suggest that mindfulness positively impacts emotional self-management, the focus of the study's second research question.

The study's third research question examines the possible influence of mindfulness on transfer of learning. The literature reviewed suggest that learning transfer appears to be supported by individual characteristics such as alertness (attention), memory, metacognition, emotional self-awareness, and the ability to "step back" from and think about one's emotions. The literature also suggests that mindfulness interventions may support these capacities. But little literature linking mindfulness and transfer of learning was found, a gap that this study may partially help to address. If mindfulness practice supports the development of these individual characteristics, it may be a useful innovation in program design and implementation to improve the transfer of learning of skills related to conflict resolution.

## Conceptual Framework

Based on this literature review, the conceptual framework for this study looks at how mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and transfer of learning intersect to influence learning in a specific context, that of conflict resolution education for adults. In Figure 2.3 below, these three fields are represented in ovals.

The Emotional and Social Competency (ESC) model (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2007), a model of emotional intelligence, is particularly well-suited to the development of the conceptual framework for this study. It goes beyond simply identifying aspects of emotional intelligence, and proposes how these aspects relate to each other. Three key components of the ESC model are represented by the shaded boxes in Figure 2.3, while specific competencies within those components are represented by the overlapping unshaded boxes. The arrows indicate a “path of influence” between these specific competencies, showing how the foundational competency of emotional self-awareness supports the development of emotional self-control; one must first be aware of one’s emotional responses before those responses can be managed. Emotional self-control in turn supports the competency of conflict management, as the ability to regulate one’s emotions can prevent impulsive responses that may escalate conflict.

Additional arrows indicate the possibility of a direct influence of mindfulness practice on emotional self-awareness and emotional self-management, leading to an impact on conflict management. Transfer of learning of skills and concepts learned in class can also directly affect the competency of conflict management. The dotted arrows suggest that mindfulness practice may indirectly impact transfer of learning, thereby also indirectly impacting conflict management.

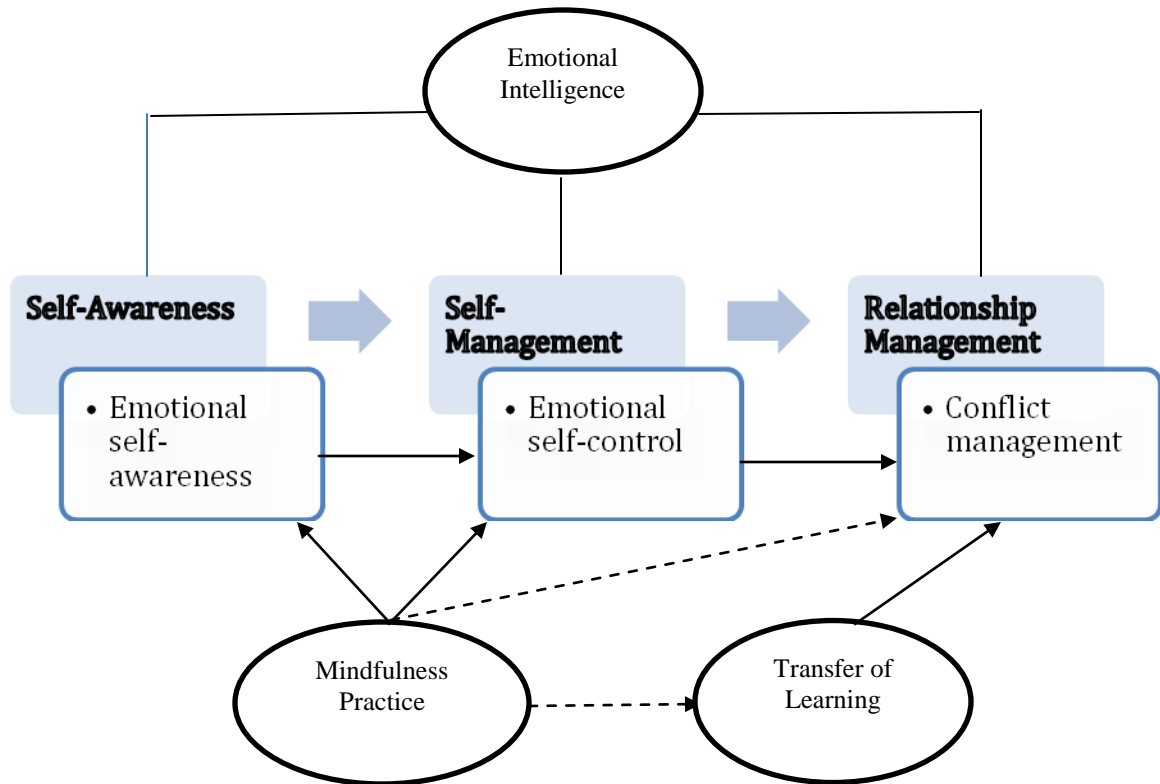


Figure 2.3. Conceptual Framework

Thus, the outcome of improved competency in conflict management may be directly affected by both improved emotional control and transfer of the content of the class, and indirectly affected by incorporation of mindfulness practice into the established course content.

Processes of learning, especially of complex competencies such as conflict management, are rarely as linear, as Figure 2.3 suggests. The actual process of developing competency in conflict management is likely more iterative and circular than this illustration implies. However, Figure 2.3 attempts to show the relatively overlooked role of emotion in conflict management, as well as the possible influence of mindfulness practice on competencies related to emotional intelligence.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Conflict resolution skills are needed in all walks of life. The field of conflict resolution has been criticized for an over-emphasis on conceptual and analytical approaches (Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Maiese, 2006). Despite the fact that strong emotional responses may interfere with the use of learned skills (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005; Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Maiese, 2006; Mischel et al. 2014), most conflict resolution courses give little attention to the role of emotion in conflict, and provide few skills for managing emotions in conflict (Deutsch, 2014b; Lindner, 2014). Including the practice of mindfulness may have potential to address this problem, as it has been found to support emotional self-management in studies carried out in a variety of contexts (Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Birnbaum, 2008; Ramel et al., 2004; Solloway & Fisher, 2007; Winzelburg & Luskin, 1999; Zylowska et al. 2007). Improved emotional self-management may result in more effective transfer of learning of interpersonal conflict resolution skills.

For these reasons, the purpose of this study was to explore the development of emotional self-management and transfer of learning when mediated by mindfulness practice in the context of a conflict resolution course for adults. The study's results inform consideration of the usefulness of mindfulness practice as a possible educational

innovation for improving the effectiveness of conflict resolution education courses for adult learners.

The study's main research questions were:

1. Do adult learners' descriptions of their emotional self-management and transfer of learning appear to be influenced by self-reported higher vs. lower frequencies of mindfulness practice during the course?
2. How do adult learners in an undergraduate conflict resolution course describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) on emotional self-management during situations of interpersonal conflict?
3. How does this group of adult learners describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) in supporting the transfer of learning of conflict resolution skills from the classroom into actual conflict situations?

This chapter describes the study design and types of information collected. It provides an overview of the steps taken to collect and analyze the data. It describes the sample, the reasons for the selection of the site, and methods for ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality of the subjects. Data collection methods are described, with the inclusion of sample instruments. Methods for analyzing, coding, and synthesizing the data are also covered. Finally, issues of validity and reliability are examined, along with limitations of the study and ways that these were addressed.

### **Rationale for the Study Design**

The study used a qualitative approach. According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative methods are most appropriate when the goal of the study is to understand “the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences and actions they are involved with” (p. 22). They also allow a researcher to understand “the *process* by which

events and actions take place” (p. 23). In this study, qualitative methods provided greater understanding of participants’ experience of mindfulness in situations of interpersonal conflict, and the process by which mindfulness influences emotional self-management and transfer of learning of course material. As Richards and Morse (2013, p. 28) point out, qualitative methods are ideal for investigating participants’ perception of a phenomenon, and the varied and complex ways in which they may interpret that phenomenon; mindfulness is a phenomenon which appeared to be subject to a range of perceptions and interpretations.

A case study methodology was used in the research. Case study methodology has been defined as one which “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). In this study, the bounded system was a class on “Managing Conflict” (see Appendix A for course syllabus) at a large urban university in the Northeast, which was investigated over two semesters with data collected from interviews, journals and writing samples. Given that the purpose of the study was to focus on better understanding a particular issue—the influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management and transfer of learning—this is best understood as an “instrumental” approach to the case study method (Berg, 2009, p. 326).

There are a number of different types of case study designs (Berg, 2009; Yin, 2005). This study used a “single case embedded case study” design (Yin, 2005). It examined a single case, the class, but with four distinct units of analysis: subjects who reported higher or lower frequencies of mindfulness practice, and subjects who reported two different stances toward mindfulness, allowing for cross-unit analysis. Additionally, there was a “pre-post” design element for one aspect of the study, subjects’ descriptions of their typical ways of handling interpersonal conflict. Subjects were asked about this



topic at two points in time—before and after the course (Berg, 2009, p. 328)—for possible changes in approaches to conflict that may have been influenced by the course.

The researcher began informally investigating the role that mindfulness played in the “Managing Conflict” class in 2009, developing questionnaires and other instruments that would elicit adult learners’ views on the influence of mindfulness practice on their ability to regulate their emotions in situations of interpersonal conflict. The design of the study was shaped by a pilot study that was carried out in 2011-2012 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for two qualitative research methods courses. Instruments used in the study were developed between 2009 and 2011 and refined during the pilot study.

### **Areas of Information Collected**

Participants in the course were the sole source of information collected. Six types of information were collected: (1) demographic information about the subjects; (2) information about subjects’ frequency of mindfulness practice; (3) information about subjects’ stance toward mindfulness; (4) subjects’ perceptions of their approach to conflict, before and after the class; (5) subjects’ perceptions about mindfulness practice and its influence on emotional self-management in conflict situations; and (6) subjects’ perceptions about mindfulness practice and its influence on transfer of learning in conflict situations.

Demographic information collected included the subjects’ gender, age, race/ethnicity, job title, job location, number of years in current job, highest level of education completed, number of college credits taken at the course site, any certificates earned at the course site, number of college credits taken elsewhere, and any previous experiences with conflict resolution education. This information was collected using a questionnaire that was administered on the first night of class. While this information did not relate specifically to the research questions, it was used to provide an additional level

of analysis of themes identified through other data collection methods (for example, the possible influences of factors such as age or educational experience in subjects' self-reports of emotional self-management and transfer of learning).

Another piece of demographic information that was collected was whether the subjects' had any previous experience with mindfulness practice or other forms of contemplative practice. As the terms "mindfulness practice" and "contemplative practice" were likely unfamiliar to the subjects at the start of the class, this question was not included on the questionnaire, but was asked as part of the post-class interview.

Information about subjects' frequency of mindfulness practice was collected through the use of weekly journals. Subjects varied in the degree to which they added narrative commentary to the journals, as opposed to simply noting dates, times, and length of practice. Subjects were also asked about their frequency and duration of practice in the post-class interview, to corroborate the data obtained through the journals.

Information about subjects' stance toward mindfulness was derived from coding post-class interviews on their experience of mindfulness.

Subjects' perceptions of their approach to conflict, before and after the class, were collected through interviews. They were asked to describe a recent conflict they had been involved in, to describe their thoughts and feelings about the conflict, to describe actions they took and whether or not these were typical for them. They were also asked how they handle strong emotions that may come up in conflict. The same questions were included in both the pre- and post-class interviews, allowing for a comparison of the themes that emerged before and after a semester of mindfulness practice.

Subjects were asked in a post-class interview to describe their experience of mindfulness practice during the course, focusing on emotions, thought processes and physical sensations that arose during practice. They were asked how, if at all, those experiences of mindfulness changed since taking the course; how, if at all, they thought mindfulness practice influenced how they handle conflict; and how they managed

emotions in conflict. Themes reported within and between the “frequency of mindfulness practice” and “stance” groups were analyzed for possible differences.

The post-class interview was also used to examine subjects’ perceptions of their ability to transfer concepts and skills learned in the class into actual conflict situations. The interviewer listened for spontaneous mentions of those concepts and skills when asking the subjects to describe how they handled a recent conflict. Differences were noted within and between the frequencies of practice and stance groups.

These six areas of information that the study gathered, and the means of obtaining the data, are summarized in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. Areas of Information Collected

Information Collected	Pre-class questionnaire	Pre-class interview	Weekly journals kept during class	Post-class interview
Demographic information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Race/ethnicity</li> <li>• Job title</li> <li>• Job location</li> <li>• Number of years in current job</li> <li>• Highest level of education completed</li> <li>• Number of college credits taken at research site</li> <li>• Certificates earned at research site</li> <li>• Number of college credits taken elsewhere</li> <li>• Prior experience with mindfulness practice</li> </ul>	X			X

Table 3.1 (continued)

Information Collected	Pre-class questionnaire	Pre-class interview	Weekly journals kept during class	Post-class interview
Perception of approach to conflict: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of a recent interpersonal conflict</li> <li>• Description of approach used in handling the conflict</li> <li>• Description of how strong emotions are usually managed in conflict</li> </ul>		X		X
Experience with mindfulness practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of practice</li> <li>• Duration of practice</li> <li>• Thought processes during practice</li> <li>• Physical sensations during practice</li> <li>• Emotions during practice</li> <li>• Stance toward mindfulness</li> </ul>			X	X
How, if at all, has mindfulness practice influenced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought processes during conflict</li> <li>• Physical sensations during conflict</li> <li>• Emotions during conflict, particularly management of strong emotions</li> <li>• Behaviors during conflict</li> </ul>				X
Transfer of learned concepts and skills to actual conflict situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reports of use of concepts and skills from class in actual conflicts</li> </ul>				X

### Overview of the Research Design

The collection and analysis of data for this study moved through five distinct phases. These were: (1) informed consent; (2) pre-class data collection; (3) collection of

data during the class; (4) post-class data collection; and (5) data analysis, findings, and conclusions. IRB approval was sought prior to beginning Phase 1.

### **Phase 1: Informed Consent**

Prior to the start of the first class, the researcher contacted all students registered for the course by email and/or telephone to inform them that a research study would take place during the course. In order to ensure that the researcher did not know the identity of students consenting to participate in the study, and did not use her position as the course instructor to coerce students to participate, a research assistant then contacted each student to explain the study in more detail, describe what is involved in being a subject in the study, and ask if the student wished to consent to be part of the study. The research assistant collected signed consent forms (Appendix B) and participants' rights forms (Appendix C) and kept them in a secure place until after the course was completed. This kept the identity of consenting students confidential until after grades were turned in.

### **Phase 2: Pre-class Data Collection**

The research assistant conducted pre-class interviews with consenting subjects about a recent experience of an interpersonal conflict, and their perception of their own style in conflict. Interviews were conducted in person prior to the first class, with one interview being conducted by telephone. Interviews were recorded, and recordings were kept in a secure and confidential file on Dropbox. At the start of the first class, all students were given an alpha-numeric code by the research assistant, while the researcher was out of the room. The researcher did not receive a list identifying the consenting students by their code until after the final round of coding all interview transcripts was complete.

All consenting subjects completed a Demographic Information Form (Appendix D) using only their alpha-numeric code as an identifier. These were stored by the research assistant in a secure file until after all coding was complete. Use of the alpha-numeric

code prevented the researcher, who was also the course instructor, from being able to identify who the consenting students were, thus minimizing the risk of bias in grading. The Pre-class Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix E.

### **Phase 3: Data Collection during the Class**

During the 15-week semester, subjects kept journals on their frequency and duration of mindfulness practice, along with any impressions about their practice. A sample “Weekly Journal Form” can be found in Appendix F. These were identified only with the students’ alpha-numeric codes, and kept in a secure file until the end of the course.

### **Phase 4: Post-class Data Collection**

Between one and three months after the last class, each subject was interviewed by the researcher about their impressions of the class, their experience of mindfulness practice, their views on the relationship (if any) between mindfulness and emotional self-management, a recent experience of interpersonal conflict, their experience (if any) of transferring concepts and skills into an actual situation of conflict, and their perception of their own conflict style. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The Post-Class Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix G.

### **Phase 5: Data Analysis and Conclusions**

Pre- and post-class interviews were transcribed. Journals were analyzed to determine the frequency of mindfulness practice of each subject. All pre- and post-class interviews were reviewed and coded for themes that emerged. Themes that emerged from the interviews before and after the course were then analyzed, both according to the two levels of frequency of practice (higher and lower) and two stances toward mindfulness (self-awareness and self-soothing). Differences within and between groups were examined and descriptive statistics were derived based on the presence or absence of

themes that were coded. The research questions were then re-visited, and conclusions were drawn. These phases are mapped in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2. Overview of Research Design

<b>Phase 1</b> <b>Informed consent</b>	<b>Phase 2</b> <b>Pre-class data collection</b>	<b>Phase 3</b> <b>During class data collection</b>	<b>Phase 4</b> <b>Post-class data collection</b>	<b>Phase 5</b> <b>Data analysis and conclusions</b>
(IRB approval will be obtained prior to Phase 1.)  Prior to first class, subjects are contacted by phone/email to inform them about the study and complete consent forms	Prior to first class, pre-class interviews on recent conflict experience and typical conflict style will be held.  At first class, subjects complete:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demographic information questionnaire</li> </ul>	During class, subjects complete:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly journals on mindfulness practice</li> </ul>	1-3 months after class, subjects complete:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-class interview on mindfulness, emotional self-management and transfer of learning</li> </ul> Note-taking and transcription	Code data  Develop themes  Analysis: comparison of themes in higher and lower frequency of practice groups, before and after class  Articulate responses to research questions  Draw conclusions

### **Discussion of the Sample**

The study was carried out in large urban university in the Northeast, within a program that was created to meet the educational needs of working adults, organizations and employers. The class that was used for the study was called “Managing Conflict.” The researcher taught this class since 2001, and began introducing mindfulness practice into the course in the fall semester of 2009. The class covered topics such types of conflicts, the difference between positions and needs in conflict, listening skills, assertive communication skills, negotiation, processes of escalation and de-escalation, managing

emotions in conflict, decision-making processes, and race and gender issues in conflict. The course was highly interactive, with many experiential activities, including role play.

The course description did not explicitly mention the use of mindfulness in the class, since mindfulness practice had been incorporated as part of regular class work in prior years. This meant that students who chose to enroll in the class were interested in learning about conflict resolution, but did not self-select because of either the presence or absence of the mindfulness component. This provided an opportunity to see whether mindfulness influenced the perceptions of emotional self-management in a group that had little or no prior experience with mindfulness practice.

The site was chosen because it met the researcher's criteria as a course for adults in conflict resolution that included a component of mindfulness, was within an easily reachable geographic area, and was one that the researcher has access to.

At the time of the study, most of the students who took courses within this program for adult learners were paraprofessionals in the city's public school system. Approximately 95% of the program's students at that time were women, and 98% were students of color. The majority of students were African-American, with Latina/o students making up the second largest demographic group, followed by Asian-Americans. The students ranged in age from 21 to 60. A typical class size was 15-18 students.

Thirteen students from two semesters of the class chose to become study subjects. An additional two students who were interviewed as part of the researcher's pilot study, were also included. These two students, Margaret and Nina, did not participate in a pre-class interview, as that was not part of the pilot study design. Their descriptions of how they handled conflict prior to the class were based on retrospective recall during the post-class interview.

The choice of the students in the class can be considered a form of purposeful sampling, as the subjects were "selected deliberately in order to provide information that



can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). The population of adult learners who have experienced mindfulness practice in the context of a course on conflict resolution is limited and difficult to identify, and the students in the class were well-positioned to share their perceptions of the influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management in conflict. They were "people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are expert in an area or were privileged witnesses to an event" (Weiss, 1994, cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 88).

The choice of the class as a source of subjects for the study was also a convenience sample, as they were a group of individuals to which the researcher has easy access (Creswell, 2013). Berg (2009) cautions that convenience samples must be carefully "evaluated for appropriateness of fit for a given study" (p. 50). However, in this case, the class was well-suited to provide information about the questions of what influence, if any, mindfulness had on emotional self-management in conflict, and transfer of learning from the classroom to actual conflict, as they had an entire semester in which to practice mindfulness in the context of a course on conflict resolution. Additionally, they likely entered the course without a bias toward, or preconceptions about mindfulness practice.

A limitation of using a convenience sample was the homogeneity of the resulting pool of subjects. Given the demographics of students at the study site, the 15 consenting subjects were all women of color, and all but 3 were employed as paraprofessionals. The possible influences these characteristics on the findings are discussed further in Chapter V.

### **Methods for Assuring Protection of Human Subjects**

The chief issue relating to the protection of human subjects in this study stemmed from the fact that the researcher studied a class that she taught. As Creswell (2013) points out, "the nature of an interview sets up an unequal power dynamic between the

interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 173), a power dynamic that could have been exacerbated by the fact that the researcher already held a position of power as the instructor for the course. For these reasons, some authors recommend against studying one’s own students (Seidman, 2006). Assuring that the influence of power issues arising from the teacher-student dynamic was minimized was of utmost importance. The study addressed this issue at each phase of the research design.

In Phase 1, Informed Consent, a research assistant handled the process, so that students would not feel coerced to participate. The researcher (who was also the course instructor) was not informed of who had chosen to participate until after final grades for the course were turned in, and coding was completed. The research assistant had a doctoral degree, and had herself carried out qualitative interview research. She was also an experienced instructor of conflict resolution classes for adult learners who understood the importance of protecting human subjects, and strictly followed the procedures designed to do so.

All participants were informed by the research assistant of the nature of the study in advance and had the option to refuse to participate. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Subjects were informed that results of their pre-class interviews and their journals would not be available to the researcher until after final grades for the class were turned in, and the post-class interview was carried out.

In Phase 2, Pre-class Data Collection, the pre-class interview was carried out by the research assistant, in order to avoid any possible biases on the part of the researcher/instructor that might have affected the student-teacher relationship during or after the course. The interviewer was trained in the use of the interview protocol in advance. The pre-class interviews were recorded, but recordings were not transcribed or shared with the researcher until after final grades for the class were turned in, and the post-class interview had been completed.

In Phase 3, Data Collection during the Class, subjects turned in weekly journals on mindfulness practice during the course. These were identified by an alpha-numeric code and kept in a locked file cabinet. The researcher did not have access to the list of codes until after final grades for the class were turned in, and all coding of interviews was completed.

Subjects were told that they would receive course credit for turning in a journal each week, but that the journals would not be graded. Credit was based on receipt of the journals, not on the content of the journals. A journal that reported regular daily mindfulness practice, and a journal that reported no practice at all, received the same amount of credit. Having used this approach in past classes, the researcher found that this resulted in students reporting their use of mindfulness practice accurately, as there was no incentive to inflate their reports of practice. This reduced both the possibility of subjects feeling coerced to practice, and of over-reporting mindfulness practice in order to receive a better grade. A pilot study carried out in 2011-2012 found that there was a high degree of agreement between the frequency of mindfulness practice reported in interviews and in journals.

It should be noted that as the design of the study involved the comparison of groups that reported higher and lower frequencies of mindfulness practice, there was no motivation for the instructor to exert influence on all students to practice. The researcher's view was that analysis of the data would be more meaningful if there was a range of frequency of practice in the class, and the study was designed around the expectation that this would be the case. The experience of the researcher in introducing mindfulness in classes over the previous four years suggested that a range of frequencies of practice would emerge naturally during the course, as some students would respond more favorably to mindfulness practice than others.

All students, whether or not they had consented to be part of the study, were invited to participate in a short mindfulness practice at the beginning of each class. A

sample “script” showing how the mindfulness practice was guided is included in Appendix H. Participation was optional, and students who did not wish to participate had the option to read quietly, review their homework, etc.

In Phase 4, Post-class Data Collection, a post-class interview was carried out by the researcher after final grades for the class had been turned in. The aim was to minimize the possibility that responses given in the interview would be influenced by the desire to receive a better grade, or that subjects would respond in ways they believed the researcher wanted to hear.

In Phase 5, Data Analysis and Conclusions, the pre- and post-class interviews were transcribed and coded. Journals were analyzed, and subjects were grouped according to their frequency of mindfulness practice, as well as on the basis of their stance toward mindfulness.

In the report of findings, names were changed to protect the identities of the subjects.

### **Methods for Data Collection**

The methods for data collection included a demographic information form, interviews (pre- and post-class), and a weekly journal. Each of these is described below, along with the rationale for its use, how it was developed, and how the data it provided were recorded.

The Demographic Information Form (Appendix D) collected basic demographic data. Three questions—on gender, age, and race/ethnicity—were optional. The remaining questions asked about the subjects’ occupations, educational background, and prior experience with conflict resolution education. The data analysis process examined whether there were differences in themes that emerged from the interviews and journals that appeared related to differing educational backgrounds, experience with conflict

resolution education, or other categories of demographic data. The Demographic Information Form was developed following guidelines described by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011).

The study involved a pre- and post-class interview. The interview protocols were designed using the “responsive interviewing” approach of Rubin and Rubin (2005). In responsive interviewing, the interview process is approached as a “dynamic and iterative process” (p. 15)—the researcher begins with planned questions, but adapts the interview in response to the types of information provided by the subjects. The focus of inquiry may shift as the relationship and interaction between the interviewer and the subject evolves.

The pre-class interview was carried out by the research assistant in the first week of the semester, before students had been exposed to any of the concepts and skills that the class covered, and before the introduction of mindfulness practice. Subjects’ descriptions of a recent interpersonal conflict, how they handled it, and the emotions they experienced provided information about the approaches to conflict they used before any influence of the course material. The pre-class interview protocol was piloted and revised based on pilot study interviews that were carried out in Spring 2012.

The post-class interview was carried out by the researcher in the three months following the end of the course, after final grades had been submitted. Subjects were asked about what stood out to them from the “Managing Conflict” course, and what (if any) concepts or skills from the course they had used in their daily lives. Experience in piloting this interview protocol suggested that mindfulness was often one of the first things mentioned, particularly by subjects whose frequency of practice was high. Placing this open-ended question first in the interview protocol allowed subjects to spontaneously describe their experiences with mindfulness, without being “led” in that direction by the researcher. It allowed for “thick” descriptions of mindfulness practice, and exploration of

its use in conflict situations, as well as yielding insights on what aspects of the course have transferred into subjects' lives.

Next, subjects were asked questions similar to the ones asked in the pre-class interview about a conflict that they had been engaged in after the class ended, how they handled it, and how they managed the emotions they experienced during the conflict. This allowed the researcher to uncover any changes in approach to conflict and emotional self-management, including changes that may have been influenced by mindfulness practice. Subjects were also asked how they described their typical approach to handling conflict at that point in time, and if this had changed since the pre-class interview.

Finally, subjects were asked directly about their experience of mindfulness practice, if this had not already come up in the interview. The pilot study suggested that for those whose frequency of practice during the course was lower, mindfulness practice tended not to be mentioned in response to the earlier interview questions. This allowed the researcher to better understand reasons for lower frequency of practice, and to analyze differences between higher and lower frequency of practice groups in terms of emotional self-management and transfer of learning.

The post-class interview protocol was developed, piloted and revised between December 2011 and September 2012, based on six interviews with former students in the "Managing Conflict" class.

The weekly journal on mindfulness practice (Appendix F) was used by the researcher beginning in 2010 to gain information about how many students were actually adopting a regular mindfulness practice as a result of the class. In Spring 2012, the journal was piloted as a research instrument in a class of 15 students. The researcher wanted to gather information on the frequency and duration of mindfulness practice, along with qualitative information about students' experiences with practice; at the same time, she believed it was an ethical violation to coerce students to practice mindfulness. The use of the journal became a way to address this dilemma. Students were instructed in

mindfulness practice in class, and given a two-sided journal page each week on which to record when and for how long they practiced, along with any comments they wanted to add about their experience of practice. Students were told that they would receive course credit for turning in the journals each week, but that the content of the journals would not be graded. Students were encouraged to be honest about recording their experiences, and were told that honest responses were most helpful to the instructor's research. Over the 15 weeks of the class, the rate of return of journals was high, and the range of frequency of practice reported was wide (from none at all to multiple times per day). This indicated to the researcher that the majority of the students appeared to be comfortable completing the journals honestly.

### **Literature to Support Design and Data Collection Methods**

The selection of a case study design for the research was guided by Yin's (2009) view that this method is particularly well suited to studies in which (1) a "how" or "why" question is being asked; (2) the focus is on a contemporary set of events; and (3) the researcher has little or no control over those events (p. 13). In this study, the focus was on the question of how, if at all, mindfulness practice influenced emotional self-management and transfer of learning in situations of interpersonal conflict. The contemporary set of events that was studied was the simultaneous learning of conflict resolution concepts and skills, and mindfulness practice, and how subjects applied these in their daily lives. While the researcher had control over what is taught in the course, she had no control over whether the subjects actually practiced mindfulness, whether and how they managed their emotions in conflicts, and whether and how they transferred concepts and skills taught in class into their lives. These facts support the choice of a case study design.

As Yin (2009) points out, a case study inquiry "relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (p. 18). This study

used two of the six sources of evidence that Yin identifies—documentation and interviews.

The use of documents in for obtaining data in qualitative research, and particularly in case study research, is widely cited (Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Richards & Morse, 2013). For Yin (2009), the value of using documents for data collection in a case study is “to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103), in this case the interviews. There were two forms of documentation that served this function—the Demographic Information Form and the Weekly Journal Form.

The Demographic Information Form provided factual information about characteristics of the subjects that was used to develop descriptive codes in data analysis. The use of a questionnaire to accomplish the collection of this type of data is supported by Cohen et al. (2011), who state that “the questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straightforward to analyze” (p. 377).

The Weekly Journal on mindfulness practice was the second form of documentation used in the study. Keeping a journal or diary during the period of a research study is a well-documented means of obtaining qualitative data (Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2013). Richards and Morse (2013), in writing about diaries, point out that this method of data collection “can provide more direct insight into participants’ lives and experiences than can be obtained in interviews asking them to recall the events” (p. 132). The journal yielded information on subjects’ experience of mindfulness practice that supplemented the information provided by the interviews, and was essential in establishing the higher and lower frequency of mindfulness practice groups, as well as the two different stance groups. As previously noted, while all subjects provided data on their frequency of practice, not all regularly provided narrative commentary in their journals.



Interviews are one of the most widely used sources of information for qualitative studies, and for case studies in particular. Seidman (2006) describes interviewing as the method of choice for “understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). While there are several approaches to interviewing, the approach represented by the Pre-Class Interview Protocol and the Post-Class Interview Protocol is best described as semi-structured. According to Richards and Morse (2013), a semi-structured interview is appropriate when the researcher knows enough about the topic of inquiry to formulate questions in advance, but in such a way that the questions will not limit the discovery of unanticipated information. Usually, they say, “the interviewer will ask the same questions of all the participants, although not necessarily in the same order, supplementing the main questions with either planned or unplanned probes” (p. 127).

The use of interviewing in the study was influenced by the Responsive Interviewing Model (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This model is based on interpretive constructionist theory, which focuses on the definitions people create, the lenses through which they view an event, and the meaning (or meanings) that they attribute to an event. Given that most subjects were experiencing mindfulness practice for the first time, an approach to interviewing that emphasized the subjects’ construction of meaning was appropriate. Multiple interpretations by interviewees of the same event are to be expected in responsive interviewing, making this method well-suited to exploring phenomena such as mindfulness and emotional self-management, which may be perceived in very different ways.

The structure of responsive interviewing involves the creation by the researcher of “main questions,” which ensure that key aspects of a research problem will be explored. It also involves the use of “follow-up questions” that address the unique and specific comments of the interviewee, and “probes” that elicit more details and fill in gaps in the views expressed. Each type of question can be found in the interview protocols. It is a

model that is described as flexible and adaptive: “Because the interviewer must listen intently and follow up insights and new points during the interview, the interviewer must be able to change course based on what he or she learns” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 36). This kind of flexibility was found to be necessary in the post-class interviews.

### **Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Data from the Demographic Information Form were used to generate a list of “descriptive codes” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 154) containing factual data about the interview subjects. This included demographic information such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, occupation, educational background, and prior experience with conflict resolution education. Information on prior experience with mindfulness or other contemplative practices gleaned from the post-class interview was added to the list of descriptive codes. Data from the journals on frequency of mindfulness practice were used to categorize subjects into higher (3.5 or more times per week) and lower (fewer than 3.5 times per week) frequency of practice groups. These descriptive codes provided lenses through which to consider possible influences on subjects’ descriptions of the themes of emotional self-management and transfer of learning in the interviews.

Subjects’ discussions of their conflict style, and examples of conflict described in the pre- and post-class interview transcripts were coded to assess any changes in style or approach to handling interpersonal conflict. The codes used in the Thomas-Kilman Instrument (Kilman Diagnostics, 2019), a conflict style self-assessment instrument, were applied retrospectively by the researcher to the relevant sections of the interview transcripts. A summary of the coding of pre- and post-class conflict style descriptions can be found in Appendix I.

Although not part of the original design, the researcher also analyzed the journal data for the average number of minutes that mindfulness was practiced, and the

percentage of the post-class interviews that focused on subjects' experience of mindfulness, as possible indicators of the "quality" of practice. The researcher decided to collect these data out of a concern that there might be "outliers" in the results pertaining to the influence of frequency of practice (for example, subjects who frequency of practice was higher, but who reported little influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management and transfer of learning). The researcher believed that data on "quality" of practice might explain these outliers.

As an additional means of investigating "quality" of practice, the researcher analyzed post-class interview transcripts for differences in how subjects interpreted the practice of mindfulness itself. This included themes such as their intentions for practice, outcomes that they expected, and the types of outcomes they actually experienced, aside from emotional self-management and transfer of learning. A distinction between what the researcher called "stances" toward mindfulness emerged from this process. Two distinct stances were noted—a "self-soothing" stance, in which subjects viewed mindfulness practice primarily as a way to relax, and a "self-awareness" stance, in which subjects viewed mindfulness practice primarily as a means to gain greater knowledge or insight into themselves and their surroundings.

This shift in the research design occurred late in the data analysis process, but all coding pertaining to stance toward mindfulness, as well as all coding pertaining to frequency of mindfulness practice, was done "blind"—in other words, before the researcher received the list of alpha-numeric codes that were assigned to the subjects at the start of the study.

The process of coding the interview transcripts began with what Creswell (2013) calls "categorical aggregation" (p. 199), a process of seeking "a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge" (p. 199). This corresponds to what Richards and Morse (2013) describe as "topic coding" (p. 156). As

each transcript was reviewed, key passages were underlined, margin notes were made about important topics, and memos were kept.

Once this process was completed with each transcript, a “start list” of topic codes was developed.

After the topic codes were completed, they were reviewed to develop categories of data, a process that Richards and Morse (2013) call “analytic coding.” Each new category was given a code, similar to the process described above.

Finally, thematic coding was carried out. Themes are another level of abstraction up from categories. They are similar to what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as “pattern codes,” described as “a theme that accounts for a lot of other data—makes them intelligible ... grouping disparate pieces into a more inclusive and meaningful whole” (p. 58).

Coding was an iterative process. The coding schemes used changed multiple times during this process. An initial set of codes can be found in Appendix J. This set of codes was applied to the post-class interviews as a whole. It addressed subjects’ descriptions of their experience of mindfulness, emotional self-management, and transfer of learning. The researcher found this set of codes to be too general; no clear patterns emerged that told a story about how mindfulness influenced either emotional self-management or transfer of learning.

The researcher then created an interim set of codes, which can be found in Appendix K. These were again applied to the entire content of the post-class interviews. The basic codes on emotional self-management were retained and expanded. Awareness of the other and understanding of conflict were added as factors that might contribute to emotional self-management. How subjects used mindfulness (during conflict, to prepare for conflict) was added, as well as a set of codes on emotional self-management strategies other than mindfulness that were used. In this interim set of codes, the section on transfer of learning was expanded greatly. It focused only on the post-class conflict descriptions,

and covered knowledge, skills, and attitudes that may have transferred. It also repeated many of the emotional self-management codes, with a view to examining how they were used in the post-class conflicts.

This yielded rich and detailed data, as well as a very extensive list of codes. Behaviors coded were defined so specifically that they often only applied to one subject, making their meaningfulness questionable. There was also much overlap and redundancy between the emotional self-management codes and the transfer of learning codes.

At this point, the researcher decided on a data reduction strategy. Since a question underlying the study was whether subjects would actually do anything differently in conflict as a result of the course, the final set of codes focused on emotional self-management and transfer of learning only in the sections of the post-class interviews that dealt with post-class conflicts. The researcher thought this would better focus the findings on what subjects actually did in conflict, rather than on thoughts and feelings about what they had learned that were not related to a specific instance of conflict.

As a result of this focus, redundant codes were eliminated. The emotional self-management codes focused on a specific behavior, the ability to interrupt automatic or habitual responses to conflict, which could be identified in the interview transcripts. The transfer of learning codes focused on three areas: analytic skills (the ability to analyze and think differently about the conflict), communication skills (both receptive and expressive, which indicated an ability to act differently in conflict), and the use of mindful awareness as an approach or orientation that subjects brought to conflict. The theme of self-awareness emerged as a support for emotional self-management, so a set of codes was developed around emotional, cognitive and physical self-awareness. Finally, as the researcher had become concerned about gathering data on quality of mindfulness practice, as well as frequency of practice, the researcher reviewed the interviews (especially the sections on “experience of mindfulness”) and journal entries for identifiable themes that would give insight into the issue of quality. Based on this review,

a set of codes was developed on “stance” toward mindfulness, drawing on and expanding on the “experience of mindfulness” codes from the initial coding scheme. The final set of codes used in the study can be found in Appendix L.

The use of Dedoose, a web-based platform for conducting qualitative data analysis, facilitated the coding process. All coding was carried out by the researcher, but coding was not reviewed by a researcher with experience in fields related to the topic of the study. Thus, inter-rater reliability was not established.

In synthesizing the data, tables were created to compare within-group differences based on frequency of practice (higher and lower) and stance toward practice (self-awareness or self-soothing). These appear in the Appendices.

Summary tables comparing between group (frequency and stance) differences were then created; these appear in Chapter IV. In order to determine which between-group differences were most meaningful to the study, the researcher focused on differences of more than 50 percentage points, as well as differences in which either 0% or 100% of subjects in a particular group (either frequency or stance) reported (or failed to report) a particular theme. The researcher also excluded themes reported by only one subject.

In interpreting the findings, the researcher made use of an “Interpretation Outline Tool” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 174) to develop possible explanations for the findings, and initial analytic categories. This can be found in Appendix M. Once possible interpretations had been developed, the researcher used an “Analytic Category Development” tool (p. 183) to synthesize the main findings based on revised analytic categories. This tool can be found in Appendix N.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Maxwell (2005) defines “validity” as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation or other sort of account” (p. 106), and

says that qualitative researchers must take care to identify and rule out threats to the validity of their studies.

One of the chief validity threats that Maxwell (2005) identifies is “reactivity,” the influence of the researcher on the individuals studied. This was of particular concern in the study, as the researcher was also the instructor for the class being studied, and thus was in a position of power that could influence subjects’ responses. Maxwell argues that this power differential always exists, particularly in the context of an interview, and stresses trying to understand how the interviewer is influencing the interviewees’ responses, rather than trying to eliminate all influence. Nonetheless, given the dual position of the researcher in this study, deliberate steps to reduce reactivity are essential.

The use of multiple data collection methods is a widely cited means of addressing the validity threat of reactivity (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2009). Rather than relying solely on post-class interview data, this study also used the pre-class interview and the weekly journal as ways of gathering data to either corroborate or cast doubt upon the validity of the results.

Another way of minimizing validity threats is through long-term involvement with the research site (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2005). The researcher’s role as an instructor allowed her to develop relationships with subjects that were honest and trusting, to gain detailed know of the subjects that extended beyond the boundaries of the study, as well as to collect rich data on the phenomenon being studied.

Comparison is suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) as a way to test the credibility of a conclusion drawn from data; they say, “We draw a contrast to make a comparison between two sets of things ... that are known to differ in some other important respect” (p. 254). In this study, two groups of subjects that are known to differ in their frequency of mindfulness practice, and two groups that differ in their stance toward mindfulness, are compared in terms of their self-reports of emotional self-

management and transfer of learning. Detailed comparison of these quantitative and qualitative descriptors of mindfulness practice lends credibility to any conclusions drawn.

Other measures were taken to minimize validity threats in this study. Post-class interviews did not take place until after final grades for the course were submitted, thereby reducing subjects' concerns about their responses influencing their grade in the course. Codes rather than names were used on all written documentation, and the code list was withheld from the researcher until after the post-class interviews were completed to reduce the influence of the researcher's power. Careful review of all interview questions to make sure there were no leading questions helped to minimize the possibility of subjects telling the researcher what they thought she wanted to hear.

Researcher bias is another validity threat identified by Maxwell (2005) that is relevant to this study, given the researcher's experience with mindfulness practice. Researcher bias refers to the possibility of the selection of data that fit the researchers' own experiences or preconceptions. Clarification of researcher bias from the outset of the study is recommended to help the reader understand any assumptions that might shape the study (Creswell, 2013, Maxwell, 2005). This was addressed in Chapter I.

Reliability refers to the idea that a study's findings are replicable; that is, if a second researcher were to follow the same procedures in a study, the findings and conclusions would be the same. Methods that can increase the reliability of a case study include careful documentation of research procedures (Yin, 2009, p. 45). In this study, documentation of all data collection was kept, and the content and process of each class session was recorded through the researcher's detailed field notes.

### **Limitations**

A major limitation of this study was the fact that the researcher studied a class that she taught. This raises a number of grounds on which the findings may be questioned—



for example, subjects may have been less than honest in their journals and interviews, instead telling the researcher what they thought she wanted to hear. The strategies described in the section on “Validity and Reliability” above, which aim to address validity threats, likely helped to mitigate the impact of this limitation, but the possibility of subjects’ responses being colored by social desirability bias cannot be entirely discounted.

Another limitation of the study was the fact that subjects were exposed to two distinct educational interventions, mindfulness practice and the content/skills taught in the course. While the study looked at self-reports of emotional self-management and transfer of learning, it is not possible to say if the changes reported are entirely due to mindfulness, or to the other more “traditional” course content. Given that subjects participated in two interviews, and that their experiences both with the course and with mindfulness were probed in depth, the richness of the data obtained should contribute to overcoming this limitation. The fact that groups with a higher and lower frequency of mindfulness practice, as well as differing stances toward mindfulness, were compared for themes that were both similar and difference should lend credibility to any conclusions drawn.

Another limitation is the heavy reliance of self-report methods in the study. Subjects’ reports of how they managed their emotions in a conflict, or what skills learned in the course were used, may have been influenced by gaps in memory, or affected by the subject’s relationship with the researcher. The fact that the study used data from the weekly journal provides insight into the subjects’ learning that gives a more nuanced picture than reliance on interviews alone. However, despite the use of these methods, the limitations related to self-report methods cannot be entirely eliminated.

Coding of interview transcripts and journals was carried out by the researcher, but there was no additional inter-rater reliability check. This raises the possibility that researcher bias could have affected the coding process, and the study findings.

Many qualitative studies use a relatively small sample, and this study was no exception. Fifteen subjects consented to be part of the study, and one was eliminated from the final analysis as she could not identify a post-class conflict she had been involved in. Additionally, all the subjects were women, and all were women of color. The majority (12 out of 15) also shared the same profession (classroom paraprofessionals). Most can also be described as working class. These are factors that must be considered in interpreting the study's findings. The homogeneity of the sample may also limit the generalizability of the findings. At the same, generalizability is usually not considered a major goal of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 101; Maxwell, 2005, p. 115). As Maxwell (2005) points out, "the generalizability of qualitative studies is usually based not on explicit sampling of some defined population to which the results can be extended, but on the development of a theory that can be extended to other cases" (pp. 115-116). Despite the small sample size and the demographics of the sample, the study may contribute to a theory of how mindfulness influences emotional self-management and transfer of learning that can be tested in other contexts and with other populations.

A related limitation is the fact that the study relies on a convenience sample (albeit one that is also purposeful). However, as this class involved instruction in both conflict resolution and mindfulness (a combination which is not common in the field of conflict resolution education), it was well-suited to provide data relating to the research questions. As one of the few studies on this topic, the research may contribute to building a broader knowledge base in this area.

## Chapter IV

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the influence of mindfulness practice on emotional self-management and transfer of learning among 15 adult learners enrolled in an undergraduate course on conflict management.

This chapter presents the findings from the three research questions that framed this study:

1. Do adult learners' descriptions of their emotional self-management and transfer of learning appear to be influenced by self-reported higher vs. lower frequencies of mindfulness practice during the course?
2. How do adult learners in an undergraduate conflict resolution course describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) on emotional self-management during situations of interpersonal conflict?
3. How does this group of adult learners describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) in supporting the transfer of learning of conflict resolution skills from the classroom into actual conflict situations?

As described in Chapter III, the descriptions of subjects' post-class conflicts were examined for evidence of the influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management and transfer of learning during actual situations of interpersonal conflict.

The main findings are summarized below:

Finding #1: For this group of subjects, self-reported frequency of mindfulness practice did not appear to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions. Other quantitative descriptors of use of mindfulness, such as length of mindfulness practice as reported in weekly journals, and the length of subjects' descriptions of their experience of mindfulness in post-class interviews, similarly did not appear to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions.

Finding #2: Among this group of subjects, a qualitative descriptor, stance toward mindfulness, appeared to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions. Specifically, subjects who described mindfulness primarily in terms of relaxation or self-soothing appeared to be less likely to report self-management and transfer of learning in their post-class conflict descriptions. By contrast, subjects who described mindfulness primarily in terms of self-awareness, or as a process of relaxation leading to greater self-awareness, appeared to be more likely to report self-management and transfer of learning in their post-conflict descriptions.

Finding #3: In describing the influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management, some subjects in this study described anger as the primary emotion they had to manage, while others described fear as the primary emotion. Different emotional self-management strategies were used, depending on whether anger or fear was the primary emotion, but mindfulness was reported as influential by both groups. Subjects in this study who reported difficulty in managing emotions in conflict tended to avoid, give up, or delay engaging in the conflict; this group of subjects reported no influence of mindfulness during their post-class conflicts.

Finding #4: Within this group of subjects, those who were able to manage their emotions successfully in post-class conflicts also reported transfer of learning more frequently. Stance toward mindfulness and capacity for emotional self-management

appeared to influence transfer of learning of analytic skills (the ability to identify causes of conflict and the ability to identify the needs of the other party), receptive communication skills, and the integration of mindfulness into one's approach to conflict. Frequency of mindfulness practice may have a modest influence on reports of specific concepts from the class being used to help analyze the conflict.

Finding #5: For this group of subjects, self-awareness—emotional, cognitive, and physical—may support emotional self-management and transfer of learning. The sense of having control over, or choice about one's emotions may be influenced by stance toward mindfulness. Cognitive clarity and the ability to observe and take responsibility for one's own role in conflict may also be influenced by stance toward mindfulness. Physical self-awareness may be influenced more by frequency of mindfulness practice, and may act to “cue” subjects to the state of their emotions.

Following a description of the setting for the study, demographic information about the subjects, subjects' prior experience with mindfulness and instruction in conflict resolution, and descriptions of subjects' post-class conflicts, each of these findings will be discussed in more depth, and excerpts from post-class interviews will be used where appropriate to illustrate each finding.

### **Description of the Setting**

The site for the study was a conflict resolution course taught in a large urban university in the northeastern United States. The course was offered through a program for non-traditional-aged college students who had some college credits, but had not completed an undergraduate degree. This program provided these students with the chance to take undergraduate level courses; by taking four three-credit courses in a range of topics, the students could earn certificates of completion. The conflict resolution course attended by the subjects was part of the requirements for a Certificate in

Management and a Certificate in Leadership. Students completing certificates were then counseled and supported in pursuing a bachelor's degree. A typical class size in this program was 15-18 students. All courses were offered in the evening to accommodate the schedules of working adults.

At the time of the study, approximately 95% of the students in the program were women, and 98% were African-American, Latina/o, or Asian-American. Most worked full-time, and approximately 95% of the students were employed as teaching assistants (also described as "paraprofessionals") in the public school system of the city in which the university is located. Teaching assistants/paraprofessionals work under the supervision of licensed teachers and serve schools in a variety of capacities, which can include: assisting teachers as general aides in the classroom; working one-on-one with special needs students; acting as translators for students and families whose first language is not English; or functioning as "crisis paraprofessionals" who intervene with children whose behavior cannot be managed in the classroom.

### **The Study Subjects**

Demographic information was collected from the 15 consenting subjects prior to the start of the class. Table 4.1 summarizes this information (all names are pseudonyms). Subjects ranged in age from 26 to 63.

Eight of the 15 subjects identified as African-American, two identified as Hispanic, two were Caribbean-Americans, and two were Chinese-Americans. One participant identified as both "Black" and "Hispanic."

Eleven of the 15 subjects were employed as teaching assistants at the time of the study, while the other four worked in administrative positions in other organizations.

Three of the subjects had Associate degrees, while the remaining 12 had completed some college courses, ranging from 6 to 90 undergraduate credits.

Table 4.1. Subject Demographics

Name	Age	Race/ethnicity	Job	Educational level
Barbara	50	African-American	Teaching assistant	90 credits
Bonnie	44	African-American	Teaching assistant	12 credits
Elizabeth	60	African-American	Teaching assistant	15 credits
Frances	50	Caribbean-American	Underwriter	6 credits
Harriet	52	Caribbean-American	Teaching assistant	45 credits
Jackie	46	Hispanic	Office supervisor	36 credits
Lisa	26	Hispanic	Restaurant manager	Associates degree
Louise	40	African-American	Executive assistant	6 credits
Margaret	51	African-American	Teaching assistant	12 credits
Nina	56	Black/Hispanic	Teaching assistant	Associates degree
Rita	32	Chinese-American	Teaching assistant	67 credits
Sarah	47	African-American	Teaching assistant	36 credits
Tanya	38	African-American	Teaching assistant	60 credits
Viola	33	African-American	Teaching assistant	24 credits
Yvonne	63	Chinese-American	Teaching assistant	Associates degree

### **Prior Experience with Conflict Resolution and/or Mindfulness**

In addition to the information summarized in Table 4.1 above, the demographic information forms completed by subjects also asked whether they had previously taken a course related to conflict resolution. This question was asked again in the post-class interviews to gain more information from those who indicated that they had this prior experience with the subject. In the post-class interviews, subjects were also asked if they had prior experience with mindfulness or a similar “centering” practice. Their responses are summarized in Table 4.2 below.

Two of the 15 subjects reported taking a prior college-level class that included some content related to conflict resolution.

Three of the 15 subjects reported taking a class in yoga, relaxation, or anger management, all of which involved breath awareness. A fourth participant reported having been advised by a health care professional to practice deep breathing to manage her stress, but had not taken an actual course.

Nine of the 15 subjects had no prior experience with classes in either conflict management or mindfulness.

Table 4.2. Prior Experience with Conflict Resolution and/or Mindfulness

Name	Prior experience with conflict resolution	Prior experience with mindfulness
Barbara	Yes (class on helping children manage conflict in school)	No
Bonnie	No	No
Elizabeth	No	No
Frances	Yes (class on interpersonal communication; included content on conflict)	No
Harriet	No	No (health care professional advised her to do deep breathing to manage stress, blood pressure)
Jackie	No	No
Lisa	No	No
Louise	No	No
Margaret	No	No
Nina	No	No
Rita	No	No
Sarah	No	Yes (referred by employer to an anger management course that involved breath awareness techniques)
Tanya	No	Yes (bought relaxation CDs; attended a few sessions of a relaxation class)
Viola	No	Yes (participates in yoga classes for children at school where she works)
Yvonne	No	No

### Post-class Conflicts Described by Subjects

Table 4.3 below summarizes the types of post-class conflicts described by subjects in response to Interview Question #2, and strategies they reported to address the conflict. One subject, Bonnie, was excluded from this table and from further analysis, as she was unable to identify a specific post-class conflict that she had been involved in. Five of the 15 subjects—Elizabeth, Harriet, Louise, Nina, and Rita—reported two post-class conflicts.



Table 4.3. Post-class Conflicts as Described by Subjects

Subject	Conflict Description	Strategies Used by Subject
Barbara	Barbara described a recent conflict with a male friend who handles conflict differently than she does. She said he gets “bent out of shape” and “rants”. He did not listen to her point of view or suggestions. This was a repeated pattern.	Barbara stopped trying to defend herself, and listened actively. She tried to be mindful of how he was feeling, and her contribution to the conflict. She looked for points they could agree on. She revisited the conflict later when he was calmer.
Bonnie	<b>EXCLUDED -- NO POST-CLASS CONFLICT IDENTIFIED.</b>	
Elizabeth 1	Elizabeth described uncomfortable interactions at family gatherings. Family members who have the same father as Elizabeth, but a different mother, asked her questions about her father that left her feeling devalued.	Elizabeth described using mindfulness to manage her emotions before these gatherings. She anticipated questions or topics that may come up, and thought about possible responses that wouldn’t offend the family members or escalate conflict.
Elizabeth 2	Elizabeth described an ongoing conflict with her daughter. Elizabeth sees her grandson has special emotional needs. She wanted him to get intervention, due to the family history of bipolar disorder. Elizabeth’s daughter resisted getting special services for him.	Elizabeth used mindfulness practice before talking to her daughter. She said that when she can calm herself, she can think of different ways to approach the conflict. When her daughter didn’t respond, she breathed deeply during the conflict and tried to come up with a different strategy.
Frances	<p>A subordinate told Frances that she was planning to quit her job, leaving extra work for the rest of the department.</p> <p>Frances had anticipated that this person would quit, but her boss discounted her. She then had to discuss with her boss how to handle being short-staffed.</p>	<p>Frances said normally she would have reacted by being upset and worried. Instead, she thought about the subordinate’s needs, and encouraged her to pursue her professional goals.</p> <p>Frances took a few minutes alone in her office to do some mindful breathing. When she met with her boss, instead of saying, “I told you so”, she described the situation and engaged him in planning how to redistribute the workload. She assertively conveyed what she was and was not willing to do. She reminded herself that this is a short-term arrangement, and that things happen that are not under one’s control.</p>
Harriet 1	Harriet experience conflict with her husband when he asked the same question over and over.	Harriet said she used to just walk away when this happened. Instead, when she felt like she was about to “snap”, she used self-talk to calm herself down. She tried to be aware of and manage her body language. She tried to consider the reasons her husband was repeating his questions.

Table 4.3 (continued)

Subject	Conflict Description	Strategies Used by Subject
Harriet 2	A co-worker gave misleading information about Harriet to an administrator, implying that she had left the school during the middle of the day without reason.	Harriet did some mindful breathing. She then confronted the co-worker in what she described as an assertive way, as opposed to the more aggressive way she might have previously handled it.
Jackie	Jackie described a conflict with her husband over his drinking. She wanted him to stop or reduce his drinking, and was frustrated by his attempts to hide it.	Jackie argued with her husband and told him the reasons that he should stop drinking. She said that after the argument, she thought about his needs. She expressed a sense of helplessness, and said there is nothing she can do about his drinking.
Lisa	Lisa described a casual relationship with her boyfriend that became serious. She felt confused and angry about this, in part because he had a chronic progressive illness. She wanted to have a conversation about the future of their relationship, but was hesitant about how to approach it.	Lisa wrote down her feelings, and realized what was behind her fears. She also practiced expressing her feelings assertively. The conversation was a positive one and brought them closer together.
Louise 1	Friends called Louise – especially on Sundays – for very long conversations about their problems, asking her advice. Louise was angered by these calls because she wanted to have time for herself.	Louise described hinting to callers about how she feels, but said they didn't take the hint. She decided to turn her phone off on Sundays, because she wanted time to take care of herself.
Louise 2	Louise described wanting to discuss with her boyfriend the future of their relationship, but felt unsure about whether it is the right time to bring this up, as his mother had recently died.	Louise acknowledged that she has “selfish” reasons for wanting an answer. She tried to be patient and not pressure him, though she felt anxiety building about the relationship. She anticipated that if she pressured him, he would back off. She knew she had to talk with him about this in the future, and said that when the time comes, she would not ask him directly but would raise it “sneakily”.
Margaret	Margaret lost her apartment and had to move in with her sister. Her sister's son became angry at having Margaret and her daughter in the apartment. The argument became violent and he tried to throw a computer at Margaret.	Margaret described using mindful breathing during this incident to calm herself. She focused on listening to her nephew and paraphrasing the feelings he was expressing.

Table 4.3 (continued)

Subject	Conflict Description	Strategies Used by Subject
Nina 1	Nina described a conflict over working with a teacher who she said did not respect her needs and feelings.	Nina anticipated talking with this teacher. She went to an empty room and practiced mindful breathing to calm herself. Later, when they had a conversation, she was able to assertively express her needs and feelings.
Nina 2	Nina had a conflict with her daughter, who wanted to transfer to a different college. Nina wanted her to stay in the college where she was currently enrolled.	Nina said that prior to the class, she would have approached the conflict by asserting her authority over her daughter. Instead, she listened to her daughter's reasons. She said they both tried to understand each other's point of view.
Rita 1	Rita described a conflict with another school paraprofessional who had previously gossiped about Rita. This co-worker asked Rita to make a phone call to parent who spoke Rita's first language. Rita was too busy to do it immediately. The co-worker later made a derogatory comment about Rita while they were passing in the hall.	Rita thought about the sources of the co-worker's anger. Later in the day when she had time, she made the call. Before reporting the results, she practiced mindful breathing. She realized that what really mattered was that the situation involving the parent and child was resolved. She spoke to the co-worker in a professional way about the results of the phone call. She reported feeling that she didn't need to feel afraid of the co-worker any more.
Rita 2	Rita described a conversation with friend who is a very busy and impatient lawyer. During the conversation, Rita said something that she realized had angered her friend.	Rita observed her friend's body language, which appeared angry and impatient. She noticed her own anxiety rising. She decided to breathe and summoned the image of her "bubble". She directly asked her friend what was bothering her. She realized that the problem was a joint one that they could resolve together.
Sarah	Sarah witnessed a dean at her school inappropriately restraining a child, for what she believed was a very minor issue. She had an internal conflict about how to handle this.	Sarah struggled to keep her emotions inside. She was afraid she would react in a very aggressive way if she said something – she did not want the other students to see her like that. Over two months later, she had still not said anything but felt she had to. She was trying to calm her feelings and "rehearse" how to express herself without escalating the conflict.

Table 4.3 (continued)

Subject	Conflict Description	Strategies Used by Subject
Tanya	Tanya's husband had an affair with another woman, and had moved in with this woman. Tanya was in the process of getting a divorce from him. He kept coming to Tanya's apartment and letting himself in – Tanya wanted him to stop doing this.	Tanya said that prior to the class, she would have passively accepted her husband's actions. Tanya practiced mindful breathing and said she had become more aware of her true emotions. She said mindfulness helped her express herself in a way that could be understood. She was assertive in speaking with her husband and holding him responsible for his actions.
Viola	A co-worker gave Viola a birthday card that Viola felt had racist overtones. She felt angry and hurt, as this brought up past negative experiences in which she had been discriminated against based on her race and color.	Viola avoided speaking to the co-worker for a couple months. Some friends encouraged her to talk with the co-worker about it. Viola reflected on her prior experiences with racism. She then spoke with the co-worker. She described these prior experiences and why the card had been hurtful.
Yvonne	Yvonne had a conflict with her siblings who lived in another country. When her brother-in-law died, she texted them and included an icon that she thought showed two hands praying. The siblings were offended because they thought the icon showed two hands clapping, as if Yvonne was applauding the brother-in-law's death.	In phone calls to her siblings, Yvonne tried to explain this was a mistake. Then, she stopped calling her siblings. Eventually the issue blew over.

Pre- and post-class conflicts descriptions were analyzed using the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (Kilman Diagnostics, 2019) to identify dominant conflict behaviors before and after the class. Results can be found in Appendix I.

### Finding #1

Finding #1: For this group of subjects, self-reported frequency of mindfulness practice did not appear to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions. Other quantitative descriptors of use of mindfulness, such as length of mindfulness practice as reported in weekly journals,

and the length of subjects' descriptions of their experience of mindfulness in post-class interviews, similarly did not appear to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions.

### **Frequency of Mindfulness Practice**

Frequency of mindfulness practice was assessed through analysis of the weekly journals kept by subjects throughout the class. Subjects were then clustered into a "higher" or a "lower" frequency of practice group:

- "Higher" frequency of practice was defined as 3.5 sessions or more of mindfulness practice per week, indicating that subjects practiced an average of at least every other day each week. An exception was made for Rita, whose frequency of practice averaged 3.4 times per week. She was included in the "higher" frequency of practice group, as she regularly described experiences of mindful awareness in her journal that took place outside of a dedicated practice time.
- "Lower" frequency of practice was defined as fewer than 3.5 sessions of mindfulness practice per week.

Results are summarized in Table 4.4 below, indicating that:

- Nine out of 14 subjects (64%) subjects reported a "higher" frequency of mindfulness practice.
- Five out of 14 subjects (36%) reported a "lower" frequency of mindfulness practice.

Table 4.4. Subjects' Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

Name	Frequency of mindfulness practice per week	Higher/Lower (H/L) frequency
Nina	6.6	H
Margaret	6.6	H
Jackie	6.3	H
Elizabeth	5.2	H
Yvonne	4.5	H
Sarah	4.5	H
Harriet	4.4	H
Viola	3.8	H
Rita	3.4	H
Barbara	2.8	L
Louise	2.6	L
Tanya	2	L
Lisa	1.8	L
Frances	1.2	L

### **Frequency of Mindfulness Practice and Emotional Self-management**

The influence of frequency of mindfulness practice on subjects' self-management in their post-class conflicts was assessed by analyzing the presence or absence of mention of the ability to interrupt automatic or habitual responses to conflict in relation to frequency of practice. Subjects who interrupted automaticity often described having an impulse to react to the other party, usually in either an aggressive or avoidant way, and then instead made an alternative choice to engage more constructively.

The results of this analysis can be found in Appendix O. Table 4.5 below summarizes the results in Appendix O. The percentages of subjects reporting themes related to self-management were compared. A sizable difference in the percentages between the higher and lower frequency of practice groups was interpreted as indicating that frequency of practice was likely influential. A small difference in percentages between the two frequency of practice groups was interpreted as indicating little

influence. Given the small number of subjects, all interpretations of influence are necessarily tentative. Table 4.5 shows that:

- Seven out of nine subjects (78%) in the higher frequency of practice group and four out of five subjects (80%) in the lower frequency of practice group were able to interrupt automatic responses in conflict.
- Four of nine subjects (44%) in the higher frequency of practice group, and three of five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of practice group described mindfulness as supporting their ability to interrupt automatic responses.
- Four of nine subjects (44%) in the higher frequency of practice group, and three of five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of practice group described other strategies other than mindfulness as supporting their ability to interrupt automatic responses. These included self-talk and self-reflection.
- Four of nine subjects (44%) in the higher frequency of practice group, and one of five subjects (20%) in the lower frequency of practice group reported having difficulty in interrupting automatic responses to conflict.

Table 4.5. Frequency of Mindfulness Practice and Ability to Interrupt Automatic Responses to Conflict

Frequency of mindfulness practice	Percentage of subjects reporting ability to:			Percentage reporting difficulty interrupting automaticity
	Interrupt automaticity	Interrupt automaticity using mindfulness	Interrupt automaticity using strategies other than mindfulness	
Higher	78%	44%	44%	44%
Lower	80%	60%	60%	20%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the differences between the higher and lower frequency of practice groups do not appear to be meaningful. This suggests that frequency of practice may have had little influence on the ability of this group of subjects

to interrupt automatic responses to conflict, an indicator of the capacity for self-management.

### **Frequency of Mindfulness Practice and Transfer of Learning**

The influence of frequency of mindfulness practice on subjects' transfer of learning was assessed by analyzing the presence or absence of three broad types of skills addressed in the course in the post-class conflict descriptions. Differences between higher and lower frequency of mindfulness practice was assessed for each type of skill.

Specifically, the researcher looked for evidence of:

- Analytic skills: The ability to use course skills and concepts taught in the course to analyze and better understand aspects of the conflict such as causes, underlying needs, goals, options, and specific course concepts.
- Communication skills: Expressive skills and receptive communication skills taught in the course that were actually used during the post-class conflict.
- Mindful awareness as part of the approach to conflict: The use of mindfulness at a range of points during the conflict to heighten awareness of the nature of the conflict. This includes the use of mindfulness in advance preparation for a negotiation, as well as during the conflict for the purpose of self-management, as a means of gaining insight, and as part of decision-making processes.

The results of analysis of these aspects of transfer of learning follow.

**Frequency of mindfulness practice and transfer of analytic skills.** Post-class interview transcripts were examined for evidence that subjects used analytic skills taught during the course during their post-class conflict. These analytic skills included the ability to identify causes of conflict, to identify underlying needs of the other party and oneself, to identify goals in the conflict, and to identify options that could be used to resolve the conflict. Also noted were specific mentions of course concepts that subjects



found relevant to their conflict; these included the “anger volcano” model, the fight-flight dynamic, and conflict styles.

The results of this analysis can be found in Appendix P. A summary of the analysis appears in Table 4.6 below, which shows that:

- Five out of nine subjects (56%) in the higher frequency of practice group identified causes of conflict, compared to three out of five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of practice group.
- Five out of nine subjects (56%) in the higher frequency of practice group identified the other party’s underlying needs, compared to three out of five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of practice group.
- Seven out of nine subjects (78%) in the higher frequency of practice group identified their own underlying needs, compared to four out of five subjects (80%) in the lower frequency of practice group.
- Three out of nine subjects (33%) in the higher frequency of practice group identified goals in conflict, compared to two out of five subjects (40%) in the lower frequency of practice group.
- One out of nine subjects (11%) in the higher frequency of practice group identified possible options for resolution of the conflict, compared to two out of five subjects (40%) in the lower frequency of practice group.
- Two out of nine subjects (22%) described specific course concepts as part of their post-class conflict description, compared to three out of five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of practice group.

Table 4.6. Transfer of Learning: Summary of Analytical Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

	Percentage of subjects reporting ability to:					
Frequency of mindfulness practice	Identify causes of conflict	Identify needs of other	Identify own needs	Identify goals	Identify options	Use course concepts (anger volcano, fight-flight, conflict styles)
Higher	56%	56%	78%	33%	11%	22%
Lower	60%	60%	80%	40%	40%	60%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the differences between the higher and lower frequency of practice groups in terms of analytic skills do not appear to be meaningful. There may be a tendency for the identification of options and the use of specific course concepts to be mentioned more often by the lower frequency of mindfulness practice group. This suggests a relatively minor influence of frequency of practice on these subjects’ transfer of analytic skills from the course to actual conflict situations.

**Frequency of mindfulness practice and transfer of communication skills.** Post-class interview transcripts were examined for evidence that subjects used communication skills taught during the course during their post-class conflict. These communication skills included both expressive skills, such as the use of assertive communication, and receptive skills, such as the use of active listening, asking open-ended questions, and paraphrasing.

The results of this analysis can be found in Appendix Q. A summary of the analysis appears in Table 4.7 below. Table 4.7 shows that:

- Seven of nine subjects (78%) in the higher frequency of practice group reported the use of expressive skills, primarily assertiveness, compared to four of five subjects (80%) in the lower frequency of practice group.

- Five of nine subjects (56%) in the higher frequency of practice group used receptive communication skills (attentive listening, asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing), compared to three of the five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of practice group.

Table 4.7. Transfer of Learning: Summary of Communication Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

Frequency of mindfulness practice	Percentage of subjects reporting use of expressive skills (assertiveness)	Percentage of subjects reporting use of receptive skills (attentive listening, open-ended questions, paraphrasing)
Higher	78%	56%
Lower	80%	60%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the differences between the higher and lower frequency of practice groups in terms of transfer of communication skills do not appear to be meaningful. This suggests that frequency of practice may have had little influence on these subjects’ ability to transfer communication skills taught in the course to an actual situation of conflict.

**Frequency of mindfulness practice and mindful awareness as an approach to conflict.** As a number of subjects mentioned bringing mindful awareness into their post-class conflicts, the post-class interview transcripts were examined for mention of mindfulness as a practice that was learned in the course and transferred into conflict situations. This included not only mention of mindfulness in the context of emotional self-management, as described above, but also use of mindfulness to prepare in advance of a negotiation. Subjects also referred to mindfulness as influencing their insight or understanding of what the conflict was really about, and their process of making decisions about behaviors used during the conflict.

The results of this analysis can be found in Appendix R. Table 4.8 summarizes the results of this analysis. As Table 4.8 shows:

- Five out of nine subjects (56%) in the higher frequency of mindfulness practice group reported mindful awareness in their approach to their post-class conflicts. (This includes Nina and Harriet, who both reported the use of mindfulness in one of their post-class conflicts, and not the other.)
- Three out of five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of mindfulness practice group reported mindful awareness in their approach to their post-class conflicts.

Table 4.8. Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts and Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

Frequency of mindfulness practice	Percentage of subjects describing mindful awareness in post-class conflicts
Higher	56%
Lower	60%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the differences between the higher and lower frequency of practice groups in terms of mindful awareness during the post-class conflict do not appear to be meaningful. This suggests that frequency of practice may have had little influence on the transfer of mindful awareness to an actual situation of conflict by this group of subjects.

### **Additional Quantitative Descriptors of Mindfulness Practice**

A second quantitative descriptor, the average length of each subject’s mindfulness practice, was analyzed as a possible factor influencing the presence or absence of themes pertaining to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions.

Length of mindfulness practice was calculated based on journal data, and categorized as either “higher” (nine minutes or more per session), or “lower” (six minutes

or less per session). Caution must be taken in interpreting length of mindfulness practice sessions, as not all subjects consistently reported the amount of time spent in each practice session. Results can be found in Appendix S. There appeared to be no meaningful differences between the “longer” and “shorter” length of practice groups. It appears that no conclusion can be made about any possible connection between length of mindfulness practice and the presence or absence of descriptions of self-management and transfer of learning in the post-class conflicts.

A third quantitative descriptor of mindfulness practice was the length of descriptions of subjects’ experience of mindfulness. These descriptions were obtained in response to Question 5 in the Post-class Interview Protocol, “I’d like to ask about the mindfulness practice that we used in class. What was that like for you?” (Appendix G). Follow-up probes asked subjects to describe their experience of mindfulness in terms of physical sensations, the emotional nature of the experience, and the types of thoughts that arose during the experience. Post-class interviews were analyzed to determine the percentage of the total interview word count in which subjects described their experience of mindfulness. These percentages were then analyzed in relation to the presence or absence of self-management and transfer of learning in subjects’ post class conflicts. Longer descriptions were defined as 12% or more of the total interview; shorter descriptions were defined as 10% or less of the total interview. Results can be found in Appendix T, and indicate no meaningful differences between the “longer” and “shorter” groups. This suggests that there was no meaningful relationship between the length of subjects’ self-described experience of mindfulness, and the presence or absence of reference to self-management and transfer of learning in the post-class conflict descriptions.

In summary, Finding #1 directly addresses Research Question #1, “Do adult learners’ descriptions of their emotional self-management and transfer of learning appear to be influenced by self-reported higher vs. lower frequencies of mindfulness practice

during the course?” Prior to data collection, it was anticipated that frequency of mindfulness practice, a quantitative descriptor, would influence reports of self-management and transfer of learning in subjects’ descriptions of post-class conflicts. Specifically, it was anticipated that a higher frequency of practice might be associated with more frequent mention of self-management and transfer of learning. This did not appear to be the case for this group of subjects, an unanticipated finding that suggests that the experience of mindfulness may not be meaningfully or adequately described solely by quantitative measures such as descriptive statistics, at least for this small sample. Similarly, length of mindfulness practice, and the length of subjects’ descriptions of their experience of mindfulness, appeared to have little if any influence on reports of self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions.

### **Finding #2**

Finding #2: Among this group of subjects, a qualitative descriptor, stance toward mindfulness, appeared to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions. Specifically, subjects who described mindfulness primarily in terms of relaxation or self-soothing appeared to be less likely to report self-management and transfer of learning in their post-class conflict descriptions. By contrast, subjects who described mindfulness primarily in terms of self-awareness, or as a process of relaxation leading to greater self-awareness, appeared to be more likely to report self-management and transfer of learning in their post-conflict descriptions.

Qualitative content analysis was carried out, focusing on subjects’ descriptions of their experience of mindfulness in the post-class interviews. Two distinct themes were noted, which reflected qualitatively different experiences of, and stances toward, mindfulness.

The first group, consisting of nine subjects, described mindfulness in terms of themes related to self-awareness of physical sensations, emotional experiences, and thought processes. They also linked mindfulness to a heightened sense of understanding or insight into the other party. For seven of these nine subjects, the deeper sense of calm produced by mindfulness practice was described as leading directly to these different aspects of self-awareness. Two of these nine subjects did not mention relaxation or calming at all, but rather described mindfulness entirely in terms of self-awareness and insight into the dynamics of their relationships. These two subjects reported a particularly high number of insights – about themselves, others, conflicts, and their environment.

The second group, consisting of five subjects, described mindfulness almost exclusively as a process of relaxation or self-soothing. Themes that appeared in their descriptions of mindfulness addressed the practice solely as a means to calm down, clear the mind, or to fall asleep. They did not go on to relate a sense of calm to self-awareness, or insight into the other party or the nature of the conflict.

Table 4.9 below groups the subjects according to their stance toward mindfulness. Excerpts from the post-class interviews below illustrate the different stances toward mindfulness. These are followed by an analysis of the possible influence of stance toward mindfulness on self-management and transfer of learning.

Table 4.9. Study Subjects' Stance toward Mindfulness

Name	Stance toward mindfulness	
	Group 1: Self-awareness	Group 2: Self-soothing
Barbara	x	
Elizabeth	x	
Frances	x	
Harriet	x	
Lisa	x	
Nina	x	
Margaret	x	
Rita	x	
Tanya	x	
Jackie		x
Louise		x
Sarah		x
Viola		x
Yvonne		x

### **Group 1: Mindfulness as Leading to Self-awareness/Insight**

Seven of the nine subjects in Group 1 described mindfulness as a process that initially calms and relaxes them; that sense of calm appears to then be followed spontaneously by increased self-awareness and insight. Self-awareness of physical sensations, emotions, and subjects' own thought processes were common themes among this group of subjects. Some also reported insights related to conflict, interpersonal problems and personal challenges. All but one of these seven subjects described mindfulness as being an influence in their post-class conflicts. The excerpts below are illustrative of the way mindfulness as a process leading to self-awareness is described by Group 1.

Lisa reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice during the course, and was the only subject in Group 1 who did not refer specifically to mindfulness practice in her post-class conflict description. Nonetheless, her description of mindfulness indicates that



she experienced the sense of calm engendered by the practice as resulting in a greater mental clarity, an aspect of cognitive self-awareness that allowed her to problem-solve and make decisions:

I found that keeping the [mindfulness] journal, and actually putting it into place whenever I needed it, it really did help to sort of calm me down, instead of having ideas all over the place of what I have to do next. It sort of gave me peace and clarity.... For example, I like to do them when I have to do work. Schoolwork, and it's usually later at night, after a whole day of work and everything. So I'll sit on my bed, and I remember from our classes, instead of keeping it all in your head, trying to concentrate on other things, like the breathing, and the hand up here (gestures to upper part of chest) and the other hand down on your belly, to exhale. And that really helps to just calm down. And then once I've completely sort of just relaxed, and I come back, it's clearer to me what I should do next, if that makes sense.... Because I feel like I always do have a ton of things to do, so it's always in my head ... that really has helped—like, relax, you can do this, what should come first? (Lisa)

Harriet reported a moderate frequency of mindfulness practice during the course; she also reported two post-class conflicts, one of which was influenced by mindfulness, and one which was not. For Harriet, the calming experience of mindfulness resulted in a deep physical self-awareness, a sense of the practice cleansing the body of toxins. Similarly to Lisa, Harriet too experienced a sense of mental clarity, and related this clarity to interpersonal problem-solving:

There were times I felt like I was floating. And, like I'm floating, my body would tingle, and I'll have little snippets ... of things at me ... like a snippet I got from one of them was, my daughter, she wanted me to give her an answer on a decision that she wanted to make ... and while doing that deep breathing, I was able to come up with the answer that I wanted to give her concerning that. And I felt the total relaxation of the body, total relaxation! It was a way of like, getting rid of toxin, and inhaling clean fresh air.... When you're done, you feel very rewarded. Like your body is saying, "Thank you for doing this!" The organs are saying, "Thank you for cleaning out many of the cells that have not been reached by clean, pure air." It's like it's saying, "Thank you for that. Thank you. Thank you for that." (Harriet)

Tanya reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice during the class, but a strong influence of mindfulness in her post-class conflict description. She described

herself as an unfocused and “hyperactive” person, but said that mindfulness practice helped her slow down and relax. As a result, she was more self-aware of her emotional reactions to others and able to moderate them. She was able to notice thoughts of judgment, withhold them, and inquire into the actual nature of the conflict:

I personally haven't been a very focused person, but in the course, we've been doing the deep breathing exercises, and now I can sort of like get a focus, or a point of view where I could just say, “Look at that. Breathe. Just internalize what you're feeling. And don't react so strongly to what the person is saying.” I personally haven't been really successful at deep breathing exercises because I'm very distracted, and I get distracted. But I know that if I'm saying to myself, “Take a breath,” then I'm not focused on the approach of the person that I'm in conflict with. And that in and of itself makes me react differently to ... the reaction of the person I may be interpreting as somebody who's yelling at me because they're angry at me, or yelling at me because they're judging me or whatever. And I won't be judgemental of that person, because now I'm thinking, “Calm down, relax, let's see what's going on before I blow up,” because that person is also blowing up, or seems to be blowing up.... I think that I'm just very ... hyperactive, and everything in me, my head, in my head, my body, is just moving forward at a very fast rate. And I have to stop and I have to say, “Settle down. Calm down. Relax your body. Breathe deeper. Slow down your heart rate. Slow down your pulse. Slow down your thinking. And just slow down!” And I kind of feel my body then starting to be more relaxed, and more calm. More easy. (Tanya)

These excerpts are illustrative of the seven out of nine study subjects who experienced mindfulness primarily in terms of the physical, emotional and cognitive self-awareness that arose as a result of calming themselves. Their descriptions indicated an openness to insights that emerged from mindfulness practice, rather than any expectation of a particular outcome.

**Barbara and Rita: Two distinctive examples of the self-awareness stance.** Two subjects in Group 1, Barbara and Rita, were unique in describing mindfulness not as a practice they did for a certain number of minutes per day, but as a form of awareness that was integrated into their interactions throughout the day. They described mindfulness almost exclusively in terms of physical, emotional and cognitive self-awareness, as well

as insights that arose about themselves and others. They rarely, if ever, made any reference to relaxation or release from stress. Instead, they tended to notice stress, examine its effects on themselves and others, and consider alternative ways to respond in the face of that stress. Barbara reported a “lower” frequency of mindfulness practice during the course, and Rita was at the low end of the “higher” frequency of practice group, but their descriptions of their experiences of mindfulness, including in the post-class conflicts, revealed a high degree of self-awareness and insight.

Rita described her experience of mindfulness as creating a “bubble” in which she held interactions and examined them with attention to her own experience, the experience of the other, and ways of responding effectively to the emotions present:

Because I’m taking that deep breath ... I don’t feel as tight, tense especially in the heart, in the chest area ... I feel like I have a better control. It’s not a feeling but it’s more of just an assurance that ... clarity-wise, I’m not as messy, for lack of better words.

I can go into that bubble ... calm and I think patient. I guess it could be a bubble of what I want or what I would like to feel during that time of conflict and then trying to pick up those things as the conflict is happening or during a dialogue, and whatever negative things that I’m feeling for that time, to let it go because there’s a purpose of reconciliation.

I think just the breathing, it was a gradual change in knowing who I am. That really helps me and so that breathing and space, that bubble of protection ... whatever comes in, it’s just enveloped in that bubble until I can look at it and examine whether it’s real or not. And if it’s not, it can stay in that bubble, so it doesn’t go out of the bubble. (Rita)

Rita’s description of mindfulness practice encompassed physical sensations (in her heart), emotional self-awareness (of calm, patience, not being “messy”), and cognitive self-awareness (of mental clarity, noticing the whether her perceptions are “real or not”). It enabled her to engage in conflict with a sense of purpose (reconciliation). Mindfulness was integrated into her way of interacting with others, rather than being used as a technique.

Barbara also described mindfulness in terms of physical, emotional and cognitive self-awareness. It allowed her to assess her own role in a conflict as it unfolds, and to keenly observe the reactions of others.

I get a little loud sometimes but through the mindfulness, when I sit and I start thinking about some of the issues, the conflict within my own self is being caused because of the volume that I have....When you do the deep breathing and then the heart rate slows down a little bit, you start thinking about, "Gee, maybe that was wrong or maybe I didn't have to insult someone or anything like that....You need to take a look at yourself and figure out why you are feeling the way you are feeling about yourself and about the other person or persons."

I think I started to practice mindfulness in other ways.... I started practicing, watching, listening, hearing, not talking too much. I myself was giving suggestions in class that I myself wasn't even practicing. I became more aware of the fact that I wasn't practicing what I was saying and I had to pull back and say, "Okay. Wait a minute."... I was practicing mindfulness. I really started looking at body language more, listening to phrases that contradict.... I try to do it without judging. I also began practicing mindfulness about judging, coming to conclusions about things, looking at—maybe there's another reason. (Barbara)

Barbara suggested that mindfulness helped her to assess her own actions, inquire into the reasons for them, and take responsibility. She was monitoring her own thought processes, noticing when she was making judgments, and questioning her assumptions.

In summary, the stance of Group 1 toward mindfulness was described as "self-awareness." It suggests that for subjects in this group, the experience was viewed as one that increased physical, emotional and cognitive self-awareness, along with insights into others, the conflicts that arise, and possible solutions. For the majority of subjects in the self-awareness group, the sense of calm that arose from mindfulness practice set the stage for this deeper self-awareness and insight.

## **Group 2: Mindfulness as Self-soothing**

The five subjects in Group 2 described their experience of mindfulness almost exclusively in terms of self-soothing. These five subjects did not mention any influence of mindfulness in their descriptions of how they dealt with a post-class conflict.

In descriptions of mindfulness as self-soothing, subjects frequently described an experience of feeling more relaxed, particularly physically relaxed, and calm. Their use of mindfulness seemed to focus intentionally on achieving this specific outcome, becoming more relaxed. Jackie, who reported practicing mindfulness frequently during the course, described relaxation as a desired outcome:

I used the breathing exercises to try and calm me down, and try and help me relax.... And it makes me just calm down, and then just sometimes just thinking about the breathing exercises. Even though I'm not doing it, I think about how I feel when I am doing it.... I think I just picture myself sitting still. It's just a flash of me just sitting still and trying to relax. And I just want to get there. I just want to go to that point and just sit and relax. I just want to get out of the situation that I am in at that moment. And just do it.... At home, I try and do it at night, just to see if it calms me, and there are times that I'll doze off while I'm doing it.... But ... it's tough for me to relax. But I think I was just so tired, that I'd just—closing my eyes and just trying to breathe, and then I'd nod, my head would go, and I'd be “Okay, I guess it worked today!” (Jackie)

For Jackie, mindfulness practice was used as a way to escape stress, or to replace stress with relaxation, including relaxation that led to better sleep. Her approach to mindfulness was an instrumental one—if it helped her to relax and sleep, it has “worked.”

A similarly instrumental stance toward mindfulness was described by Viola, whose frequency of practice was moderate. She was initially skeptical of the usefulness of mindfulness, only putting it into practice when the stresses of work as a classroom paraprofessional became particularly high:

In the beginning, I thought it was useless. I just kind of thought to myself, when I did mindfulness, I was just thinking of random thoughts, like “What am I going to do when I get home,” “Can't wait to get out of this class,” “Oh, this is so boring right now.” Then ... one day I had like three fights in the classroom—three fights that we had to break up in the classroom. So, on my lunch break, I think I was just like really tired. And I

said, “You know what? Let me see if this technique works.” (Laughs). I fell asleep! So the first day that I actually tried it, when I really felt that I need it, it actually worked.... And then of course, when you open your eyes, it’s like back to the same situation. However, I was well-rested. I felt like I had slept for hours. So, it worked out pretty well. (Viola)

Like Jackie, Viola valued mindfulness based on whether it “works,” meaning whether it helped her relax and recover from stress.

Some subjects who described mindfulness as self-soothing equated it with other means of discharging tension and releasing stress. Yvonne, who reported a high frequency of mindfulness practice, described mindfulness as one of several ways that she relaxed and calmed herself:

It’s very hard to think about what you cannot get through. I’m not thinking. I have to have more entertainment. Do more exercise. I feel good. I learned how to do mindfulness. I do that sometimes. I stay on the bed and do that. Do more exercise. I will walk. And also I will do the hula hoop. If I have energy, I will do the hula hoop.... But if I don’t have energy, I just sit. And mindfulness, sit, comfortable. And sometimes watching TV, that’s it. Or magazine, reading. That’s real good. (Yvonne)

Yvonne did not seem to distinguish between mindfulness and other types of physical exercise or entertainment. It appeared to be something she did purely to relax and/or distract herself from difficulties that arose in daily life.

These excerpts suggest that subjects in Group 2 approached mindfulness primarily as a process of self-soothing, and tended to practice with a specific expected outcome. They practiced to obtain relaxation, release from stress, and better sleep. Their willingness to practice mindfulness tended to be based on whether or not it “worked” to help them achieve these goals.

### **Stance toward Mindfulness and Emotional Self-management**

The influence of stance toward mindfulness on subjects’ emotional self-management in their post-class conflicts was assessed by analyzing the presence or absence of mention of the ability to interrupt automatic or habitual responses to conflict in relation to stance (self-awareness or self-soothing).

The results of this analysis can be found in Appendix U. Table 4.10 below summarizes the results in Appendix U. The percentages of subjects reporting themes related to self-management were compared. A sizable difference in the percentages between the higher and lower frequency of practice groups was interpreted as an indicator that stance toward mindfulness was influential. A small difference in percentages between the two stance groups was interpreted as an indicator of little influence. Given the small number of subjects, all interpretations of influence are necessarily tentative. Data from Table 4.5 on frequency of mindfulness practice and the ability to interrupt automatic responses to conflict are included in the first two rows of Table 4.10, to facilitate comparison of the possible influences of frequency of practice and stance. Table 4.10 shows that:

- Nine of the nine subjects (100%) who described a Group 1 stance (self-awareness) reported the ability to interrupt automatic responses to conflict, compared to two of the five subjects (40%) who describe a Group 2 stance (self-soothing).
- Seven of the nine subjects (78%) in Group 1 described using mindfulness to interrupt automaticity, compared to none of the five subjects (0%) in Group 2.
- Five of the nine subjects (56%) in Group 1 describe using a strategy other than mindfulness to interrupt automaticity, compared to two of the five subjects (40%) in Group 2. Strategies used were primarily self-talk and self-reflection. Some subjects used these in conjunction with mindfulness.
- None of the nine subjects (0%) in Group 1 reported difficulty interrupting automatic responses to conflict, compared to five of five subjects (100%) in Group 2. Some of the subjects in Group 2 were eventually able to interrupt their automatic responses, but not without difficulty.

Table 4.10. Stance toward Mindfulness, Frequency of Mindfulness Practice, and the Ability to Interrupt Automatic Responses to Conflict

Means of analysis (frequency of practice or stance):	Percentage of subjects reporting ability to:			Percentage reporting difficulty interrupting automaticity
	Interrupt automaticity	Interrupt automaticity using mindfulness	Interrupt automaticity using strategies other than mindfulness	
Frequency of practice (from Table 4.5):				
Higher	78%	44%	44%	44%
Lower	80%	60%	60%	20%
Stance toward mindfulness:				
Group 1: Self-awareness	100%	78%	56%	0%
Group 2: Self-soothing	40%	0%	40%	100%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the size of the differences between the Group 1 stance (self-awareness) and the Group 2 stance (self-soothing), suggests that for this group of subjects, stance toward mindfulness may influence their ability to interrupt automatic responses to conflict, and to do so using mindfulness. It also appears that stance may influence reports of difficulty in interrupting automaticity, with subjects in Group 2 consistently reporting difficulty.

### **Stance toward Mindfulness and Transfer of Learning**

The influence of stance toward mindfulness on subjects’ transfer of learning in their post-class conflicts was assessed by analyzing the presence or absence of mention of analytic skills, communication skills, and mindful awareness in subjects’ approach to the post-class conflict, in relation to stance (self-awareness or self-soothing).

**Stance toward mindfulness and transfer of analytic skills.** The results of the analysis of stance toward mindfulness in relation to transfer of analytic skills can be found in Appendix V. Table 4.11 below summarizes the results in Appendix V. The percentages of subjects reporting transfer of analytic skills were compared. A sizable difference in the percentages between the two stance groups was interpreted as an



indicator that stance toward mindfulness was influential. A small difference in percentages between the two stance groups was interpreted as an indicator of little influence. Given the small number of subjects, all interpretations of influence are necessarily tentative. Data from Table 4.6 on frequency of mindfulness practice and the ability to interrupt automatic responses to conflict are included in the first two rows of Table 4.11, to facilitate comparison of the possible influences of frequency of practice and stance. Table 4.11 shows that:

- Seven out of nine subjects (78%) in Group 1 (self-awareness) were able to identify causes of conflict, compared to one out of five subjects (20%) in Group 2 (self-soothing).
- Seven out of nine subjects (78%) in Group 1 were able to identify the other party's needs in conflict, compared to one out of five subjects (20%) in Group 2.
- Seven out of nine subjects (78%) in Group 1 were able to identify their own needs in conflict, compared to four out of five subjects (80%) in Group 2.
- Three out of nine subjects (33%) in Group 1 were able to identify goals in the conflict, compared to two out of five subjects (40%) in Group 2.
- Two out of nine subjects (22%) in Group 1 were able to identify options in the conflict, compared to one out of five subjects (20%) in Group 2.
- Three out of nine subjects (33%) in Group 1 used specific concepts from the course to analyze the conflict, compared to two out of five subjects (40%) in Group 2.

Table 4.11. Transfer of Learning: Summary of Analytical Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness

Means of analysis (frequency of practice or stance):	Percentage of subjects reporting ability to:					
	Identify causes of conflict	Identify needs of other	Identify own needs	Identify goals	Identify options	Use course concepts (anger volcano, fight- flight, conflict styles)
Frequency of practice (from Table 4.6):						
Higher	56%	56%	78%	33%	11%	22%
Lower	60%	60%	80%	40%	40%	60%
Stance:						
Group 1: Self-awareness	78%	78%	78%	33%	22%	33%
Group 2: Self-soothing	20%	20%	80%	40%	20%	40%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the size of the differences between the Group 1 stance (self-awareness) and the Group 2 stance (self-soothing), suggests that for this group of subjects, stance toward mindfulness may influence their ability to identify cause of conflict, and the other party’s needs in conflict. There does not appear to be an influence of stance toward mindfulness in terms of other analytic skills.

**Stance toward mindfulness and transfer of communication skills.** The results of the analysis of stance toward mindfulness in relation to communication skills can be found in Appendix W. Table 4.12 below summarizes the results in Appendix W. The percentages of subjects reporting transfer of communication skills were compared. A sizable difference in the percentages between the two stance groups was interpreted as an indicator that stance toward mindfulness was influential. A small difference in percentages between the two stance groups was interpreted as an indicator of little influence. Given the small number of subjects, all interpretations of influence are necessarily tentative. Data from Table 4.7 on frequency of mindfulness practice and the

ability to interrupt automatic responses to conflict are included in the first two rows of Table 4.12, to facilitate comparison of the possible influences of frequency of practice and stance. Table 4.12 shows that:

- Seven out of nine subjects (78%) in Group 1 (self-awareness) reported the use of expressive communication skills (specifically assertiveness) in their post-class conflicts, compared to four out of five subjects (80%) in Group 2 (self-soothing).
- Eight out of nine subjects (89%) in Group 1 reported the use of receptive communication skills (specifically attentive listening, asking open-ended questions and paraphrasing) in their post-class conflicts, compared to none of the five subjects (0%) in Group 2.

Table 4.12. Transfer of Learning: Summary of Communication Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts, in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness

Means of analysis (frequency of practice or stance):	Percentage of subjects reporting use of expressive skills (assertiveness)	Percentage of subjects reporting use of receptive skills (attentive listening, open-ended questions, paraphrasing)
Frequency of practice (from Table 4.7):		
Higher	78%	44%
Lower	80%	60%
Stance:		
Group 1: Self-awareness	78%	89%
Group 2: Self-soothing	80%	0%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the size of the differences between the Group 1 stance (self-awareness) and the Group 2 stance (self-soothing), suggests that for this group of subjects, stance toward mindfulness may influence their ability to use

receptive communication skills in conflict. There does not appear to be an influence of stance toward mindfulness on the use of expressive communication skills.

**Stance toward mindfulness and mindful awareness in approach to conflict.**

The results of the analysis of stance toward mindfulness in relation to the use of mindful awareness as an approach at multiple points in a conflict can be found in Appendix X. Table 4.13 below summarizes the results in Appendix X. The percentages of subjects reporting mindful awareness as an approach to conflict were compared. A sizable difference in the percentages between the two stance groups was interpreted as an indicator that stance toward mindfulness was influential. A small difference in percentages between the two stance groups was interpreted as an indicator of little influence. Given the small number of subjects, all interpretations of influence are necessarily tentative. Data from Table 4.8 on frequency of mindfulness practice and the use of mindful awareness as an approach to conflict are included in the first two rows of Table 4.13, to facilitate comparison of the possible influences of frequency of practice and stance. Table 4.13 shows that:

- Eight out of nine subjects (89%) in Group 1 reported the use of mindful awareness as an approach to their post-class conflict, compared to none of the five subjects (0%) in Group 2.

Table 4.13. Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts and Stance toward Mindfulness

Means of analysis (frequency of practice or stance):	Percentage of subjects describing mindful awareness in post-class conflicts
Frequency of practice (from Table 4.8):	
Higher	56%
Lower	60%
Stance:	
Group 1: Self-awareness	89%
Group 2: Self-soothing	0%

Bearing in mind the small total number of subjects, and the unequal “higher” and “lower” frequency of practice group sizes, the size of the difference between the Group 1 stance (self-awareness) and the Group 2 stance (self-soothing), suggests that for this group of subjects, stance toward mindfulness may influence their use of an approach to conflict characterized by mindful awareness.

To summarize Finding #2, qualitative analysis of the experience of mindfulness reported by this group of subjects yielded two distinct orientations toward the practice. Subjects in Group 1 noted the calming effect of mindfulness, but went on to describe self-awareness and insight as arising from those effects. Two subjects in Group 1 described mindfulness almost exclusively as an experience of self-awareness and insight. By contrast, subjects in Group 2 approached mindfulness primarily in terms of relaxation and self-soothing; they had an instrumental approach to mindfulness, considering it to have “worked” if it relieved their stress or helps them sleep. Finding #2 suggests that for this group of subjects, stance toward mindfulness may have a greater influence on emotional self-management than does frequency of mindfulness practice. Finding #2 also suggests that subjects’ stance toward mindfulness may have had a greater influence on certain aspects of transfer of learning than frequency of mindfulness practice. These aspects included two analytic skills, the ability to identify causes of conflict and the ability to identify the other party’s needs in conflict. The use of receptive communication skills also appeared to be influenced more by stance toward mindfulness than by frequency of practice. Finally, the transfer of mindful awareness into subjects’ approach to their post-class conflicts appeared to be influenced more by stance than by frequency of practice. Subjects reporting a self-awareness stance were more likely to report emotional self-management and transfer of learning than those reporting a self-soothing stance. The finding on the influence of stance toward mindfulness on emotional self-management and transfer of learning was unanticipated, and adds an additional perspective on Research Question #1, “Do adult learners’ descriptions of their emotional self-management and

transfer of learning appear to be influenced by self-reported higher vs. lower frequencies of mindfulness practice during the course?”

### **Finding #3**

Finding #3: In describing the influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management, some subjects in this study described anger as the primary emotion they had to manage, while others described fear as the primary emotion. Different emotional self-management strategies were used, depending on whether anger or fear was the primary emotion, but the influence of mindfulness was reported by both groups. Subjects in this study who reported difficulty in managing emotions in conflict tended to avoid, give up, or delay engaging in the conflict; this group of subjects reported no influence of mindfulness during their post-class conflict.

This finding addresses Research Question 2, “How do adult learners in an undergraduate conflict resolution course describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) on emotional self-management during situations of interpersonal conflict?” For each of the two “stance” groups described in Finding #3, the excerpts that follow will illustrate their experience of mindfulness and emotional self-management, and the types of strategies they used.

#### **Managing Anger**

Subjects who identified anger as the primary emotion they tried to manage tended to report that prior to the class, they typically used aggressive or competing approaches to conflict. They described mindfulness as playing a role in enabling them to interrupt their automatic or habitual responses during the conflict, usually soon after the onset of the conflict. They reported using mindful breathing to pause their initial impulse to respond with anger. They sometimes reported simultaneously noticing physical changes that

enabled them to realize that their anger was escalating. They often reported using self-talk in combination with mindfulness to calm down and chose a different approach than the one they would have chosen had they allowed their anger to take over.

Margaret reported both a high frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She also reported an angry and aggressive style of conflict prior to the class, even saying, “If I can’t talk and my words don’t come out, I’m ready to hit.” While living with her sister, Margaret had a confrontation with her sister’s son in which he became physically violent. Margaret was able to notice the physical signs that her anger was escalating. She used mindfulness and self-talk to calm herself, and used listening skills from the class to help defuse the situation:

My sister’s son and me and my daughter, we got into a big blow-up.... It feels like to me like a hot flash is about to come over me.... And I say, “Okay, I’m getting worked up. So this time be quiet.”... And I just kept breathing.... It calms me down because otherwise I would go back and forth ... I would argue with you.... Other things we learned, I can’t pinpoint how I would use them. But most of all it’s my breathing because I will breathe and it will shut me up. And I have time to think about what I want to say instead of saying hurtful things. I realized it helped me because he has said some awful things to me and my daughter.... And that class with the breathing exercise and learning how to talk without being aroused.... I would have went back and forth already. I didn’t go back and forth with him. (Margaret)

Barbara described her stance toward mindfulness entirely in terms of self-awareness, with no reference to self-soothing or relaxation. She described mindfulness as a form of awareness that she brought to daily experiences. She also reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice. She described mindfulness as influencing her to take a less angry and confrontational approach her post-class conflict with a friend. She also incorporated self-talk as another strategy for interrupting her habitual way of responding to conflict.

There was one particular time I think he was ranting about something.... And I also noticed that—I said, “You know what, I need to just shut it down.” Don’t defend myself. Just sit and listen, not do so much talking. Not be so quick to react or response. Just to sit and listen. Be mindful of how

he's feeling. Be mindful of myself of what I did to make him feel that way.... I'm talking about generally being concerned about the way my behavior has affected someone else.... And that was one of the strategies of conflict that I used ... staying in that moment, being respectful, but listening and hearing. (Barbara)

Elizabeth reported a high frequency of mindfulness practice, and described her stance toward mindfulness as one of self-awareness. She also described her typical approach to conflict prior to the class as a confrontational one. In a conflict with her daughter over getting an appropriate placement for Elizabeth's grandson, who has special emotional needs, Elizabeth wrestled with anger and impatience. She used mindfulness to stay calm, not act "irrationally," and determine how best to communicate with her daughter, who is resistant to Elizabeth's attempts to help:

I asked you to put occupational therapy on his IEP, did you do it? No. Now, I need to breathe. So then I'm breathing.... It calms me down. It keeps me from doing, like if I was irrational, I would be down at the courts taking custody of my grandson because I'm irrational.... (Elizabeth)

These three subjects each experienced mindfulness as playing an important role in helping them manage their anger in conflict.

### **Managing Fear**

For some subjects, managing fear of engaging in conflict was more salient in their post-class conflict descriptions than managing anger. Those who described fear as a primary emotion were also more likely to describe an avoidant approach to conflict prior to the class. They tended to describe taking time away from potentially conflictual situations, using that time to prepare to address the other party. The use of mindfulness during that preparation time was frequently mentioned. After calming themselves and preparing, they engaged with the other party in an assertive way, both expressing their needs and feelings, and listening to the other.

Nina described her stance toward mindfulness as one of self-awareness, and reported a high frequency of mindfulness practice. As someone who tended to avoid



conflict and not express her feelings prior to the class, she described mindfulness as influencing her ability to break out of that habitual way of responding and express herself assertively in a conflict with the teacher she works with:

I didn't want to go to that school and deal with that teacher.... I take a deep breath, and then I stop, and then I go inside the office.... I walk away, think about it, then talk to her.... I spoke to her and everything went okay after that.... Before, I used to let the stress get on me ... and then I didn't do anything, I'd like back down. (Nina)

Rita reported a self-awareness stance and a higher frequency of practice. She described her conflict with a friend, and how fear of the friend's reactions could immobilize her. She credited mindfulness practice with helping her accept that her friend's reactions were not under her control, and that she could handle possible anger directed at her:

I think before with her ... even though we were good friends, I didn't want to—I felt like if I were to ask, I would step on egg shells. That's why I was very anxious as well. I was a very fearful person. I think I'm always afraid of what could happen in terms of either lashing or just like—it may not directly be towards me but I wouldn't know what to do with it.... I think when I'm anxious I can't see or do anything else but be anxious and just afraid of what could possibly happen that's negative. In practicing mindfulness and being able to ask those questions that, like I guess even just being brave enough to ask a question and know that even if there is going to be an emotional outpour afterwards on her end, it's still okay. (Rita)

Prior to the class, Tanya described her approach to conflict as a mix of competing, avoiding and accommodating to the wishes of others. She reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness, and a low frequency of practice. For Tanya, mindfulness supported her engagement with her husband over their pending divorce. She used mindfulness in conjunction with self-talk to effectively apply assertiveness skills and advocate for herself:

So the conflict is that I'm not just quietly letting it happening. I'm actually saying what I'm thinking. And it's because I've been able to take in some of the information from the materials that we have in our class. And also from the mindful exercise, because I'm allowing myself to address my

emotions in this whole situation.... I've been able to talk about it! Because [before] I would not, I was just like "Oh. Okay." But I'm able to really just say, "No, that's not okay, you don't have to be upbeat about this! You can speak as you have to." (Tanya)

These three subjects each make it clear that mindfulness plays a role in helping them manage their fear of engaging directly and assertively in a conflict.

### **Difficulty Interrupting Habitual Responses to Conflict**

The subjects who described difficulty managing their emotions in conflict, and interrupting habitual or automatic responses, varied in their frequency of mindfulness practice. But all shared a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness, and did not report the use of mindfulness in addressing their post-class conflicts. They usually identified their emotional response to conflict as one of anger, and either fell into habitual confrontational patterns, used indirect methods of dealing with the conflict, or avoided it altogether.

Jackie reported a high frequency of mindfulness practice, and described her stance on mindfulness as entirely one of self-soothing. In her post-class conflict with her husband over his drinking, she reported repeating the same patterns of becoming angry and arguing with him that have previously failed to resolve the problem. Nonetheless, she continued these habitual responses, despite a sense of resignation about their effectiveness:

But I can't do anything else about it. I can let myself get angry every time I see him have a beer. And that's what happens.... "I know, I'm going to stop" (he says). I tell him, I say, "X, you really need to not do this. You're not supposed to be drinking." To him, "Oh, it's only one." I said, "No, it's not only one." "Oh, I had a bad day," or "I worked" ... he'll say, "It was a rough day." He'll use any excuse, he'll say anything he can think of just to justify him having it. (Jackie)

Louise reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice, and described a stance toward mindfulness that focused strongly on self-soothing. She described a conflict with friends who called and interrupted the peace of her Sundays. She had in the past

habitually handled the conflict indirectly, hinting at her feelings but not expressing them directly. After the course, she changed to another indirect way to deal with the issue—she kept her phone turned off. While this removed the source of her anger, it did not directly address the source of the conflict, her feelings, or her needs:

Sundays, to me, it's like the Sabbath day. I don't want to do anything. But I found that Sundays were being cluttered with calls from my friends, wanting to talk. And some don't know how to get off the phone! I'm hinting! And they won't get off the phone.... And I found sometimes like friends of mine would say, "Oh, what's wrong? You don't sound like yourself." And I would say, "Oh, I'm alright, just going through stuff."... I said, "You know what, Louise," I said to myself, "You've got to stop this." Like, I'll say ... I may turn off my phone ... to shut people out.... (Louise)

Yvonne described a high frequency of mindfulness practice, and a stance toward mindfulness focused on self-soothing. She engaged in a conflict with her siblings over a communication that took place via a messaging app. The siblings were offended by an icon Yvonne attached to a message, one which they felt was disrespectful to a deceased family member. Yvonne initially tried explaining the misunderstanding, but ultimately resorted to a habitual way of dealing with these siblings—avoiding contact without actually resolving the conflict:

And from that time, I'm not calling anybody. Okay, you don't call me, I don't call you. And now I'm quiet for a little bit. They're always doing that, and fighting.... I know all my sisters, if you explain to them, they don't listen. I'm telling you, they don't listen. They need to win! Win, win something! If they didn't win, they lose! Never, never, that's why I will keep quiet for a little while. (Yvonne)

These three excerpts illustrate the types of difficulties with emotional self-management that were experienced by some of the study subjects, specifically those reporting a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness.

To summarize Finding #3, this group of subjects clearly described mindfulness as influencing emotional self-management in conflict. This was true both for those whose primary reaction to conflict was anger, and for those whose primary reaction was fear.

For those who tended to respond to conflict with anger and confrontation, mindfulness was often used “in the moment.” The use of mindfulness supported them in “cooling down,” moderating impulsive tendencies, and using active listening and assertive communication. For those who tended to respond to conflict with fear and avoidance, mindfulness was often used after temporarily stepping away from the conflict. It enabled subjects to prepare to engage in negotiation, and to express their feelings and need assertively. Those who experienced difficulty with emotional self-management all described a self-soothing, rather than self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. They persisted in habitual patterns of response, responded indirectly to reduce the incidence of confrontation (without actually expressing their needs and feelings), or avoided conflict altogether.

#### **Finding #4**

Finding #4: Within this group of subjects, those who were able to manage their emotions successfully in post-class conflicts also reported transfer of learning more frequently. Stance toward mindfulness and capacity for emotional self-management appeared to influence transfer of learning of analytic skills (the ability to identify causes of conflict and the ability to identify the needs of the other party), receptive communication skills, and the integration of mindfulness into one’s approach to conflict. Frequency of mindfulness practice may have a modest influence on reports of specific concepts from the class being used to help analyze the conflict.

Analysis of the interviews suggested a possible link between the capacity for emotional self-management and transfer of learning, which is discussed below. This is followed by excerpts that illustrate various aspects of transfer of learning, with a focus on those that seemed to be influenced either by frequency of mindfulness practice or stance toward mindfulness, based on the comparisons presented in Finding #2.

### **Emotional Self-management, Transfer of Learning, and Stance toward Mindfulness**

As discussed in Finding #2, all of the subjects who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness also reported the ability to successfully manage their emotions in their post-class conflicts. (Sarah and Viola, who reported a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness, reported difficulty in interrupting automatic responses to conflict, but were ultimately able to do so. Sarah managed her anger by not engaging with the other party in the conflict; Viola managed her fear of engaging with the other party only after encouragement from friends.) Those who were able to manage their emotions in conflict also more frequently reported transfer of learning, including analytic skills, receptive communication skills, and the integration of mindful awareness at various points in the process of engaging in conflict.

The group of subjects who described their stance toward mindfulness as self-soothing all reported difficulty interrupting automatic responses to conflict, as shown in Table 4.10 (Finding #2). They were also far less likely to report the transfer of analytic skills in their post-class conflict descriptions. And they reported no transfer of receptive communication skills or the integration of mindful awareness during their post-class conflict.

These results are presented in Table 4.14, which examines possible links between emotional self-management, the specific skills that appeared to be transferred into the post-class conflicts, and the influence of stance toward mindfulness.

It appeared that a possible link may exist between stance on mindfulness, emotional self-management, and transfer of learning in conflict. The next sections will examine this link with a focus on the course skills that transferred into the post-class conflicts, particularly those that appear to be influenced either by stance toward mindfulness or frequency of mindfulness.

Table 4.14. Possible Links between Emotional Self-Management, Transfer of Learning, and Stance toward Mindfulness

	Emotional Self-management	Transfer of analytic skills		Transfer of communication skills	Mindful awareness in conflict
Name	Ability to interrupt automatic responses	Identify causes of conflict	Identify needs of other	Receptive skills	Integrated throughout conflict
<b>Group 1: Self-awareness</b>					
Barbara	x	x		x	X
Elizabeth	x	x	x	x	X
Frances	x	x	x	x	X
Harriet	x		x	x	X
Lisa	x	x		x	
Nina	x	x	x	x	X
Margaret	x	x	x	x	X
Rita	x	x	x	x	X
Tanya	x		x		X
Totals: Group 1	9	7	7	8	8
<b>Group 2: Self-soothing</b>					
Jackie					
Louise			x		
Sarah	x				
Viola	x	x			
Yvonne					
Totals: Group 2	2	1	1	0	0

### Transfer of Analytic Skills

Two types of analytic skills appeared to be influenced by stance on mindfulness, as well as being linked to the capacity for emotional self-management. These were the ability to identify causes of conflict, and the ability to identify the needs of the other in conflict. In the next two sections, excerpts from post-class interviews are used to illustrate these two types of analytic skills.

**Identifying causes of conflict.** The course specifically addressed analysis of the causes of conflict. Subjects who were able to identify causes of conflict were found primarily in the group that described a self-awareness stance toward conflict, and also reported the ability to manage their own emotions in conflict. For example, in Rita’s conflict with a co-worker over a phone call that she could not make in a timely fashion, Rita described using mindfulness in response to the emotions triggered by the co-worker. Her ability to manage those emotions seems to support her in identifying both the factors affecting her inability to make the call, and the reasons for the co-worker’s feelings:

The teacher had come to me and asked if I could go to her classroom to get down the number and to make a phone call. However, this was during a time of just a very busy transition. I think I was still working on my last final at the other class. So I needed to run back here. So I didn’t make it the next day. I heard in passing a woman, I recognized her voice saying, “Oh, you can never get her to do anything you want, she thinks....” It was very discouraging to hear but I knew the root of her anger. I knew where it was coming [from] ... I breathed! (laughs) I breathed heavily! (Rita)

Like Rita, Nina described a conflict with a teacher she worked with. She used mindfulness to manage her strong emotions. She was subsequently able to identify the causes of the conflict as being a combination of both her own discomfort in new school, and the suspicions of the teacher:

That was the first time I was transferred to that school, and I was so mad. I was doing that breathing like three times a day (laughter)... Yeah, because it was giving me a hard time. It was a new school, new personnel after four years in one school. And I feel like I wasn’t welcome to that school. And the teacher also, she thought I was spying [on] her. It was tough! (Nina)

For both Rita and Nina, being able to practice mindfulness at these times of stress enabled them to both manage their own emotions, and to see the sources of the conflict more clearly, in themselves and in the other party.

**Identifying the other’s needs.** The ability to identify the other party’s needs in conflict was another analytical skill that was a major focus of the course. Subjects who

were able to identify the other party's needs were found primarily in the group that described a self-awareness stance toward conflict, and also tended to report the ability to manage their own emotions in conflict.

In describing her conflict with a co-worker who abruptly announced that she would be leaving the company, Frances used mindfulness to manage her own emotions of fear and worry. This gave her space to more fully understand the needs of the co-worker:

Probably what I would have done [in the past] is to be like, "Oh my god, no you're not!" And then I would be like, maybe just worrying, "Oh my god, what am I going to do next?" But I guess maybe just learning how to control [my emotions], understanding the other person's needs.... Because even though I know it's a blow to the unit, I thought about, "This is what she wants, this is her needs, this is what she has to do."... My first reaction probably last year would have been ... worrying about this is going to be a blow.... But instead, I didn't. I thought about I guess maybe her needs, and this is something she wants to do. Versus how I feel about her leaving.  
(Frances)

Harriet reported frustration and anger in conversations with her husband, but she was able to use self-talk to manage those emotions. As was the case with Frances, when Harriet was able to keep her emotions under control, she was better able to focus on the other party and understand what the needs driving his behavior might have been:

I'll be telling my husband something, and I don't know if it is for his purpose that he would keep repeating the same thing that I've just said. He would ask me that question over and over! And I will get to the point where I want to snap! But then I say, "Okay, Harriet, calm yourself down. Maybe he wants to make sure that he's understanding me, or he wants to make sure that he is getting the question that I'm asking, make sure that he gets it right before he gives the answer." So just sometimes it comes to a boiling point, but I know how to handle it so that I scale back, and deal with it now in a calmer way.... (Harriet)

Both Harriet and Frances reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness, and the ability to interrupt habitual or automatic responses to conflict. For both, the capacity for emotional self-management appears to create an opening to identify the needs of the other party.



**Use of specific course concepts to analyze conflict.** One aspect of analytic skills that appeared to transfer into the post-class conflict descriptions seemed to be influenced to at least a modest extent by frequency of mindfulness practice, but not stance toward mindfulness. This was the ability to recall and use specific course concepts to analyze and better understand the conflict. The three course concepts most frequently mentioned were the fight-flight response, the anger volcano model, and the presence of different styles in conflict.

As mentioned in Finding #2, there was no meaningful difference between the self-awareness and self-soothing stance groups in terms of mention of specific course concepts. However, the lower frequency of mindfulness practice group tended to mention specific course concepts somewhat more frequently than the higher frequency of practice, an unexpected finding. These specific concepts were mentioned by three of five subjects (60%) in the lower frequency of practice group, and two of nine subjects (22%) in the higher frequency of practice group (see Finding #2, Table 4.11).

Louise reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness. In describing her conflict with her boyfriend over the future direction of their relationship, she refers to the fight-flight response: “All I can do is be patient. But if things don’t go in a time that I want, I have to do something about it. Either fight, or take flight. Not with this though! I won’t fight! I’ll take flight” (Louise).

Louise also refers to the anger volcano model, though her interpretation of the model seems to be limited to describing anger as an eruption, rather than delving more deeply into the model’s linkage between anger, primary emotions and unmet needs:

Because a lot of women, in relationships, they want to know something, they’ll turn into the volcano! And I’m just not going to do that. Because I don’t want to turn something I want to know into ... get off the subject of that, and be blamed for something, and never get an answer. (Louise)

Barbara reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. In describing a conflict with a male friend, she shows

awareness that there are different styles of dealing with conflict, and that gender may have a role in determining those styles:

He solves conflict very differently than I do and I'm just wondering if it were a "she" instead of a "he." Would there have been the same response? Because you know how women are. They're very different than men. We're so busy analyzing one another and we don't stop. But they [men] kind of calm down a little bit and—I don't know. I'm just wondering if it could have been different and if it would have been different if he was a she. (Barbara)

These excerpts reflect the use of specific course concepts by subjects attempting to better understand their post-class conflicts. The tendency of the lower frequency of practice group to mention these concepts more frequently than the higher frequency of practice group is noted, though given the small number of study subjects, it is unclear whether this difference is meaningful.

### **Transfer of Communication Skills**

Interview transcripts were analyzed for evidence of both expressive communication skills (primarily assertive communication) and receptive communication skills (attentive listening, asking open-ended questions, and paraphrasing).

**Expressive communication skills: Assertiveness.** Of the fourteen subjects who reported a post-class conflict, eleven of them (79%) reported using assertive communication in their post-class conflicts. There were no meaningful differences between the higher and lower frequency of mindfulness practice groups, or between the self-awareness and self-soothing stance toward mindfulness groups, in terms of the use of assertive communication. However, it was an approach to communication used by subjects who described themselves as typically avoiding conflict prior to the class, as well as by subjects who described themselves as typically taking a competing approach to conflict prior to the class. Therefore, examples of their use of assertiveness merit some discussion.

*Use of assertiveness and the avoiding approach to conflict.* For subjects who described their pre-class approach to conflict as primarily one of avoiding, using assertiveness skills enabled them to engage directly with conflict. They described a sense of satisfaction with being able to make their needs and feelings known.

Lisa reported a lower frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. Her tendency to avoid conflict, which she attributed to having to avoid the anger of an alcoholic parent as a child, left her “stuck” and unable to express herself when her relationship with her boyfriend unexpectedly became more serious. She said:

And then I was stuck there, and I didn't know how to say it. He also had concerns. And it got to a point where, I was so angry at him for no reason. And then I remembered stuff from class, and I was like, “I should probably just talk about it.” So we set up a date ... and I wrote stuff down (laughs), so that I wouldn't forget ... and I said how I felt. And another thing that I took from the class too was that, just expressing your feelings about it. “This is how I feel” or “how it makes me feel.” “This is what I'm scared of.” Being just, opening up. And it turned out to be a great conversation! It was good!  
(Lisa)

Viola reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness. Her habitual pattern of avoiding conflict left her struggling with deeply hurt feelings when a co-worker gave her a birthday card that she perceived as having racist overtones. With the encouragement of classmates, she was able to express her emotions after several weeks of withholding them:

It was a card with a monkey.... And I was very shocked that she bought the card, only because I had shared with her ... that growing up in New York, not even in the South, that I had a complex as far as I was teased about my complexion.... I just didn't talk to her for a while.... And I was just trying to avoid her. Until one day ... I had probably spoken to some of the students in the class, and they were like, “You know, you've got to tell her, because if she's a friend, she needs to know that she hurt you.” So, I told her how I felt about the card, and just going back, I told her that when I was younger, I had this issue that I was being called names, and one of the things that I remember was someone saying ... “monkey,” and that really bothered me. (Viola)

Tanya reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-awareness stance toward conflict. In the face of her husband's infidelity, she described a nuanced understanding of assertiveness, one that frees her from habitually avoiding conflict or accommodating to the needs of others:

I'm being assertive, but being assertive is not necessarily—my interpretation, because you can be assertive and not be a b----, you can be assertive and not be bossy. You can just be assertive and have your own interests ... just have some self-awareness of what's going on, and be able to say, "No, you can't do that. It's wrong. I'm not going to allow it." (Tanya)

For Lisa, Viola and Tanya, assertive communication was a powerful skill that transferred from the class into their post-class conflicts, one that allowed them to fundamentally change their approach to conflict.

*Use of assertiveness and the competing approach to conflict.* The use of assertive communication allowed subjects with typically competing approaches to conflict to shift away from confrontation and express their feelings and needs in a way that did not escalate the conflict.

Elizabeth reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She found assertive communication to be a way to engage more productively with her daughter in the conflict over the best special needs placement for Elizabeth's grandson. She drew heavily on mindfulness practice to help her stay calm and assertive, rather than using her more typical competing approach to conflict:

I spoke to her about it the day before yesterday and I told her, and I had to breathe when I said it. "These people, there's a social worker there, there's a psychiatrist there, there's a second psychiatrist there, there's a teacher there with Special Education and there's a para [paraprofessional] with him. Where he is right now, you have a teacher and a para, he's still throwing chairs in the classroom." The breathing calms me down and I try to come up with another strategy. "Again, he needs help... Give him the help that you need. You say you love him, then give him the help." That was a time I'm breathing when I speak to her about that. (Elizabeth)

Harriet reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She was involved in a conflict with co-worker who reported Harriet as having left the school where they both worked, when in fact Harriet had told the co-worker that she had been asked to leave to pick up some supplies. Harriet managed to control her anger, and modified her typically competing approach to conflict, instead clearly stating her needs and the facts of the issue:

I went to her, I said, “Listen, I was just called into the assistant principal’s office! When I was leaving the room, I told you where I was going.” She wants to put it off, “I didn’t hear what you said.” Things like that. So ... I said, “I’m a person who does my work. If I need to go out of this building, somebody knows, I do not pick up [and leave] like that.” I ... let her know that I’m very displeased about what has been done. (Harriet)

For Elizabeth and Harriet, assertive communication required them to manage their anger, and it allowed them to express their views without the kind of escalation that might have followed a more competing or aggressive approach to the conflicts.

Thus, assertive communication appeared to be a significant part of subjects’ learning in the course, enabling them choose more effective alternatives in conflict, regardless of the approaches used prior to the class. They allowed subjects to communicate their needs and feelings, while maintaining openness and engagement with the other party.

**Receptive communication skills.** The use of receptive communication skills appeared to be influenced by stance toward mindfulness; they were described only by subjects who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. The receptive communication skills included attentive listening, asking open-ended questions, and paraphrasing. Each was used to more fully understand the other party’s needs, feelings and perspectives; receptive communication skills appeared in some cases to be useful in de-escalating conflict.

**Attentive listening.** Attentive listening appeared to involve withholding the impulse to argue, advise, or counter-attack. Subjects who used attentive listening were able to

give full attention to the other party in conflict, gaining a better understanding of their needs and feelings.

For Nina, attentive listening enabled her to improve a frequently contentious relationship with her daughter, a 20-year-old college student, and to better understand her perspectives:

Sometime she want to, “Oh, I want to transfer to this school.” I don’t tell her “no” right straight there.... Because before I sound demanding, I tell her “No, no.” But now, I let her explain herself.... And I have better relationship with her now.... That’s what I say, getting on the other person’s shoes. And let the other person express their feelings too. It’s not me, “I said, I said, I said,” and that’s it, and when it’s your turn, you don’t let the other person speak. (Nina)

For Harriet, the ability to check her own impulse to respond in anger to her husband’s repetitive questions allowed her to remain patient and to take his needs and feelings into account:

I just keep reminding myself inside, “Okay, Harriet, you’ve got to handle this nicely. You’ve got to calm yourself down, go with the flow, and let him know that you’re with him, you’re understanding him, you’re getting there.” (Harriet)

***Asking open-ended questions.*** Subjects who reported a “self-awareness” stance toward mindfulness used a variety of open-ended questions in their post-class conflicts. They used mindfulness to manage their emotions, and then employed open-ended questions to gain insight, before moving to alternatives for addressing the conflict.

Elizabeth used an open-ended question strategically when her daughter failed to take her son to an appointment Elizabeth arranged at a special needs school. Instead of lashing out in anger and frustration, she asked, “Why didn’t you keep that appointment?” This helped to elicit the daughter’s concerns about the distance her son would have to travel, and whether the school could provide the services he needs.

Rita, in describing a conflict with her friend, said, “With her, I feel like I have the permission to just ask, ‘What’s wrong?’ Not even beat around the bush.” Frances

described dealing with an emotional co-worker by asking, “What happened?” as part of her attempt to calm her down. Frances also reported using mindfulness to calm herself after the interaction with the co-worker who was quitting; she then discussed the situation with her boss, using open-ended questions:

It’s like you see something’s going to happen, and then it happens, it’s like okay. I told my boss. So instead of me having to tell him, “I told you so”, I come back to my desk, relax.... So when I approach him, I told him, “Well, this is what happened.... What [do] we need to do to follow up? Meaning, what are our plans?” Instead of blaming, like, “I told you.” And I think that went well. (Frances)

For Elizabeth, Rita and Frances, the ability to ask open-ended questions helped them to gain greater insight into the nature of the conflict, and the needs and feelings of the other party. In Frances’s case, the use of open-ended questions also gave her the opportunity to move from a sense of workplace “crisis” to a focus on problem-solving.

***Paraphrasing.*** Paraphrasing was a receptive communication skill mentioned by two of the nine subjects who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. Paraphrasing involved reflecting back the essence of the other party’s needs and feelings as the conflict unfolded. It required subjects’ ability to manage their own emotions, so that they could give focused attention to the speaker.

Margaret was able to use paraphrasing to help defuse a conflict that turned violent, when her nephew became angry at her. The use of mindful breathing was essential in enabling her to manage this interaction without injury to herself or other family members:

He picked up the computer to try to throw it. When he went to do that, that’s when the m----- f----- came out and everything else. But during the whole time I was actually listening and I was coming back with, “Just let me hear what you were saying, that we take advantage of your mother?” I learned how to paraphrase real fast during that.... And during that time I just was listening to him, repeating what he was telling me so that I was hearing it, and then I was breathing to relax myself. (Margaret)

Frances used paraphrasing during her conflict with the employee who suddenly announced she was leaving the firm. She was able to focus on the employee's needs and reflect them back, rather than being overwhelmed by her own emotions:

And she told me this, she told me she felt like this is not something she wanted to do long term.... I told her, "I understand ... you've got to set goals, the career path that you want to be in." ... And she was, she looked at me kind of like.... Because I think maybe her initial reaction was for me to be upset. And she was like, "Thank you" ... I think it turned out well because of the mindful breathing. (Frances)

For Margaret and Frances, paraphrasing required both emotional self-management and focused attention, which allowed them to more fully understand the other party in conflict. Mindfulness appeared to support this capacity for both.

These three types of receptive communication skills—attentive listening, asking open-ended questions, and paraphrasing—were unique in this study, in that they were only used in post-class conflicts by those who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. It appears that the self-awareness stance may support emotional self-management, which then allows subjects to access these communication skills and transfer them from the classroom into an actual situation of conflict.

### **Transfer of Mindful Awareness into Post-class Conflicts**

For some subjects, the use of mindfulness itself appeared to transfer into conflict situations. While not an analytic or communication skill in the same sense as those discussed in Finding #4, subjects nonetheless drew on mindfulness at multiple points during the process of engaging with and resolving conflict. They described a sense of mindful awareness that permeated their approach to their post-class conflicts. This use of mindful awareness during their conflicts was reported by eight of the nine subjects (89%) who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness, and none of the five subjects (0%) who described a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness as part of their approach



to their post-class conflicts. Examples of this integration of mindful awareness throughout conflicts follow.

Barbara reported a low frequency of mindfulness practice, and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. For her, mindfulness helped to insert a “pause” in her process of reacting to a conflict, allowing her to reflect on her options, and how she really wanted to respond. She used a creative analogy to describe how mindful awareness affected her during a conflict:

The mindfulness, when I’m still ... it corrects me. So if I’m thinking ... about saying something that is disrespectful ... it kind of checks me.... The best way I can explain it is that in football—I’m not even a football fan but you have the defense and then you have the guy running with the ball and he kind of blocks it and that’s what happens.... Mindfulness is the coach.... And it stops those emotions, like when I want to get bent out of shape, “No. Wait a second. Wait just a second. Don’t you do that.”... It whispers in your ear like, “Wait a minute. Wait just a second.”... I have to really get a hold of myself; who I am.... That mindfulness, it reminds me of who I am....  
(Barbara)

For Margaret, mindfulness was no longer a practice that occurred at a specific time, but one that she could employ in many types of interactions. She was able to notice uncomfortable emotions as they arise, and use them as a cue to focus on mindful breathing, even during conversations:

I learned how to—your breathing exercises were beautiful because I still do them ... and I feel much better when I do them and I’ve learned to do them when something is not going right with me.... Even if it’s not a conflict or anything—I haven’t had no big conflicts or anything like that, but when I just feel my impatience coming, I know now not to take it out on what’s around me. I know techniques now to breathe, to center.... That’s why I like it and so I breathe, because it’s at a point now that I can do it while I’m talking to you. (Margaret)

Rita described mindfulness as creating a “bubble” of awareness, one that allowed her to examine her own emotions and perceptions about conflict. Similarly to Barbara, she described mindfulness as creating a “space” in the midst of an interaction. That space that allows her to re-focus her attention away from her habitual response of “taking things

personally”, and to consider what would help to address the conflict. And like Margaret, she processed thoughts, emotions and options while the interaction was ongoing:

I guess I can say the attack is, it’s filtered. It’s not a wall that I’ve built up. It’s more like there’s a space. When I take that breath, when I step back, when I pause, there’s that space.... It could even be something like I was in this bubble I’m sucking air from, kind of like let’s say, this peace ... so as I’m just taking that breath and believing that whatever comes out, it would ... help. Like what I say or my actions ... it would just help the situation, just being able to listen and knowing what I want to do ... I think in the past, everything seemed very direct to me and I took a lot of things personally.... But when I have that space, I’m able to just stop jumping into that and start thinking those same thoughts. I’m able to think differently, that it’s not necessarily always me, even though I may have that contributing factor but as the conflict happens, I’m not just letting it happen and just receiving it, but I can process it while it’s happening. (Rita)

For Barbara, Margaret and Rita, the practice of mindfulness itself transferred into conflict situations. A sense of mindful awareness was fully integrated into their approaches to conflict, rather than being seen as a discrete practice.

To summarize Finding #4, in this group of subjects, those who were most likely to report transfer of learning were also those who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness, and the ability to manage their emotions in conflict. This suggests the possibility that for this group of subjects, stance toward mindfulness and emotional self-management may influence transfer of learning in the context of a course on conflict resolution. The skills that may be influenced by stance toward mindfulness and emotional self-management appeared to include analytic skills (the ability to identify causes of conflict, and the ability to identify the needs of the other party in conflict) and receptive communication skills (attentive listening, asking open-ended questions, and paraphrasing). An analytic skill that may be influenced by frequency of mindfulness practice more than stance toward mindfulness was the ability to use specific course concepts (fight-flight, the anger volcano, conflict styles) to understand conflict. The expressive communication skill of assertiveness was reported by the majority of subjects, and did not appear to be influenced by either stance toward mindfulness or frequency of

mindfulness practice. However, it was noted that subjects who described their pre-class approach to conflict as either avoidant or competitive were equally likely to use assertive communication to more constructively engage with the other party in conflict.

### **Finding #5**

Finding #5: For this group of subjects, self-awareness—emotional, cognitive, and physical—may support emotional self-management and transfer of learning. The sense of having control over, or choice about one’s emotions may be influenced by stance toward mindfulness. Cognitive clarity and the ability to observe and take responsibility for one’s own role in conflict also may also be influenced by stance toward mindfulness. Physical self-awareness may be influenced more by frequency of mindfulness practice, and may act to “cue” subjects to the state of their emotions.

Themes related to self-awareness emerged from the analysis of the post-class conflicts. Results of the analysis of self-awareness in relation to frequency of mindfulness practice can be found in Appendix Y. Results of the analysis of self-awareness in relation to stance toward mindfulness can be found in Appendix Z. A summary of these results can be found in Table 4.15 below. The four themes that appeared to be most meaningful were as follows:

- Eight out of nine subjects (89%) who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness also reported the sense of having control or choice over one’s emotions, as compared to one out of five subjects (20%) who reported a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness. The sense of having control over one’s emotions can be seen as an aspect of emotional self-awareness.
- Seven out of nine subjects (78%) who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness also reported a sense of cognitive clarity during conflict, as compared to one out of five subjects (20%) who reported a self-soothing stance

toward mindfulness. Cognitive clarity can be seen as an aspect of cognitive self-awareness, the ability to think about one's own thoughts.

- Nine out of nine subjects (100%) who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness also reported the ability to identify and take responsibility for their own role in contributing to the conflict, as compared to two out of five subjects (40%) who reported a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness. The ability to identify one's own role in conflict is indicative of an ability to notice and think about one's own thoughts and actions.
- Five out of nine subjects (56%) who reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice also reported noticing physical sensations during conflict, as opposed to none of the five subjects (0%) in the lower frequency of practice group. Subjects who reported physical self-awareness during conflict tended to interpret those sensations as indicators that their emotions were becoming triggered.

Table 4.15. Self-awareness in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice and Stance toward Mindfulness

Means of analysis (frequency of practice or stance):	Emotional self-awareness			Cognitive self-awareness				Physical self-awareness
	Range of emotions	Sources of own emotions	Sense of control/choice over emotions	Clarity	Assumptions/interpretations	Identify own role	Examine/shift own perspective	
Frequency of practice:								
Higher	100	67	56	44	44	78	22	56
Lower	100	80	80	80	40	80	20	0
Stance toward mindfulness:								
Group 1: Self-awareness	100	67	89	78	44	100	33	44
Group 2: Self-soothing	100	80	20	20	40	40	0	20

The excerpts below illustrate these four aspects of self-awareness.

### **Emotional Self-awareness**

A sense of control or choice over one's emotions was an aspect of emotional self-awareness that was reported by all but one of the subjects who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness.

Elizabeth reported a higher frequency of practice, and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. In social situations with family members, she exercised control over her emotions by preparing herself in advance for these encounters. Considering possible questions or comments they might make, and coming up with responses that would not escalate a tense interaction, allowed her to keep emotions from the past in check. She used mindful breathing as part of her advance preparation:

So I have to prepare myself emotionally, prepare myself for like, “Who are these people? Do they know me? Do they know my trials and tribulations?” No. They don't know. So I have to prepare myself, words not to offend them. Prepare myself with me staying centered, not to falter and let past emotions that hurt me in the past, and then I put them in the back, come back up again, because this is what makes me strong now. However, when things happen now because of those past emotions, I'm stronger. I can handle them better. I'm noticing that about myself.... Mindful practice is very good for me. (Elizabeth)

Rita reported a higher frequency of practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She vividly described formerly having a sense of powerlessness in conflict. Mindfulness helped her restore a feeling of agency, and an ability to separate herself the experience of being controlled by another:

I think in the past ... when I'm in conflict, I feel like I'm not in control of what's happening.... I just already automatically assume that I have no power, that I don't have the right to an opinion. And so when I do feel like I have control—knowing that it's not someone else who's controlling my actions or my emotions and although they can do something that can irritate me, I feel like I'm able to remove myself from that, just like being able to separate. (Rita)

Tanya reported a lower frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She described feeling a need to always be upbeat and “bubbly”, despite a serious physical injury and the process of a painful divorce. She experienced mindfulness as allowing her to better self-regulate, and to have a more authentic relationship with her own emotions:

So when I’m in the mindful exercise... I can regulate my emotions.... Just letting myself be below where I usually am ... I’m always up ... it requires a lot of energy—physical, mind—a lot of energy. And when I’m doing the mindful breathing exercise, it allows me to be able to not work and use so much energy, in terms of my will to be optimistic and to be upbeat and to be bubbly.... I can just sort of be quiet and be introspective and think about what’s going on in my life and the lives of the people that I care about and at my job. (Tanya)

In these excerpts, Elizabeth, Rita, and Tanya demonstrated the ability to notice and reflect on their own emotions, rather than being controlled by them. They made conscious choices about their emotions in order to be more at peace with themselves, and to interact with others more effectively.

### **Cognitive Self-awareness**

Two aspects of cognitive self-awareness were described by subjects who reported a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness, a sense of cognitive “clarity” and the ability to identify and take responsibility for their own role the conflict.

**Cognitive clarity.** A number of subjects reported a connection between practicing mindfulness, and the experience of greater cognitive clarity. Mindfulness practice seemed to help them think better, make better decisions, and gain insight, all of which indicated clarity in thought processes.

Elizabeth reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She credited mindfulness practice with helping her notice and reflect on her thoughts. She was able to manage negativity and rumination on the past, which she experienced as calming:

Clearer head, clearer thoughts. I think better when I breathe because I experienced when I don't breathe, I'm more into negativity. You stay on one thing like, "Why did he do that?" ... When I breathe ... that calms me down in order for me to think better. (Elizabeth)

Lisa reported a lower frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She described mindfulness as helping her reduce stress and relax. But rather than this being an end in itself, she reported that the next steps for problem-solving emerge from this relaxed state:

It's changed how (pause) instead of stressing about how to figure something out, it's helped me find that peace, in order to just relax, and then figure it out. Instead of all very stressful, and it's easier to just calm down, and then go to it. (Lisa)

Margaret reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She described how mindfulness helped her to notice how her emotions led her to thoughts about conflict that weren't "real." She was able to observe those assumptions, question them, and release inaccurate interpretations she made. Her ability to observe her own thought process led her to greater cognitive clarity:

It's like a fear, making you think things that aren't really real. My mind, it takes me to another place. So the breathing helps me, it really helps me.... I tell myself, "It's not that, Margaret. It's a feeling. This is what you're thinking, but ain't nobody telling you this. That's like a thought. You're reading into this. You're reading into stuff that isn't there." ... That breathing technique actually helps me with observation. It helped me personally, inside, a whole lot. (Margaret)

For Elizabeth, Lisa, and Margaret, self-awareness of one's own thought processes appeared to be essential to accurately assessing a conflict situation, making decisions, and problem-solving.

**Ability to identify and take responsibility for own role in conflict.** A second theme related to cognitive clarity appeared to be the ability to notice one's own role in contributing to conflict. This was accompanied by a willingness to take responsibility for one's actions, and to change those actions in order to reduce conflict and improve communication. For example, Rita, who reported a higher frequency of mindfulness

practice, and a self-awareness stance, said, “I didn’t realize that I was being passive aggressive or even just the silence part.... I didn’t realize it was contributing to deeper conflict within a relationship.” She reported that recognizing and taking responsibility for her role in conflict enabled her to engage more directly and constructively.

Lisa reported a lower frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She was able to identify a pattern of responding to conflicts that interfered with her being able to establish long-term relationships. She was able to reflect on the source of this pattern in her childhood, take responsibility for it, and change it in her current relationship:

In the past, in my prior relationship, if it got too difficult for me, or it felt like it was too much, I would easily break up. And that would be the end of it.... I think it comes from my dad, who was a drinker, a drunkard. And it was always easy to just close the door and make believe nothing was going on. And not deal with anything.... And that’s not the solution to the problem! (Lisa)

Barbara reported a lower frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She described connecting mindfulness practice to greater physical self-awareness, which in turn led to the ability to think about her own thoughts and actions in conflict:

When you do the deep breathing and then the heart rate slows down a little bit, you start thinking about, gee, maybe that was wrong or maybe I didn’t have to insult someone or anything like that ... because I’m being mindful, because when I’m sitting and I’m relaxing and I’m able to pull my thoughts back in. To even be aware of the fact that I’m wandering, I’m off course. I’m missing the mark. I’m mistreating people. I’m not doing things that are right. It helps me regroup.... (Barbara)

Harriet reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She described how mindfulness helped her pause and reflect on her own thoughts and actions during conflict. She realized that she made assumptions and interpretations, and began to question their validity:



For me, I thought that whatever I have to say, it was of utmost importance. And when I say it, and whatever your response may be, whatever you have to say may not be important to me.... I think I had figured out what you were trying to do, and I read into the whole thing, and you are wrong and I am right.... But after the class, you realize that, "Hey, I maybe read into something that was wrong, that was never your intention." (Harriet)

Margaret reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance. In the midst of an emotionally charged conflict with her nephew, she was able to use mindful breathing to stay calm and simultaneously reflect on how she may have been contributing to the conflict. She then reflected on her habitual pattern of becoming defensive in conflict, and how that has changed as a result of mindfulness practice:

And I just kept breathing and I started listening more. Because when he started hitting things ... it made me think a lot and made me realize a lot. Maybe I don't listen and maybe I'm in my own little world. So it started making me look at things differently and when I started feeling myself get overwhelmed or overboard, the breathing made me feel better.

Before when I would be angry, again, I wasn't listening to what was being said to me. I felt defensive of anything and everything. So my automatic defense was, "I'm going to get you before you get me." But now I feel, "Let me breathe and let me see the scenario," and "Do I have to run or do I have to defend myself first?" Because I always felt I had to be—"Let me defend me." It's like before they get a hold, before they get a hold over me, let me get me. But now I feel it's not about "before they get me" or "before me getting them." Let me hear what the scenario is, because maybe I did do something ... the breathing helps me to stop and listen. (Margaret)

These subjects demonstrated an ability to notice and reflect on their own assumptions about what is causing conflict, and their role in it. Their ability to think about their own thinking enabled them to see that role more clearly, take responsibility for it, and change their actions.

### **Physical Self-awareness**

Physical self-awareness was also reported during conflicts, and this tended to be more true for subjects who reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice. Physical

sensations often helped these subjects identify the fact that they were having emotional responses to conflict.

Sarah reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness. After witnessing what she considered inappropriate restraint of a child by a dean, she struggled to control her anger. The physical sensation of her heart racing helped her notice that her anger was on the verge of escalating out of control. She chose not to respond in the moment, but planned to do so when school resumed in the fall:

But between now and then, I'm calming down my heart, my anger... Every time I see him, my heart starts racing. When I get like that, I'm really reactive. This is why I backed out and just—I can't approach him right now.  
(Sarah)

Nina reported a higher frequency of practice, and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. Like Sarah, she used the sensation of her heart beating as a cue to notice her anger. She chose to step away from the situation to calm herself:

When I feel myself, like, nervous, I call it nervous ... like my heart is beating too fast, I know that it's not appropriate to talk to any person, because I know that I'm mad ... so I take a deep breath, and then I stop  
(Nina)

Harriet reported a higher frequency of mindfulness practice and a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. She described a somewhat different type of physical self-awareness from Sarah and Nina. Harriet became aware of her body language, and chose to modify the unspoken messages she was conveying during conflict:

Before, my body language would show, like I'm getting disgusted—I'll either hold my head, or roll my eyes, or walk away, and do things like that to show that I want him to get the message that, "I'm getting angry and upset with you." ... So no longer—my bodily expression, I don't do that anymore.  
(Harriet)

For these three subjects, physical self-awareness provided insight into their own emotional state, and allowed them to make choices about how best to manage those emotions.

To summarize Finding #5, for this group of subjects, self-awareness—emotional, cognitive, and physical—may play a role in supporting emotional self-management and transfer of learning. The ability to attend to and think about one’s own emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations may allow subjects to observe the process of conflict unfolding, how they are contributing to that process, and question their habitual responses. This may provide an opening for drawing on the course content in order to approach the conflict differently.

The next chapter will present a synthesis of the implications of this study, along with a discussion of factors that may influence interpretation. This is followed by conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter V

### SYNTHESIS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this modified case study was to examine the influence of mindfulness practice on emotional self-management and transfer of learning in a group of adults in an undergraduate course on conflict resolution. It was hoped that a better understanding of the potential impact of mindfulness practice would provide insight into how to more effectively enable adult learners to put concepts and skills taught in the course into practice in actual situations of conflict.

Subjects included 15 adult undergraduate students, one of whom was excluded from the analysis because she was unable to identify a post-class conflict she had been involved in. All were working-class women of color, and most held jobs as classroom paraprofessionals.

Qualitative data were collected through pre- and post-class interviews. Quantitative data were collected through weekly journals kept by students on their frequency and length of mindfulness practice. Some qualitative data were also obtained from the journals, as certain subjects made journal entries about the nature of their experience with mindfulness.

The study was based on these three research questions:

1. Do adult learners' descriptions of their emotional self-management and transfer of learning appear to be influenced by self-reported higher vs. lower frequencies of mindfulness practice during the course?

2. How do adult learners in an undergraduate conflict resolution course describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) on emotional self-management during situations of interpersonal conflict?
3. How does this group of adult learners describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) in supporting the transfer of learning of conflict resolution skills from the classroom into actual conflict situations?

Chapter IV presented five main findings that arose out of thematic coding, along with initial analysis. A brief summary of the study's findings, for this specific group of subjects, is as follows:

1. A quantitative descriptor of mindfulness, frequency of practice, did not appear to influence emotional self-management and transfer of learning.
2. A qualitative descriptor of mindfulness, "stance" or orientation to practice, appeared to influence emotional self-management and transfer of learning. Two distinct stances, self-awareness and self-soothing, were noted.
3. Those who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness were more likely to report emotional self-management in their post-class conflicts. This included the management of both anger and fear.
4. Those who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness were more likely to report transfer of specific analytic and communication skills in their post-class conflicts.
5. Emotional and cognitive self-awareness appeared to support both emotional self-management and transfer of learning.

### **Analytic Category Development**

Interpretation of the findings was begun using the “Interpretation Outline Tool” described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012, p. 174). This can be found in Appendix M. Analysis of individual responses, coded transcripts, data summary tables, and the five major findings resulted in the development of four analytic categories. These were further developed and refined using the “Analytic Category Development” tool described by Bloomberg and Volpe (p. 183). The researcher’s Analytic Category Development tool can be found in Appendix N. The analytic categories that frame this chapter are:

- Analytic Category #1: Understanding mindfulness through quantitative and qualitative lenses, based on Findings #1 and #2.
- Analytic Category #2: The interconnection of cognition and emotion in learning to resolve conflict, based on Finding #3.
- Analytic Category #3: Being “mindful” in conflict, based on Finding #4.
- Analytic Category #4: Learning methods in conflict resolution education, based on Finding #5.

This chapter synthesizes and interprets the findings and analysis, based on relevant literature and the researcher’s own experience. The aim is to provide a fuller picture of the potential role of mindfulness in adults’ process of learning to manage interpersonal conflicts. Contributions of the study are discussed. This chapter also revisits the researcher’s assumptions, which were described in Chapter I, and examines the researcher’s process of becoming aware of her own assumptions and biases. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for future research are discussed.

### **Synthesis**

The discussion that follows is organized around the analytic categories that emerged from the findings.

### **Understanding Mindfulness through Quantitative and Qualitative Lenses**

Despite the qualitative design of the study, much of the researcher's early thinking about this study had a quantitative orientation—there was an implicit belief that frequency of practice would “prove” whether or not mindfulness impacted emotional self-management and transfer of learning. After all, much quantitative research in the field of mindfulness has focused on “dose response”—what length of practice, over what length of time, with what regularity will produce beneficial psychological outcomes. This research is inconclusive. Longer and more frequent periods of practice have been found to produce better outcomes by some authors (Helber et al., 2012; Lacaille et al., 2018), while others have found that shorter interventions can be effective (Carmody & Baer, 2009; Miller, Borsatto, & Al-Salom, 2018). And following a study of adults in a home-based mindfulness class that found reductions in stress did not vary based on practice time, the authors suggested that “other psychological phenomena, including quality of meditation practice, influence these outcomes” (Ribeiro, Atchley, & Oken, 2018, p. 401).

This study highlights the importance of asking questions about the quality of mindfulness practice. Qualitative research is less about “proving” a hypothesis or validating existing research, and more about discovering new understandings, possibilities, and unexpected connections between existing concepts. The researcher's shift to examining a qualitative descriptor of mindfulness practice, “stance,” led to the study's most thought-provoking finding.

The study uncovered what appeared to be two distinct stances toward mindfulness in this group of subjects. What was labeled the “self-soothing” stance was characterized by a description of mindfulness practice as a means to relax, calm down, clear the mind, or to fall asleep. Subjects who described this stance did not go on to associate a sense of calm with self-awareness, or insight into the other party or the nature of the conflict.

The “self-awareness” stance was sometimes initially described by subjects in terms of relaxation or calming. But they then went on to discuss how that relaxed state led to

awareness of physical sensations, emotional experiences, and thought processes. They often described a heightened sense of understanding or insight into the other party or the conflict.

The experiences with mindfulness reported by these two groups have some overlap with an early study of motivations for mindfulness. D. H. Shapiro (1992), in a study of long-term meditators, established a three-point continuum of motivations for mindfulness practice. The first point on the continuum was called “self-regulation,” which Shapiro described as the desire to improve relaxation, reduce psychological distress and pain, and increase physical health and well-being. The second was “self-exploration,” in which the motivation for mindfulness practice was greater self-awareness and insight, achieved through non-judgmental awareness of one’s thoughts and emotions. The third type of motivation was “self-liberation,” which referred to the use of mindfulness practice to enhance spiritual development and “an understanding of one's relationship not only with oneself, but what may be called ... the nature of ultimate reality” (p. 24). Shapiro found that motivations for mindfulness practice changed along this continuum over time, with longer-term practitioners being more likely to report “self-liberation” motivations.

The two stances found by the researcher appear to have parallels with D. H. Shapiro’s first two points. However, Shapiro approached his study from an analytical perspective, asking meditators to provide reasons for meditation, and grouping findings into logical categories. His findings were based on meditators’ cognitions about their practice. By contrast, the researcher did not ask subjects about their motivations for mindfulness practice. Her questions were more open-ended and invited a range of responses. These covered thoughts about mindfulness, but also associated emotions and physical sensations. Subjects in the self-soothing stance group particularly focused their understandings of mindfulness on distressing emotions, and relief from those. Subjects in the self-awareness stance group described a broader range of emotions, particularly emotional responses to mindfulness practice itself such as joy, peace, and gratitude.



It is noteworthy that the question of motivation for practice arose spontaneously only in the interviews with subjects describing a self-soothing stance. They expressed clear intentions for practicing mindfulness: they wanted to recover from a hard day at work, fall asleep, or otherwise disengage from conflict and stress in their lives. If they relaxed or fell asleep, they described mindfulness as having “worked”; if they did not achieve that outcome, mindfulness didn’t “work.” By contrast, expressions of intention for mindfulness practice were rarely mentioned in the interviews with subjects describing a self-awareness stance. They appeared to be simply noticing their experience, monitoring it, and reporting it. They were more likely to describe cognitive, emotional, and physical experiences, without an attempt to “make” anything happen. They appeared to be open to the experience, and insights they could gain from it. These insights seemed to be intrinsic motivators for this group of subjects to continue mindfulness practice, and to engage in conflict rather than distancing themselves from it. They tended not to express expectations of specific outcomes for mindfulness practice.

The similarity between the stances the researcher identified and D. H. Shapiro’s typology of motivations may lend some confirmation to the finding of the importance of understanding the experience of mindfulness through a qualitative lens, despite the differences in the purposes of the two studies.

Pepping, Walters, Davis, and O’Donovan (2016) confirmed the presence of D. H. Shapiro’s motivations in their study, and raised the question as to whether different motivations for mindfulness practice might lead to different outcomes. This question is pertinent to the current study, and the differences between the “stance” groups in particular. The findings suggest that those who described a “self-soothing” stance had different outcomes, in terms of emotional self-management and transfer of learning, from those who described a “self-awareness” stance. However, this study is too limited in size and scope to address the question of whether different motivations for practicing mindfulness, or stances toward mindfulness, might lead to different outcomes.

In summary, the discussion of stance toward mindfulness led to an exploration of how subjects constructed their meaning of the practice, their intentions (or lack thereof) and their experiences; this led to a deeper understanding of how mindfulness may affect emotional self-management and transfer of learning in conflict than would have emerged from an investigation of frequency of practice alone. The different types of findings that quantitative and qualitative methods yielded in this study illustrate the importance of balancing both types of inquiry in mindfulness research.

A final comment on this topic pertains to the use of the descriptors used in this study—“higher” and “lower” frequency, and “self-soothing” and “self-awareness” stance. The researcher does not intend to imply any sort of judgment with the use of these labels. One stance is not superior to the other, nor is one frequency of practice better than another; such a view reflects the type of evaluative thinking that may arise from a quantitative orientation. Using mindfulness for self-soothing, calming, and relaxation can be profoundly beneficial for adults, whether or not it leads to deeper self-awareness and insight. The descriptors for frequency of practice and stance were applied to interviews that took place at a particular moment in time; in a sense, they were a “snapshot” of subjects’ relationship to mindfulness at that moment, and may not capture a possible process of movement across the different motivations or stances. Just as there may be a continuum of motivations for practicing mindfulness, there may also be an evolution in how subjects make meaning of the experience of mindfulness with continued practice.

### **The Interconnection of Cognition and Emotion in Learning to Resolve Conflict**

An implication of the study’s findings is that greater attention might usefully be given to the role of emotions in conflict resolution education. However, it is essential to remember that emotion and cognition in learning are interconnected, rather than separate and distinct processes.

Emotions have the potential to interfere with cognition. Subjects in this study gave examples of times when anger or fear led to habitual responses to conflict. Escalated emotions overrode their thought processes. As a result, they had difficulty identifying their own or the other's underlying needs, or considering possible alternative approaches, inhibiting learning during the conflict.

However, emotions also have the potential to support cognition. When subjects were better able to manage their emotions, they told stories of noticing habitual responses of anger or fear, exercising cognitive control over those emotions, and choosing not to act on them. Rather, they paused and either tried to listen (in the case of habitual responses stemming from anger), or prepared themselves to better express their feelings and needs (in the case of habitual responses stemming from fear). They were able to "shift course" and apply skills learned in class, as well as using those skills to continue learning as the conflict unfolded. Their emotional competencies supported the use of their cognitive competencies.

The descriptions of subjects in this study who were able to notice and interrupt automatic responses, manage their emotions, and choose alternative behavioral strategies in interpersonal conflicts have some similarities with the process of "reflection-in-action" described by Schön (1983, 1987). According to Schön (1983), "phrases like 'thinking on your feet' ... suggest not only that we can think about doing but that we can think about doing something while doing it" (p. 54). Knowing is demonstrated through action, and this process may take place within seconds, as was often the case for subjects in this study. Schön describes the sequence of events that may happen rapidly in an instance of reflection-in-action. There may be (1) a situation in which an adult responds in a routine way; (2) the routine response results in an unexpected outcome; (3) the unexpected outcome prompts reflection-in-action; (4) assumptions may be questioned, or the problem may be reframed; and (5) new actions are tried with an experimental mindset (Schön, 1987). This sequence can be seen in subjects' post-class conflict descriptions, as so many

of their negotiations attempted to deal with “surprise” responses from others in new ways, experimenting with what was learned in the class.

Schön’s work on reflective practice was developed in the context of improving professional education. He made little reference to emotions in the process of reflection-in-action, framing this concept in primarily cognitive terms. Yet, reflection in action in the context of handling interpersonal conflict, which is often highly emotional, would appear to require using cognitive and emotional competencies in an integrated way.

Subjects who demonstrated emotional self-management, and appeared to also follow some of the steps of reflection-in-action described by Schön, often credited mindfulness practice with their ability to do so. Mindfulness practice involves

a dynamic process of learning how to cultivate attention that is discerning and nonreactive, sustained and concentrated, so that we can see clearly what is arising in the present moment (including our emotional reactions, if that’s what comes up). (Shapiro & Carlson, 2017, p. 16)

Mindfulness essentially inserts a brief pause between what Schön calls an “unexpected outcome” and a habitual response, allowing for reflection, reframing, and alternative choices. While mindfulness itself is not a form of reflective practice, it can cultivate the attention and metacognitive capacities that reduce emotional reactivity, making possible reflection-in-action, the application of prior learning, and learning from the conflict as it takes place. Based on this group of subjects and the specific context of reflection-in-action during interpersonal conflict, the ability to manage emotions appears to support the activation of cognitive processes.

**Anger and fear.** For subjects in this study, anger was not the only emotion that had to be managed, though it is the one that is most addressed in the literature on emotions in conflict. Fear was also an emotion that was described as interfering with the ability to handle conflict effectively by nearly half the subjects. Handling fear has received less attention in the literature, possibly because the strategies often used by those

who experience fear in conflict – avoidance or accommodation – may mask the presence of a conflict altogether.

Subjects who reported anger as a challenging emotion to manage in conflict also tended to report a “competing” approach to conflict in pre-class interviews. They described a strong influence of mindfulness practice when managing anger. Typically, they reported using mindful breathing as the conflict was occurring to calm themselves, inhibit impulsive responses, and access skills used in the class, most often receptive communication skills.

Subjects who reported fear as a challenging emotion to manage in conflict tended to report an “avoiding” or “accommodating” approach to conflict in pre-class interviews. Typically, they reported using mindful breathing as a form of preparation for engaging with the other party, enabling them to calm themselves, think more clearly about the nature of the conflict, and plan ways to address it. Based on this group of subjects, mindfulness may have utility for helping adults who are experiencing a range of emotions in conflict. It is also a practice that can be used flexibly at different points in the negotiation process—before, during, and theoretically after a conflictual encounter.

In summary, cognition and emotion are likely intertwined in many types of learning, but conflict resolution education seems to make that link even clearer. It highlights the necessity of seeing learning in the cognitive and affective domains as synergistic in increasing conflict management competencies.

### **Being “Mindful” in Conflict**

The field of mindfulness research increasingly looks at how the practice may influence interpersonal behavior, but little research has specifically addressed links between mindfulness and behavior in interpersonal conflicts. The experiences of subjects in this study offer possible ways to think about what it might mean to be “mindful” in

conflict. The discussion below considers how the *practice* of mindfulness might influence the *trait* or *disposition* of mindfulness in the context of interpersonal conflict.

Mindfulness has been found to heighten self-awareness, a competency that is the foundation of the Emotional and Social Competency model (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2007) that forms part of this study's conceptual framework. Most of the subjects in this study who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness not only demonstrated awareness of their emotions, but also described a sense of choice or control over their emotions. This type of emotional self-awareness may suggest one aspect of what it could mean to be mindful in interpersonal conflicts.

Along with emotional self-awareness, subjects in this study also reported metacognition, the ability to think about their own thoughts and emotions. Some reported being able to identify assumptions and interpretations they were making during conflicts. In some cases, this led to shifts in perspective about the other party in conflict, and what the true nature of the conflict was. The capacity for metacognition, an aspect of cognitive self-awareness, may provide another way of thinking about how mindfulness could be enacted in conflict.

The experiences of this group of subjects appeared to confirm the Emotional and Social Competency model's proposed view of self-awareness as foundational to the development of emotional self-management. All subjects in this study who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness were able to successfully manage their emotions in post-class conflicts. The ability to notice automatic responses to conflict, interrupt those patterns of response, and choose alternatives may be understood as a way of being mindful in response to interpersonal conflict. This emotional self-management competency may contribute to the capacity for reflection-in-action described by Schön (1987), and the ability to be flexible and adaptable described in the Conflict Intelligence model (Coleman, 2018).

As discussed above, emotion and cognition are interconnected in conflict, and the ability to draw on analytic skills taught in the course, specifically the ability to identify causes of conflict and possible options, was reported by most subjects who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. Subjects who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness were able to use these kinds of analytic skills to override habitual emotional patterns of response, and shift to a focus on problem-solving. This ability to use cognitive and emotional competencies together may be another way to frame what it means to act mindfully in conflict.

Most conflict resolution education courses encourage the use of assertiveness, and receptive communication skills related to active listening. While there was no difference between frequency and stance groups in the use of assertiveness among subjects in this study, there were differences in the use of receptive communication skills, a finding that merits further study. Almost all subjects in this study who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness also reported the use of attentive listening, asking open-ended questions, or paraphrasing. Subjects who used receptive listening skills demonstrated at minimum an interest in the other, and in many cases empathy or concern.

The transfer of these specific skills into situations of conflict cannot be said to be unique to the course that was the focus of this study; the use of these analytic and communication skills can be outcomes of any effective conflict resolution education course. However, the broader competencies of emotional self-awareness, metacognition, and emotional self-management may contribute to an understanding of what it means to be mindful in conflict. Research outside of this study has found that mindfulness practice appears to impact each of these competencies. And in this study, subjects' descriptions of interpersonal conflicts also suggested that these competencies may have been influenced by mindfulness. These three competencies are not typically addressed through experiential methods in most conflict resolution courses; their inclusion in such courses

may add to thinking about the goals of conflict resolution education, and form the basis of an emerging description of what it might mean to be “mindful” in conflict.

### **Learning Methods in Conflict Resolution Education**

One of the implications of the greater focus on emotions and emotional self-management in conflict resolution education that this study suggests is that the methods typically used in these courses may need to be diversified. Learning methods that primarily emphasize rational analysis and theoretical models may not be adequately support the development of emotional intelligence competencies needed in interpersonal conflict.

Course design and implementation has been found to be an important contributor to learning transfer, a goal of conflict resolution education. The use of multiple instructional methods is often cited as a way to increase skill transfer outside the classroom (Merriam & Leahy, 2005, p. 7). In this context, mindfulness practice itself can be understood as a form of experiential learning that may complement the more commonly used analytical approaches to conflict resolution education, creating a more holistic learning experience. The experience of incorporating mindfulness and other contemplative elements into a college writing seminar, as described by Kroll (2013), is an example of the power of using multiple learning modalities. Kroll designed his course around the use of “conceptual-procedural, kinesthetic, and contemplative” modes of learning (p. 9), seeing these as synergistic. Hart (2004) describes “contemplative knowing” as an approach that can balance the dominant rational and sensory ways of knowing that are privileged in higher education. And Coleman (2018) calls for substantial use of experiential learning methods to balance the more analytical methods commonly used in conflict resolution education. Though Kroll, Hart, and Coleman describe learning modalities in different ways, the underlying principle is similar: the use of a mix of both experiential and analytic teaching and learning methods can enhance learning and its transfer.



While the influence of mindfulness was the focus of this study, there are other ways to promote self-awareness and emotional self-management in conflict resolution education for adult learners. Other than mindfulness practice, the alternative strategies most commonly used by subjects in this study were self-talk, followed by self-reflection processes. These were sometimes used alone to manage emotions, but were often used in conjunction with mindfulness. Others described physical exercise, walking in nature, listening to calming music, prayer, and simply taking “time out.” Discussion of alternative approaches to emotional self-management in conflict resolution courses can encourage learners to find ones that are a good fit in terms of individual learning preferences, as well as being appropriate to specific context of the conflict.

Other strategies can also be used to encourage emotional self-awareness. Journaling and guided reflection (alone or in small groups) are effective tools for addressing emotions. Realistic simulations and/or role plays can evoke emotions that typically come up in conflict, and allow them to be processed in a safe space. The use of visual arts, music and drama can engage learners’ emotions, intuition, and imagination.

Though subjects in this study experienced the same course material and exposure to mindfulness, the findings on stance toward mindfulness show that they constructed two entirely different meanings of the practice. This notion of learners as actively making meaning from their experience is central to the constructivist perspective that is prominent in the field of adult learning: “A learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world.” (Fenwick, 2000, p. 248). It can be expected that different personal understandings of mindfulness practice, of the role of emotions in conflict, and of what it means to “manage” one’s emotions will arise in conflict resolution courses. Time should be provided for adult learners to share how they construct their own meaning of these concepts, and reflect on them as a way of clarifying and deepening their understanding.

## **Interpreting the Findings**

There are a number of factors that may have influenced the subjects' response to the study, and these should be considered in interpreting the findings. These include the specificity of the sample, personality factors, conflict intensity and complexity, and the design of the study itself.

### **Specificity of the Sample**

The subjects in this study shared certain demographic characteristics that mirrored the site's student population at the time the research was carried out. They were all women, members of minority groups, and all but three were classroom paraprofessionals. Taken individually and together, these three characteristics may have influenced subjects' responses to the study.

Gender differences in understandings of, and approaches to conflict have been the subject of considerable study. The social construction of gender, and resulting stereotypical expectations of gender, are often considered a factor in the tendency of women to take up a view of conflict that is focused on its relational aspects, as opposed to the greater focus on analytic or legalistic aspects of conflict that appears to be more associated with men's approaches to conflict (Kolb, 2009; Northrup & Segall, 2006). The inclusion of emotional self-management as a central theme of the course may have had greater resonance with a group of women than it would have in a mixed-gender group of subjects, and a factor to keep in mind in interpreting the findings.

As members of racial and ethnic minority groups, the positionality of these subjects in the larger social context may also have influenced their responses to the class. Conflicts related to power and positionality were described by only two subjects in the post-class conflict descriptions, but were a regular part of class discussions. For example, two African-American students reported tense encounters with police during the class—and both reported using an intentional focus on mindful breathing during the encounters

to manage their emotions and handle the situations without escalation. Two others reported trying to teach basic mindfulness practices to their adult children, in one case to handle stress related to bias at a job, and in the other to also deal with situations involving law enforcement. Social position as members of minority groups among this group of subjects may have influenced the frequency and types of conflicts they experienced. This in turn may have been reflected in their commitment to learning about conflict resolution, in their willingness to try an innovative approach such as mindfulness practice, and in determining what skills and concepts they transferred into their daily lives.

The fact that the sample was composed primarily of classroom paraprofessionals working in public schools could also have influenced how the subjects engaged with the course. As adults working in educational settings, they may have had an openness to learning that would not necessarily have been present in a sample of subjects from other professions. For many of them, managing conflicts between children, including those with behavior problems, was part of their daily work life. This may have increased their receptiveness to concepts and skills taught in the course. For example, the fact of working with children who struggled with emotional self-management may have influenced their responsiveness to any practical strategies that would support this competency. Indeed, there were study subjects who reported trying to teach simple breath awareness practices to their students and were favorably impressed with the effects it had. This may have influenced their own motivation to use these practices themselves.

While the sample was too small to draw any conclusions about the influence of these demographic characteristics, and their intersectionality, on the study's findings, these factors should be considered for their possible impact. The specificity of the sample may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other populations, or to a more diverse sample.

## Personality

It is possible that personality factors could have influenced either frequency of practice, or how subjects describe their stance toward mindfulness. Personality is often described using the “Five Factor Model” typology (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987). The model’s five dimensions of personality, and key characteristics of each, are:

- Extraversion: sociable, friendly, fun-loving, talkative, affectionate, assertive.
- Neuroticism: tendency to worry, experience negative emotionality, insecurity, moodiness, self-consciousness.
- Openness to experience: imaginative, original, broad interests, daring, flexible thinking.
- Agreeableness: altruism, caring, emotional support, nurturance, trust, cooperative.
- Conscientiousness: careful, thorough, impulse control, hardworking, persevering, will to achieve.

Research has identified possible links between the Five Factor Model, and dispositional mindfulness. Dispositional mindfulness refers not to the practice of mindfulness, but to a personal characteristic or trait. It has been described as one’s tendency to pay attention intentionally, with a focus on the present moment, and without judgment of one’s experience. This involves the behaviors of “observing experience, describing internal experience, acting with awareness, being non-reactive, and being non-judgmental” (Hanley, 2015, p. 154).

Dispositional mindfulness has been found to be negatively associated with neuroticism, and positively associated with conscientiousness; weaker positive associations between dispositional mindfulness and the additional three personality factors (agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience) appear to exist (Giluk, 2009; Hanley, 2015; Latzman & Masuda, 2013). This raises the possibility that the personality factors of subjects in the current study may have influenced either their

frequency of mindfulness practice or their stance toward mindfulness. For example, a subject high in neuroticism may have been less likely to practice mindfulness on a regular basis, or have been more likely to adopt an instrumental, self-soothing stance in order to achieve short-term relief from psychological distress. Likewise, a subject high in conscientiousness might have been more likely to practice mindfulness on a regular basis. Openness to experience may have predisposed some subjects to embrace the novelty of mindfulness practice in a college classroom, and adopt a self-awareness stance. While this study did not attempt to assess personality factors in relation to mindfulness practice, and its use in conflict situations, the possible influence of personality on the findings should be considered.

### **Conflict Intensity and Complexity**

Among this group of subjects, those who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness practice also reported the ability to manage their emotions during their post-class conflicts, and were more likely to report transfer of learning. However, the study did not investigate whether the intensity and/or complexity of the post-class conflicts influenced what appeared to be the links between mindfulness and emotional self-management, and between emotional self-management and transfer of learning. It seems reasonable to expect that subjects engaging in highly intense or complex conflicts might find emotional self-management and transfer of learning more challenging.

Intensity and complexity of the conflicts might also have an impact on a subject's frequency of mindfulness practice. For example, a subject facing a high intensity conflict, particularly one with a lengthy duration, might practice mindfulness frequently as a way to cope with stress. Alternatively, in the face of intense conflict, a subject might find it more difficult to give time and attention to mindfulness, resulting in a lower frequency of practice.

Conflict intensity and complexity could also influence stance toward mindfulness. For example, a subject coping with an intense and complex conflict might be more likely to adopt a self-soothing stance toward mindfulness, seeing the practice primarily as a means of short-term stress relief. Or, a subject dealing with a complex conflict might be drawn to mindfulness practice as a means of gaining greater insight into a challenging situation, and thus be more likely to report a self-awareness stance.

It is worth noting that subjects with what might be considered intense and complex conflicts were found in both frequency of practice groups, as well as both stance groups identified in the study. And subjects who were able to effectively manage emotions did so in both emotionally escalated and complex conflicts, as well as simpler ones. Nonetheless, as the study did not attempt to formally classify the complexity and intensity of the interpersonal conflicts that subjects described, the impact of this variable cannot be assessed. Conflict intensity and complexity may act as a mediator between mindfulness practice and emotional self-management, or as a potential moderator of frequency of practice; this should be borne in mind in interpreting the findings of this study. Further analysis of the role of conflict intensity and complexity, as well as how it interacts with personality and contextual factors, would be needed to more fully understand any possible influences.

### **Study Design**

The design of the data collection methods, which required having subjects log their frequency of practice and record how long they practiced, may have affected the process of meaning-making regarding mindfulness practice. By requiring this logging from all members of the class, the researcher may have inadvertently caused some subjects to focus exclusively on meeting those requirements. Subjects may have been more attentive to recording when they practiced mindfulness, and for how long, than to noticing emotions, thoughts, and internal shifts that occurred while practicing. The process of

documenting mindfulness practice in this way could have impacted subjects' construction of the meaning of the practice itself. Variations in the data collection design, such as encouraging subjects to simply describe thoughts, emotions and physical sensations during mindfulness practice, or reliance on shorter and more frequent interviews about mindfulness practice, might have yielded data on the quality of mindfulness practice that differed from what the researcher labeled "stance" toward mindfulness.

In summary, there were a range of factors that could have influenced the findings of this study. The unique characteristics of the sample, the role of personality in how subjects engaged with the practice of mindfulness and with the process of conflict resolution, the varying levels of intensity of the conflicts described, and aspects of the design of the study itself could all contribute to the results. While the goal of qualitative research is not necessarily to establish generalizability, the potential influence of each of these factors should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. Future research might usefully explore whether variation in any of these aspects might influence the findings.

### **Revisiting Researcher Assumptions**

Based on the researcher's professional experience, five assumptions were made about the study. Here the researcher will reflect on those assumptions in light of the process of carrying out this study, collecting data, and analyzing findings.

The first assumption was that conflict resolution education/training would be more effective if adult learners were offered effective tools for managing their emotions, in addition to concepts, analytical skills, and communication techniques. This appeared to be true for the majority of subjects in this study. Most were effectively able to manage emotions and apply content learned in the course—often leading to results that surprised them, and were remarked upon by others who observed them acting in new ways.

A second assumption was that the capacity for emotional self-management could be learned if education or training specifically addressed this as a desired outcome. This appeared to be true for most subjects, particularly for those who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. Subjects who had difficulty with emotional self-management in the past described specific changes in how they approached conflict in the post class interviews, suggesting that the ability to manage one's emotions can be learned.

A third assumption was that adults could learn and incorporate mindfulness into their daily lives to some degree—that the ability to practice mindfulness was not dependent upon possessing certain personality traits, learning styles, or types of intelligence. This appeared to be only partially true. Subjects' stance toward mindfulness appeared to influence their ability to incorporate the practice into their daily lives, and into conflict situations. The study did not collect data on subjects' personality traits, learning styles, or ways of knowing, all of which are potential factors that could influence the establishment of a regular mindfulness practice.

A fourth assumption was that mindfulness practices that were taught in a secular way, without connecting them to any religious or spiritual tradition, could have beneficial effects on capacities such as attention, awareness, and emotional self-management. This assumption appeared to be true for those who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness. While many contemplative practices have roots in spiritual traditions, the researcher believed that drawing on those sources would not be appropriate for an instructor in a public university. While some authors and researchers lament the separation of mindfulness practice from its roots, there are well documented physical, cognitive and psychological benefits to the practice, including in the form in which it was taught for the purposes of this study.

A fifth assumption was that regular and frequent mindfulness practice would result in improved emotional self-management, which might in turn positively impact transfer



of learning. This assumption appeared not to be true. While obviously some degree of mindfulness practice is necessary in order to experience beneficial impacts, the assumption that “more is better” did not hold up in the findings. For most themes related to emotional self-management, transfer of learning, and self-awareness, outcomes that seemed to be meaningful appeared to be influenced by how adults constructed their meaning of mindfulness practice, rather than how often they practiced.

### **Uncovering Researcher Bias**

The discovery that this fifth assumption was not supported by the study was an unanticipated turning point in this study. During the process of coding and analyzing post-class interview transcripts and subjects’ mindfulness journals, the researcher had begun to wonder if there would be “outliers” in her study—subjects who reported a high frequency of mindfulness, but described little self-awareness, emotional self-management, and transfer of learning, or vice versa. She realized that finding a way to describe “quality” of mindfulness practice, rather than just “quantity”, might allow her to explain possible outliers. Late in the process of data analysis, she reviewed and coded subjects’ descriptions of their experience of mindfulness, and arrived at the realization that subjects were talking about the experience of mindfulness practice in qualitatively different ways. Those who understood the process as one that would help them relax and fall asleep had an entirely different orientation to mindfulness from those who understood it as a means of attaining greater insight into themselves, the other party, and the conflict itself. The identification of these two different stances—self-soothing and self-awareness—pushed the researcher to also identify the biases and assumptions she had brought to the study. An excerpt from her research journal captures the realization at this point in the data analysis process:

I think I have been trying a lot of “quantify” the experience of mindfulness and its influence on SR [self-regulation] and TOL [transfer of learning], and I think that led me to “hypothesizing” and getting invested in

“proving” what I was expecting to find. That’s not good qualitative research. And it led me to waste a lot of time. I should say, “waste” a lot of time. The process of writing all of this has led to discovery, insight, and a greater clarity about myself and my study.

In reality, this process of discovery was anything but a “waste” of time. It allowed the researcher to realize that writing is a process of continually refining and clarifying one’s thinking, rather than only producing a finished product.

Moreover, it initiated a process of examining other hidden assumptions and biases. For example, the researcher noticed the irony of the fact that she was coding subjects’ ability to think about their own thoughts, assumptions and emotions in conflict, while not fully noticing her own thoughts and assumptions about her process of analysis. She realized that she had been operating with another subtle bias—that of evaluating higher frequency of practice as “better” or more desirable than lower frequency of practice. This extended to the concept of stance as well—the researcher realized that she was unconsciously judging a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness as superior to a self-soothing stance, rather than seeing them as possible points in an evolving understanding of the experience. Uncovering these judgmental biases while studying mindfulness practice, a process of bringing non-judgmental awareness to one’s experiences, was humbling. But ultimately this resulted in the shift in the focus of the study from frequency of mindfulness practice to stance toward mindfulness, which led to far richer and more nuanced understandings of how mindfulness may operate in situations of conflict than would have been gained from examination of quantitative data alone.

Finally, this shift in the direction of the study, and the examination of biases and assumptions it precipitated, exposed the powerful influence of the idea that quantitative research is more “scientific” than qualitative research. When working with literature from the field of mindfulness research, it is difficult to escape the fact that quantitative research dominates. This may have influenced the researcher to direct her attention to the quantitative aspects of what she was studying, and to overlook (until late in her analysis)

qualitative data that were emerging as meaningful. A key learning for the researcher has been an understanding of this quantitative bias, and a greater appreciation for the role of qualitative research in providing deeper understandings of complex phenomena.

## **Conclusions**

While the sample size for this study was small, and had similarities in terms of gender, social class, and profession, the experiences of this group of subjects nonetheless have suggested the following conclusions about the interaction between emotional intelligence (particularly the competency of emotional self-management), mindfulness, and transfer of learning in the context of conflict resolution education.

### **Conclusion #1**

Literature on emotional intelligence suggests that emotional self-awareness supports emotional self-management, which in turn supports conflict management competencies. Data from this group of subjects, specifically from those who described a self-awareness stance toward mindfulness, support the idea that these competencies build on each other. Course content that builds emotional intelligence competencies, along with the more analytical content that is typically part of conflict resolution education for adults, may enhance the capacity for conflict management. Methods used to address emotional content and emotional self-management are likely to be most effective if they are experiential in nature, rather than didactic and analytical.

### **Conclusion #2**

Literature on mindfulness research suggests that the deep attention cultivated by mindfulness practice supports greater self-awareness and the ability to notice and inhibit habitual emotional responses. In the descriptions of subjects in this study who were able to manage their emotions in conflict, there appeared to be a direct link between

mindfulness, self-awareness, emotional self-management and transfer of learning. The focused attention engendered by mindfulness may enable adults to be aware of, pause, and manage their habitual emotional responses to conflict; in that pause, the possibility of recalling and enacting skills that they have learned in class emerges.

### **Conclusion #3**

Based on this group of subjects, incorporating mindfulness practice appears to have the potential to enhance the capacity of adult learners to manage emotions in conflict. At the same time, mindfulness practice is not the only possible means of enhancing these emotional intelligence competencies; incorporating a range of emotional self-management strategies in conflict resolution education may allow more learners to find an approach that meets their specific learning preferences.

### **Conclusion #4**

The study expands the understanding of emotional self-management in interpersonal conflict beyond a focus only on anger. This group of subjects reported the ability to manage not only anger, but also fear. Mindfulness was described as being effective in managing both anger and fear, albeit in different ways. This suggests that mindfulness may be beneficial for individuals with varying approaches to conflict. By addressing a full range of emotions in conflict, rather than just anger, the potential benefits of conflict resolution education may reach a greater number of learners.

### **Conclusion #5**

The study appears to lend support to the proposition that mindfulness practice can have an impact not only on intrapersonal states, but also on interpersonal behavior. Most subjects in this study with a self-described self-awareness stance were able to not only understand themselves and conflict in a new way, but to actually change their habitual

behaviors in conflict, suggesting possible ways to think about what it means to be “mindful” in conflict.

### **Conclusion #6**

A subjective experience such as mindfulness practice may not be fully understood through quantitative means alone. Qualitative measures may allow researchers to better understand adult’s perceptions of mindfulness and how those are constructed. The differences between subjects in this study who described their stance toward mindfulness practice as either “self-awareness” or “self-soothing” suggest one possible way of understanding “quality” of mindfulness practice; there may be other ways to conceptualize “quality” of practice as well. This could bring a complementary perspective to the field of mindfulness research, which tends to be dominated by quantitative approaches.

### **Conclusion #7**

Adult learners are actively engaged in making meaning of their experiences, including mindfulness practice, as demonstrated by the qualitatively different stances identified in this study. A range of factors may influence how adults construct their views on mindfulness. Those factors may include personality traits, and the intention that subjects brought to the practice, as well as demographic characteristics, conflict intensity, and other contextual factors.

## **Recommendations**

The researcher offers the following recommendations, based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study.

**Recommendations for the Design of Conflict Resolution Education for Adults**

1. It is recommended that conflict resolution programs encourage emotional self-awareness and the practice of strategies for emotional self-management.
2. If the capacity for emotional self-management influences transfer of learning, and mindfulness supports emotional self-management, then giving consideration to incorporating mindfulness practice in conflict resolution education programs is recommended as a way of supporting the development of self-awareness and self-management. At the same time, other ways to develop emotional self-management can also be included.
3. If using mindfulness in the context of a conflict resolution course for adults, careful consideration should be given to how it is presented. The intention and motivation for mindfulness practice should be made clear.
4. Use of a variety of teaching and learning methods, aiming for a balance between analytical approaches and those that are rooted in direct experience and reflective practice, is recommended. Allowing adequate time for experiential activities, including the experience of mindfulness, and reflection on them, may maximize their benefits.

**Recommendations for Conflict Resolution Instructors**

1. Those who incorporate mindfulness or other experiential strategies for emotional self-management into conflict resolution courses will be best prepared to do so by having ample first-hand experience with those practices, and the way such practices can support self-awareness, self-management and transfer of learning.
2. Instructors can be aware that adult learners are actively engaged in the construction of meaning, and may have different understandings of mindfulness practice. These can be usefully discussed in class settings.

3. Avoiding judgment of the quality of a learner's experience of mindfulness can lead to greater insight into how a learner's stance toward the practice may be evolving.

### **Recommendations for Researchers**

1. In conducting research on mindfulness, careful consideration to the assumptions that may underpin one's choice of quantitative or qualitative approaches is recommended. Both are needed to better understand mindfulness, and care should be taken to find the best fit between research questions and research methods.

### **Recommendations for Future Research Topics**

1. Does one's style of conflict change as a result of exposure to mindfulness practice in the context of a conflict resolution course? What are factors that support or inhibit those changes? (This implies the need for a systematic collection of data on conflict style prior to and following the course.)
2. To what extent do subjects who are exposed to mindfulness practice during a conflict resolution education course continue to practice when the course is over? What are the factors that support or inhibit continued mindfulness practice, and its use in interpersonal conflict?
3. Does self-awareness always lead to emotional self-management? If not, what are the factors that may interfere with that connection?
4. How could a larger scale study of the influence of mindfulness on transfer of learning be constructed that would not rely as heavily on self-report data?
5. What types of instruments would allow researchers to assess the complexity and intensity of interpersonal conflict, and investigate its influence on the use of mindfulness, emotional self-management, and transfer of learning in conflict?

6. What are other ways in which “quality of mindfulness practice” might be defined and investigated?



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## Appendix A

“Managing Conflict” Course Syllabus

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**SYLLABUS: PSY 290: Managing Conflict****Fall 2013**

Instructor: Susan Fountain  
Phone: (845) 485-3266  
E-mail: [susan.fountain@sps.cuny.edu](mailto:susan.fountain@sps.cuny.edu)  
[shfountain@gmail.com](mailto:shfountain@gmail.com)

Credits: 3 (letter grade)

Class Schedule: 15 Tuesdays, Sept. 3 to Dec. 17, 2013, from 5:30PM to 8:00PM.

NOTE: There is NO CLASS on Oct. 15, 2013.

**Course Description**

Conflict is neither good nor bad; it is an inevitable part of life. Knowing how to handle conflict productively is a life skill that makes us more effective in our workplace (and outside of it!)

Conflict is often approached competitively, based on a belief that only one party in a conflict can “win”, and that in order to “win”, the other party must “lose”. Or, conflict may be avoided altogether in the hope that it will go away, when in fact, unresolved conflict often simply re-surfaces at a later time (often with greater intensity).

This course explores ways of taking a “collaborative” approach to conflict – an approach that aims to meet the priority needs of both parties, without compromising or giving up our genuine concerns. This creates the potential for lasting and effective resolutions, increased understanding, and stronger relationship between the parties. The course will emphasize learning and applying practical skills for analyzing the sources of conflict, managing emotions and communicating in ways that promote constructive conflict resolution.

**Course Objectives**

The course will enable you to:

- identify different styles of approaching conflict, and your own style preference;
- distinguish between positions and needs in conflict;
- better handle anger and other emotions in the negotiation process (your own and other’s);

- reframe conflicts that appear to be “win-lose” situations;
- recognize the role culture, including organizational culture, plays in conflict;
- use active listening skills to promote perspective-taking;
- communicate needs and concerns without judgment or blame;
- identify the stages necessary to successful negotiation;
- understand the purpose and principles of mediation.

### **Required Reading**

Alson, Sheila, and Burnett, Gayle (2003). *Peace in Everyday Relationships*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House, Publishers.

Additional required articles will be distributed in class or made available electronically.

### **Course Requirements**

In “Managing Conflict”, you will be assessed on your understanding of key concepts, and your ability to use conflict resolution skills. Your final grade will be based on **class participation (25%)** and **written work (75%)**.

**Class participation:** We learn new ways of handling conflict not just by talking about them, but by trying them out. Conflict resolution is a skill-building process that requires your full participation. Participation allows you to see how both your knowledge and your skills are developing during the course. Regular attendance and punctuality are essential to participation (see **Attendance Policy** below). Your grade for class participation will include:

- **Participation in Class Discussions:** This class will involve many types of discussions – in the full group, in pairs, and in small groups. The **quality** of your contributions to discussions is more important than the **quantity**. Participation in class discussions counts as 10% of your final grade. Good class participation may include (but is not limited to):
  - Sharing your understanding of a concept or idea
  - Discussing how a concept might apply to your life
  - Asking a question (to the instructor or a student) for clarification or insight
  - Paraphrasing another student for clarification or insight

- Reflecting another student's emotions
  - Summarizing what others have said
  - Pointing out similarities or differences in what others have said
  - Suggesting another way of looking at a problem
  - Supporting another student who is having difficulty
- **Discussion Starters**: As part of the participation requirement, each student will be asked to start a discussion on one of the reading assignments. More details about what is expected will be provided in class. This counts as 5% of your final grade.
  - **Group Presentation**: Each class member will be part of a small home group that will meet regularly to explore in depth a conflict that members share with the small group. Your group will choose one of these conflicts and make a presentation about it to the class. The presentation is an opportunity for you to show your understanding of the concepts taught in the class, and to share with others about how those concepts might be applied to a new situation, and everyone in the group is expected to participate. You will be given time to work on this presentation in class. More information on expectations for the presentation will be given in class. The presentation counts toward 10% of your final grade.

**Written work:** Written assignments have been designed as opportunities for you to show your understanding of concepts covered in class, and practice skills for managing conflict. Expectations for each written assignment will be discussed in class. Written assignments include:

- **Conflict Description**: You will be asked to write a 1-2 page description of a conflict that you have experienced, and that you would like to use as a “case study” throughout the course. This can be a conflict from the past, on one you are currently involved in, preferably from your workplace. It should be a conflict that had or has some emotional content for you. You don't have to analyze the conflict – just describe it as if it was a story, or the plot of a movie. This counts toward 5% of your final grade.
- **Reading Responses**: These are short (about 2 pages) reflections on chapters from the textbook. They are a chance to demonstrate your understanding of the concepts explored in the chapters, to consider how they might be applied in your own life, and to reflect on how your understanding of conflict resolution processes is changing during the course. There will be 3 Reading Responses; each is worth 5% of your final grade (15% total).

- **Written Exercises:** These are short (about 2 pages) exercises in which you show how you can apply a skill discussed in class to an actual conflict situation in your life. There will be 3 Written Exercises to complete. Each is worth 5% of your final grade (15%) total.
- **Journals:** Beginning with class #3 (Sept. 17), you will be asked to keep a journal through the end of the course. The purpose and format of the journal will be explained in detail in class. Your journals will not be graded. However, completing them is required, and will count toward 10% of your final grade.
- **Workplace Conflict Analysis:** You will re-visit the conflict that you wrote about in your “Conflict Description” and discuss what might have been done differently, using concepts and models presented in class. More details will be given in class. Suggested length: 4-5 pages. This paper counts as 15% of your final grade.
- **Group Process Paper:** This paper is a chance to apply what you are learning about conflict resolution to the process of working with a group to prepare a presentation. You will be expected to write about your group, focusing on any conflicts that arose, and how your group handled them – or on how your group worked together to prevent conflict from arising. The focus for this paper will be your own actions. More details on this paper will be provided in class. The paper counts toward 15% of your final grade.

### **Requirements for Written Work**

Your written work may be turned in as hard copies, or as email attachments.

- Papers turned in as hard copies must be typed, and pages stapled. NO folders or plastic sheet protectors.
- Papers turned in as email attachments **MUST** be saved with your name, and **MUST** have your name on the first page. Papers turned in by email are due on the same date as hard copy papers. They will be returned to you, with comments and grade, by email – I WILL NOT print papers sent by email.

For all papers:

- Use 12 point font, double spaced, and 1 inch margins.
- The first page of each assignment must include: your name, name of the class (PSY 290: Managing Conflict – Fall 2013), assignment title (for example, “Reading Response #1”), and due date.

**Attendance policy**

Please plan to attend every class session. Students who miss two or more classes may be asked to complete an additional written assignment, and/or the final grade for the course may be lowered. Repeated lateness (or early departures) will cumulatively count toward absences. It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor and/or the counsellor if she/he cannot attend class.

**Homework policy**

If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, please contact the instructor to discuss a possible extension. The grade on homework that is turned in late will be lowered by one half grade for each week it is late. If you are absent from class, you are responsible for getting the assignment from the instructor or another class member, and bringing it to the next class.

**Cell phone/Texting policy**

Use of cell phones for texting or calling during class is disruptive and inappropriate. Please refrain from taking personal calls, or receiving or sending text messages, while class is in session. Cell phone use during class time must be restricted to emergency situations and otherwise should be reserved for the break. Please turn off cell phones, or set them on vibrate, while class is in session.

**Plagiarism policy**

Plagiarism means presenting material written by someone else (an author, another student, a website) as if it was your own. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Ways to appropriately quote from a book, article or website will be discussed in class. Any student who plagiarizes will receive an automatic grade of **F** on the assignment and the final grade in the course will be adversely affected. Incidents of plagiarism will be reported to the Director of the Off-Campus College. If you have concerns about plagiarism, please discuss them with the instructor or counsellor before turning in an assignment.

## PSY 290: Managing Conflict: Course Outline

Fall 2013

This outline is subject to change, according to the needs of the class.

Class/Date	Topic	Reading due	Written assignment due
Class #1: Sept. 3	Introduction to conflict resolution		
Class #2: Sept. 10	Elements of a collaborative approach to conflict resolution	Peace In Everyday Relationships (PiER), Preface, Introduction, Ch. 1.	Workplace conflict description (1-2 pages). Bring 2 copies.
Class #3: Sept. 17	Anger and other strong emotions in conflict	PiER, Ch. 2.	Reading Response #1
Class #4: Sept. 24	Centering and managing our own emotions in conflict	PiER, Ch. 3 and 4.	Exercise #1: Identifying Triggers (PiER pp. 46-48). (1-2 pages)
Class #5: Oct. 1	What is conflict really about? Escalation and de-escalation	PiER, Ch. 5, 8, 9	
Class #6: Oct. 8	Issues of culture and identity in conflict	PiER, Ch. 6 and 7.	Reading Response #2
Oct. 15	NO CLASS		
Class #7: Oct. 22	Communication skills: Active listening, part 1	PiER, Ch. 10 and 11.	
Class #8: Oct. 29	Communication skills: Active listening, part 2	Burley Allen, "Listening, the Forgotten Skill" (Ch. 5)	Exercise #2: Listening Assessment (Burley-Allen, pp. 107-112). (2 pages)
Class #9: Nov. 5	Communication skills: Expressing our needs, part 1	PiER, Ch. 12.	Exercise #3: Active Listening (PiER pp. 139-140) (2 pages)
Class #10: Nov. 12	Communication skills: Expressing our needs, part 2	Rosenberg, "Nonviolent Communication", Ch. 3, 4, 5	Reading Response #3
Class #11: Nov. 19	Negotiation skills, part 1	PiER, Ch. 14	
Class #12: Nov. 26	Negotiation skills, part 2	PiER, Ch. 13	Workplace Conflict Analysis
Class #13: Dec. 3	Difficult behaviors in negotiation, part 1	PiER, Ch. 15	



<b>Class/Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading due</b>	<b>Written assignment due</b>
Class #14: Dec. 10	Difficult behaviors in negotiation, part 2	One article to be announced	Group Process Paper
Class #15: Dec. 17	Group presentations		

## Appendix B

## Informed Consent Form

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Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000  
[www.tc.edu](http://www.tc.edu)

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:** You are invited to participate in a research study on how adults learn to manage the strong emotions that often come up in situations of conflict.

The study involves participation in activities as part of the “Managing Conflict” class (PSY 290), including learning new ways of thinking about what causes conflicts; practicing communication skills; role plays; learning about emotions and ways to deal with them, including mindfulness (a way of using your breath to become more aware of your thoughts and feelings); and group work to reflect on how you handle conflict. All students in the course will have the same classroom activities, readings and homework assignments, regardless of their participation in the study.

The following four written activities are a part of the class for all students. For students who agree to be a part of the research study, these writings will be collected and analyzed:

- A short questionnaire that asks for some information about you;
- An essay about a conflict scenario, written during both the first and last class;
- A weekly journal on mindfulness practice, or other ways you manage your emotions;
- A description of a conflict you have been involved in, and a paper analyzing it.

There are also three activities **ONLY** for students who agree to be part of the study. These are:

- A pre-class interview (15-30 min.) describing how you usually handle conflict, and giving an example, if possible;
- An interview after the class is over (60-90 min.), discussing what parts of the class helped you manage strong emotions better in conflicts;
- An **OPTIONAL** focus group (to be scheduled about 9 months after the end of the class), where students can discuss the study findings with the instructor.

Interviews will be audio-taped. Tapes will not be used for any other purpose, but transcribed portions of the audio tapes may be used in later publications or shown at conferences with your permission. If you don't want to be audiotaped, the interviewer will take notes on the interview, which may be used in the final report. Your actual name will not be used in the final report.

The research will be conducted by Susan Fountain, who will also be the instructor for the course. The first interview will be conducted by a research assistant. The research will be conducted at CUNY's Off-Campus College at 119 West 31<sup>st</sup> Street in Manhattan.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The research has the same amount of risk students might encounter during usual classroom activities. Students in the class will be asked to keep each other's personal information confidential, but there is some risk that not everyone will do so. Students will always have control over what information they choose to share.

While you will not be required to share information that you wish to keep private, sometimes discussing a past or present conflict may bring up emotions. It is possible that trying new ways of handling conflict can feel uncomfortable at first. You will always have the option to "pass" on participating in an activity if you feel uncomfortable; you can observe the activity instead.

There are no direct benefits involved in participating in the study.

Students who choose to participate in the optional focus group will be asked to keep information discussed confidential. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that participants will do so.

PAYMENTS: Students who complete two interviews (one before the class, and one after final grades have been turned in) will receive \$25.

PARTICIPATION AS THE STUDENT'S CHOICE: The course instructor is also the researcher. But no student who wants to take the course should feel coerced to participate in the study. Participation in the study is optional. If you do not wish to be part of the study, you can still take the course. Your decision about participating will not affect your grade in the course. The course instructor will not know who has agreed, or not agreed, to participate in the study until after final course grades have been submitted.

DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: A research assistant will discuss the study with you, and collect your signed "Participant's Rights Form", if you agree to participate in the study. A copy will be returned to you. To protect your confidentiality, the research assistant will keep the original forms until after the grades for the course have been turned in – the instructor will not know who is participating in the study until final grades are completed.

Your pre- and post-class writing samples and weekly journals will be identified by a code that you will be given, not by your name. The instructor will not be given the list of codes

until after final grades for the class have been turned in, and the final interview has been completed.

All written materials completed as part of the study will be kept in a locked file box. The Off-Campus College staff will not have access to these materials.

The pre-class interview will be done by a research assistant. The content of the interview will not be shared with the instructor until after final grades for the class have been turned in, and the final interview has been completed.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: The “Managing Conflict” class meets once a week for 15 weeks. Each class is 2.5 hours long. All students enrolled in the class (regardless of participation in the study) will spend time outside of class reading, doing homework, and keeping a short journal. For students who take part in the study, the estimated total time for interviews outside of class time is no more than two hours.

HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: The results of the study will be used for the researcher’s doctoral dissertation. An article on the study may also be submitted for publication in a journal, and results of the study may be presented at a conference.

## Appendix C

Participant's Rights Form

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Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000  
[www.tc.edu](http://www.tc.edu)

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS**

Principal Investigator: Susan Fountain

Research Title: "The Development of Emotional Self-Management in the Context of a Conflict Resolution Course for Adults" (working title)

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher's assistant. I have had the chance to ask questions about the purposes and procedures of this study.
- My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or end my participation at any time without any effect on my course grade or student status.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research if she feels it is in my best interests to do so.
- If, during the course of the study, new information becomes available which may affect my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information that comes from the research project that personally identifies me will not be shared with others without my separate agreement, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions about the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (845) 485-3266. The investigator's email address is [shf11@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:shf11@tc.columbia.edu).
- If at any time I have comments or concerns about how the research is being carried out, or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The

phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.

- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- I understand that if I choose to participate in the optional focus group at the end of the study, the researcher cannot guarantee that information discussed will be kept confidential by participants.
- I understand that audio taping of interviews is part of this research:

( ) I agree to be audio taped.

( ) I do NOT agree to be audio taped.

I understand that the written and audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator and the research assistant. If I do not agree to be audio taped, the interviewer may take notes during the interview. Any portions of the interviews (either taped or in note form) that are used in the final report will not reveal my actual name.

- Written and audio taped materials:
  - ( ) may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
  - ( ) may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to \_\_\_\_\_ (participant's name) in age-appropriate language. He/She has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e. assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D  
Demographic Information Form

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Please answer provide as much of the following information as you are comfortable sharing. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer.

YOUR CODE: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please do not put your name on this form.)

Gender (optional): Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Age (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Race/ethnicity  
(optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Job title: \_\_\_\_\_

School/organization you work for:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Job Location:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Number of years in current job:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Highest level of education completed:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Number of college credits taken at Off-Campus College:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Names of any certificates earned from Off-Campus College:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Number of college credits taken elsewhere (please indicate where):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever taken a course, workshop or training related to conflict resolution? (for example, interpersonal behavior, communication skills/listening, anger management, stress reduction, etc.)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please describe briefly:

Where was the class taken? \_\_\_\_\_

When was the class taken? \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for providing this information!**



## Appendix E

### Pre-Class Interview Protocol

---

#### **Introduction:**

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. As part of our research study, I'd like to ask you some questions about your recent experiences with conflict. I'll be asking you about a conflict you have been involved in -- please feel free to share as much or as little information as you are comfortable with. There is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions that I will ask you. If there is a question you would prefer not to answer, you can just tell me that, and we will move on to the next question.

Do you have any questions for me about the interview?  
Are you willing to go ahead with the interview?

Before we begin, I want to ask your permission to record the interview. The audio recording will not be used for any purpose outside of the research. Also, the class instructor will not have access to this recording until after the final grades for the class are turned in, and after she has done the final interview with you. This is to insure that your privacy is protected, and that nothing you say in the interview will affect the instructor's attitude toward you during the course. If the course instructor quotes from the interview in her dissertation, she will not identify anything you say with your real name. She will also change any specific information you share that might reveal your identity (for example, the name of someone you work with, or the place that you work).

Do you have any questions for me about recording the interview?  
Do you give me permission to record the interview?

Thanks, let's begin!

#### **Interview questions:**

1. What led you to sign up for this course?
2. Have you ever taken a course on anything related to conflict resolution before?

3. Can you think of a time recently when you were in conflict with another adult that you know?

*If yes, proceed to Question 4.*

*If no, allow a little more time. Try using some prompts such as,*

- “It might have been a ‘fight’, or more of a disagreement or difference of opinion...”
- “It may be a conflict that the other person knew about because you talked about it... or it may be a conflict that you didn’t talk to the other person about...”
- “It might be a conflict that took place at home, or at work, or at an organization that you belong to in the community..”.

4. Can you describe the conflict?

*Depending on how complete a description is provided, you may want to use prompts such as:*

- What did the other person do?
- What did the other person say?
- What did you do?
- What did you say?
- How did the conflict turn out?
- How did you feel about the way it turned out? What was your reason for feeling this way?

5. Would you say that the way you handled this conflict is similar to what you usually do in conflict?

- Can you tell me anything else about how you usually handle conflicts?

6. When you are in conflict, do you ever feel strong emotions come up?

*If yes:*

- Can you name the kinds of feelings you have had?
- Do you think those emotions affect you in a conflict?  
(If yes, ask “How do they affect you?”)
- What do you usually do when you feel those emotions come up?  
(If a strategy for managing emotions is mentioned, ask, “How did you learn to do that?”)

*If no:*

- Do you ever feel strong emotions come up after a conflict is over?  
*(If no, go on to question #7.)*
- Can you name the kinds of feelings you have had after a conflict?
- What do you usually do when you feel those emotions come up?  
*(If a strategy for managing emotions is mentioned, ask, “How did you learn to do that?”*

7. *(If this information has not already been provided):* So, to summarize, how would you complete this sentence: “My usual way of handling conflict is....”

- How did you learn this way of handling conflict?

**Closing the interview:**

This has been very helpful! Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Again, I will keep this recording in a secure place, and it will only be given to the instructor after final grades are turned in, and the final interview has been completed. Thank you for participating in this part of the research study!

## Appendix F

Weekly Journal Form

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**Journal #1: Due Sept. 17, 2013****YOUR CODE** \_\_\_\_\_ (Please do not put your name on this form.)

Use this “journal” to record your experiences with mindfulness practice each week (you will be given a new journal page in class each week). Please record:

- How many minutes did you practice mindfulness, or another centering practice, each day (if at all)?
- What time of the day did you practice? (may be more than once)?
- Did you notice any physical sensations, emotion, thoughts, insights, etc. while practicing that you would like to share?
- Did you notice anything at other times of the day that you connect with doing the mindfulness practice? (Add an additional sheet of paper if you need more space.)

Please be accurate in what you report! Don’t exaggerate the amount of time you spend on mindfulness practice -- if you didn’t do it at all, just write “0 minutes”. Your journals will be most useful if you are completely honest in your reactions. You will receive course credit for turning in all the journals; content will not be graded.

**Tuesday, Sept. 10****Wednesday, Sept. 11****Thursday, Sept. 12****Friday, Sept. 13****Saturday, Sept. 14****Sunday, Sept. 15****Monday, Sept. 16**

## Appendix G

### Post-Class Interview Protocol

---

#### **Introduction:**

I'm interested in learning about how the Managing Conflict class affects students. I'll be asking you some questions about some of the activities we did in the class, and which ones, if any, are things that you found useful, or that you still use. I'll also be asking about how you handle conflict, and will ask you about a specific example of a recent conflict, if you have one.

There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I will ask! Please feel free to share only as much information as you are comfortable sharing. If there is a question you would prefer not to answer, you can just tell me that, and we will move on to the next question.

What will be most useful in this interview is your complete honesty. Don't feel you have to tell me what you think I might want to hear. You are not being graded on this! Your frank responses will help me improve the course, and benefit future students.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?  
Are you willing to go ahead with the interview?

Before we begin, I want to ask your permission to record the interview. The audio recording will not be used for any purpose outside of the research. If I quote from the interview in my dissertation, I will not identify anything you say with your real name. I will also change any specific information you share that might reveal your identity (for example, the name of someone you work with, or the place that you work).

Do you have any questions for me about recording the interview?  
Will you allow me to record the interview?

#### **Interview Questions:**

1. As you think back on the Managing Conflict class, what stands out for you about it?

*Possible questions to explore further, depending on response:*

- Can you say more about that?
- What was it that made this stand out for you?
- What thoughts or feelings came up for you about this?
- What was this like for you?

- Have you used this in your daily life?
    - If so, how?
    - When?
    - Can you give an example?
2. Can you think of a conflict that you have been involved in recently? Can you describe it?

*Possible questions to explore further, depending on response:*

- What did the other person do?
  - What did the other person say?
  - What did you do?
  - What did you say?
  - How did the conflict turn out?
  - How did you feel about the way it turned out?
  - What was your reason for feeling this way?
3. Would you say that the way you handled this conflict is similar to the way you have handled conflict in the past?
- If not, what has changed?
    - How did that change come about?
  - How would you describe your typical way of handling conflict at this time?
4. When you are in conflict, do you feel strong emotions come up?

If yes:

- Can you name the kinds of feelings you have had?
- Do you think those emotions affect you in a conflict?
  - If yes, “How do they affect you?”
- What do you usually do when you feel those emotions come up?
  - If a strategy for managing emotions is mentioned, “How did you learn to do that?”

If no:

- Do you ever feel strong emotions come up after a conflict is over?
- Can you name the kinds of feelings you have had after a conflict?
- What do you usually do when you feel those emotions come up?
  - If a strategy for managing emotions is mentioned, ask, “How did you learn to do that?”

5. *(If specific mention of mindfulness has not yet come up in the interview):* I'd like to ask about the mindfulness practice that we used in class. What was that like for you?

*Possible questions to explore further, depending on response:*

- How often would you say you did mindfulness practice on your own during the class? For how long? When? Where?
- What did you notice about doing mindfulness practice?
- What did you think about it?
- What did it feel like?
- Did you ever notice the experience of mindfulness at times of the day when you weren't doing the practice? If so, can you explain?
- Have you ever noticed the experience of mindfulness in a conflict situation? If so, can you explain?
- Do you still do mindfulness practice? Why or why not?

### **Closing the interview:**

This has been very helpful! Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and I will change your name in the dissertation report to protect your confidentiality. I will also change any specific information that you mentioned in the interview today that might reveal your identity.

After I finish analyzing all the interviews, I will be holding a focus group (probably in September or October of 2014). The focus group is a chance for me to tell everyone who participated in the study about my findings; it's also a chance for you to tell me if you think my interpretations are correct. Coming to the focus group is optional. I must tell everyone that while I will ask anyone who comes to the group to keep other people's information confidential, I can't guarantee that people will do so after they leave the group.

Would you like me to contact you about attending the focus group when I schedule it?

Thank you again for participating in this part of the research study!

*(Provide subject with compensation.)*

## Appendix H

## Sample Mindfulness Practice Script

This is an example of the way a mindfulness practice session in class was introduced in the early part of the course. Subjects who did not wish to participate could do something quiet in their seats, such as review the readings for the evening's class. Subjects who did participate were instructed to find a comfortable seated position, to notice any areas of tension, or its absence, in their bodies, and to then bring their attention to their breath. Thoughts and feelings inevitably arise during mindfulness practice; subjects were instructed to label those thoughts or feelings, and let them go, returning attention to the breath. To close the session, subjects were instructed to expand their attention outward to the sounds in the room, to stretch or move their bodies, and to look around the room as a way of re-focusing attention.

As subjects became more familiar with mindfulness practice, less of this "script" was used, and periods of silence (denoted by "...") become longer. The class started with practicing mindfulness for only a minute or two, and built up to 5 minutes or more.

*Take a few moments to find a comfortable, upright seated position.... Let your hands relax in your lap.... You may want to close your eyes, or you may want to keep them open, but just gazing down at the floor in front of you.*

*Bring your attention to how your body is feeling right now.... Is it tight? Relaxed? Does it want to move?.... Take some time to shift your position, so you can feel comfortable and settled for the next few minutes.*

*Now bring your attention to your feet and feel them touching the floor.... Now notice how your lower legs feel.... Notice your thighs, and where they make contact with the chair; how does that feel? .... Notice where your back touches the chair.... Notice your arms; are they relaxed? Loose? Tight? .... Notice where your hands and your arms are touching your body, or maybe the chair.... Now bring your attention to your neck, and just check in to see how it is feeling.... Notice your head.... Does it feel light? Heavy? .... Notice that place where your neck and your head come together.*

*Now bring your attention to your breath. Breathe normally through your nose.... You may want to place one hand on your upper chest, and one hand on your belly. As you breathe, notice if your hands are moving....Don't try to force your breath to be faster or slower, deeper or shallower... Just notice your breath.... Inhaling.... Exhaling....*

*Keep breathing and noticing.... You may want to focus your attention on the feeling of air as it comes in and goes out of your nostrils....*



*If a thought comes up that distracts you from your breath, just notice it, gently let it go, and return your attention to your breath....*

*You may want to label those thoughts as they come up.... “worrying”.... “planning”....*

*If you notice an emotion come up, try to label that as well.... “peaceful”.... “bored”.... “tired” ... Just name it and then return your attention to your breath...*

.....

*As we get ready to “come back” shift your attention to the sounds in the room, and notice what you hear.... And keep breathing....*

*And when you are ready, you can open your eyes if they were closed.... You may want to stretch a little.... Look around the room....*

*Thank you.*

## Appendix I

## Conflict Behavior, as Described in Pre- and Post-Class Interviews

Types of conflict behaviors are based on Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument.

Where more than one type of conflict behavior was mentioned, the most-frequently mentioned is listed first.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Pre-Class Interview</b>	<b>Post-class Interview</b>
Barbara	Collaborating Competing	Collaborating
Elizabeth	Competing	Collaborating
Frances	Compromising Avoiding	Collaborating
Harriet	Competing Avoiding	Collaborating
Jackie	Competing Avoiding	Avoiding
Lisa	Avoiding Competing	Collaborating
Louise	Competing Accommodating	Competing Collaborating Avoiding
Margaret	Competing*	Collaborating
Nina	Avoiding*	Collaborating
Rita	Avoiding Collaborating	Collaborating
Sarah	Competing	Avoiding Accommodating Competing
Tanya	Avoiding Competing	Avoiding
Viola	Avoiding Collaborating	Collaborating
Yvonne	Competing Avoiding	Collaborating

\*No pre-class interview; description is based on subjects' retrospective recall during post-class interview.

## Appendix J

Initial Set of Codes

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## Experience of Mindfulness

- Conflict style
- Cognitive aspects
- Emotional aspects
- Physical aspects
- Spiritual aspects

## Emotional self-management (ESM)

- ESM behaviors
- ESM cognitions
- ESM emotions
- ESM physical sensations
- ESM – how learned
- ESM and mindfulness
- ESM and other strategies
- ESM motivation for

## Transfer of learning (TOL)

- TOL of course strategies: linked to mindfulness
- TOL of course strategies: not linked to mindfulness
- TOL doesn't work in my conflict
- How others react to subject
- What others say about subject
- Subject tries to teach others course skills
- Subject tries to teach others mindfulness

## Appendix K

## An Interim Set of Codes

**I. Emotional Self-Management (ESM)**

- A. Interrupting automaticity
- B. Self-awareness
  - Physical
  - Emotional
    - Sources of emotions
    - Choice/control over emotions
  - Thoughts
    - Focus
    - Clarity
    - Metacognition
      - Aware of making interpretations, assumptions
      - Aware of judging
      - Letting go of judging
- C. Other awareness
  - Other's needs
  - Other's feelings
  - Seeking to understand the other
  - Difficulty understanding the other
- D. Understanding conflict
  - The nature of conflict
    - What is and is not under subjects' control
  - Causes
  - Goals
  - Options
  - Own role in conflict
    - Self-judgment
- E. Intentional use of mindfulness in ESM
  - To prepare
  - During conflict
  - Integrated into approach
- F. Other ESM strategies
  - Linked to mindfulness
  - Not linked to mindfulness
- G. Emotional dysregulation

## II. Transfer of Learning (TOL)

- A. Knowledge, skills attitudes in TOL
  - Attitudes, orientations -- positive
  - Attitudes, orientations -- negative
  - Knowledge, concepts
  - Skills – used constructively
  - Skills – used destructively
- B. ESM in TOL
  - Self-awareness
    - Emotional
    - Physical
    - Thoughts
      - Focus
      - Clarity
      - Aware of own assumptions, interpretations
      - Letting go of judgment
- C. Understanding of conflict
  - Causes
  - Goals
  - Options
  - Nature of conflict
    - What is and is not under one's control
- D. Interrupting automaticity
  - Using mindfulness
  - Using other strategies
  - Difficulty interrupting automaticity
- E. Other-awareness
  - Aware of others' needs, feelings
  - Seeking to better understand other
  - Difficulty in understanding other
- F. Strategies used
  - Intentional use of mindfulness
    - To prepare for conflict
    - During conflict
      - As integrated into approach to conflict
  - Other strategies used
    - Self-talk without mindfulness
    - Self-talk with mindfulness
    - Self-reflection without mindfulness
    - Self-reflection with mindfulness
    - Suppressing own emotions
    - Less frequently used strategies

## Appendix L

Final Set of Codes

---

Note: This set of codes was applied to the sections of the post-class interviews that pertained to interpersonal conflicts which subjects experienced following the end of the course.

## Emotional Self-Management

- Able to interrupt automaticity
  - Interrupted automaticity using mindfulness
  - Interrupted automaticity using other strategies
- Reported difficulty interrupting automaticity

## Transfer of Learning

- Analytic Skills
  - Identify cause of conflict
  - Identify needs of other
  - Identify own needs
  - Identify goals
  - Identify options
  - Use of specific course concepts
- Communication Skills
  - Expressive
    - Assertiveness
    - Modification of non-verbal behavior
    - Calming the other
    - Apologize
  - Receptive
    - Attentive listening
    - Asking open-ended questions
    - Paraphrasing
- Mindful Awareness used in Conflict

## Self-Awareness

- Emotions
  - Range of emotions
  - Sources of emotions
  - Sense of control or choice over emotions

- Thoughts
  - Clarity
  - Identifies own assumptions/interpretations
  - Identifies own role in conflict
  - Examines/shifts perspective
- Physical Sensations

#### Stance Toward Mindfulness

- Motivation for practicing mindfulness
  - Relaxation, calming
  - Sleep
  - Insight/self-awareness
  - Relaxation, calming that leads to insight/self-awareness
  - Other
- What is noticed during mindfulness practice
  - Emotions
  - Thoughts
  - Insight
  - Distracting
  - Physical sensations
- Reactions to mindfulness practice
  - Positive (continues, describes benefits)
  - Negative (doesn't continue, frustrated, doesn't see benefits)
  - Mixed

## Appendix M

## Interpretation Outline Tool

**Analytic Category #1: Quantitative and qualitative understandings of the influence of mindfulness**

Analytic Category #1 address both Finding #1 and Finding #2.

**Finding #1:** Subjects' self-reported frequency of mindfulness practice (along with other quantitative descriptors) does not appear to be associated with reports of self-management or transfer of learning.

**Finding #2:** A qualitative descriptor, subjects' stance toward mindfulness, appears to be associated with the reports of self-regulation and transfer of learning in post-class conflicts.

Finding #1: A quantitative measure, frequency of practice, did not seem meaningful in terms of influencing emotional self-management and transfer of learning, for the most part.

Why not?

*Possible inadequacy of frequency of practice as a measure*

- Frequency likely is influential, but it may not be the most important factor in determining how subjects respond in conflict situations.
- Looking at frequency of practice alone doesn't reveal what subjects were actually doing when they were practicing.
- Assessing frequency of practice does not indicate the intention of subjects when practicing, and how they understand the purpose of practice.
- Frequency addresses the quantity of practice, but doesn't assess the practitioner's state of mind.
- Maybe one session of high quality mindfulness practice per week is more effective than multiple sessions of low quality practice.



*Possible impact of the design of the study*

- The design of the study itself – having subjects log their frequency of practice and record how long they practiced – may have caused some subjects to focus exclusively on meeting those requirements, to the detriment of really noticing internal shifts.
- Subjects with the self-soothing stance were practicing with a particular instrumental focus – they wanted to achieve relaxation, sleep. This may have interfered with the development of attention and self-awareness, as the focus was more on results.

*Different interpretations of mindfulness practice*

- Subjects may have understood the purpose of mindfulness practice in a way that was different from what the researcher intended.
- Subjects are active constructors of meaning, and may have brought their own interpretations to mindfulness practice.
- The researcher (who was also the course instructor) may not have been explicit about the purpose of mindfulness in the course.

Finding #2: A qualitative measure, stance toward mindfulness, appeared to be meaningful in terms of influencing emotional self-management and transfer of learning, for the most part.

Why?

*The difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches to research*

- A qualitative measure may provide a better understanding of a subjective experience such as mindfulness.
- A qualitative measure may be better at answering how a phenomenon happens than a quantitative measure

*Intention may matter*

- The intention with which one practices mindfulness may be more influential than frequency.
- Practicing with the intention to be self-aware may carry over into real life more effectively than frequency.
- However, the mention of “intention” was noticeably absent from the self-awareness group’s descriptions. Rather than having a specific intention, they seemed to practice with an openness to whatever emerged – whether that was awareness of their own emotions or thoughts, insight into the other party, or insight into the nature of the conflict. Without a specific objective in mind,

subjects in this group may have been open to multiple effects of mindfulness practice. They were noticing their experience and reporting it, rather than monitoring to see whether or not they were achieving a specific outcome.

*Personal characteristics of the subjects*

- Subjects who enroll in a course on conflict resolution may be inclined to be self-reflective; this may have cause stance on mindfulness to be more salient.
- Subjects with a high level of self-awareness or related personal traits may naturally interpret mindfulness practice as one that influences self-awareness.
- Assessing stance may be more a description of the personal traits of the subjects than any actual impact of mindfulness practice.

*Types of conflicts*

- These were mostly conflicts about relationship issues – trust, respect, bias, power, etc., rather than tangible issues (money, time, etc.) This may have influenced the types of issues subjects were reporting,

Links to literature on the purposes of quantitative vs. qualitative research; mindfulness literature on dose response; literature from the adult learning field on how adults construct meaning; mindfulness research related to personality types (Five Factor Model); role of intention/motivation to practice mindfulness.

**Analytic Category #2: The impact of mindfulness on emotional self-management**

Analytic Category #2 addresses Finding #3:

**Finding 3:** In describing the influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management, some subjects described anger as the primary emotion they had to manage, while others described fear as the primary emotion. Different emotional self-management strategies were used, depending on whether anger or fear was the primary emotion, but stance toward mindfulness was reported as influential by both groups.

Why?

*The nature of mindfulness practice*

- The focused attention cultivated in mindfulness practice may enable subjects to notice their emotional responses.
- One cannot interrupt habitual responses to conflict unless one first notices them.

*Individual differences in subjects*

- The ability to notice and think about one's own thoughts and feelings – metacognition – requires an ability to hold them as “objects”, rather than being “subject” to them. Subjects may have differed in their metacognitive abilities.
- The developmental level of subjects (using Kegan's model) may determine the stance that one takes toward mindfulness; they may differ in their position on “subject-object” relations.

*Expanding a limited view of emotional self-management*

- Anger is not the only emotion that has to be managed in conflict, even if it is the one that is most addressed in the literature.
- Fear-based responses to conflict have tended not to be addressed in the literature – perhaps because the strategies resulting from fear tend to be avoidance or accommodation, which tend to mask conflict.
- For some subjects who report anger, the primary emotion may actually be fear.

*There's more than one way to manage emotions*

- Some subjects reported self-management strategies other than mindfulness – principally self-talk and self-reflection.
- Mindfulness practice isn't the only path to emotional self-management.
- Using mindfulness for self-soothing, calming, relaxation can be beneficial. For many people, greater attention and self-awareness and insight arise out of deep relaxation, but not all.
- The impacts of mindfulness can be seen along a continuum from relaxation to insight. At the time of the interviews, subjects may have been at different points along that continuum, but they also may have been “in motion” along that continuum.

Links to literature: Kegan's constructive developmental theory; literature on attention in mindfulness research; literature on mindfulness and emotional self-management.

**Analytic Category #3: The link between emotional self-management and transfer of learning**

Analytic Category #3 addresses Finding #4.

**Finding #4:** Subjects who were able to manage their emotions successfully in post-class conflicts also reported transfer of learning more frequently.

Why?

*The mechanism of mindfulness*

- Mindfulness created a pause that supported self-management. In that pause, subjects appear to be able to recall skills learned in the course, and make decisions about which ones to use.
- Mindfulness may support the capacity for self-reflection, particularly reflection-in-action.

*Emotions impact learning – and learning transfer*

- Stress interferes with recall and learning. When stress is reduced, learning may be more likely.
- Self-management halts escalation; in a de-escalated conflict, subject may be more likely to use learned skills.

*Individual differences*

- Some subjects may be better at applying what is learned for reasons that have little to do with mindfulness or self-regulation.
- For example, learning styles could influence transfer (for example, a subject who favors “active experimentation” in Kolb’s learning cycle may be more likely to transfer learning)

Links to literature: literature on reflection-in-action (Schön). Literature on stress and learning. Literature on mindfulness and learning (relates to attention?). Transfer of learning literature on social and emotional skills. Literature on learning modalities and transfer.

**Analytic Category #4: Self-awareness as foundational to emotional self-management and transfer of learning**

Analytic Category #4 addresses Finding #5.

**Finding #5:** Self-awareness – emotional, cognitive, and physical – may support emotional self-management and transfer of learning.

Why?

*Mindfulness, emotional self-management, and transfer of learning are linked*

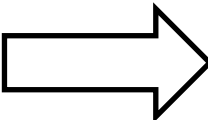
- In order to manage one’s emotions in conflict, one has to be aware of them.
- The ability to notice and reflect on one’s thoughts – metacognition – supports a more accurate view of the conflict (allows one to identify assumptions and interpretations that may not be accurate).

- With a more accurate view of conflict, one is more likely to transfer skills that are appropriate to, and effective in, addressing the conflict.

Links to literature: Boyatzis and Goleman ESC model (study confirms the foundational role of self-awareness), Coleman CIQ model.

## Appendix N

## Analytic Category Development Tool

Analytic Category Development			
Research Question	Finding Statement	Outcome/Consequence (in terms of Research Problem):	Analytic Category
1. Do adult learners' descriptions of emotional self-management and transfer of learning in conflict appear to be influenced by self-reported higher vs. lower frequencies of mindfulness practice during the course?	<b>Finding #1:</b> Subjects' self-reported frequency of mindfulness practice did not appear to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions.	How learners construct their understanding of mindfulness is may influence its impact on emotional self-management and transfer of learning.	Category #1 Understanding mindfulness through quantitative and qualitative lenses
	<b>Finding #2:</b> A qualitative descriptor, subjects' stance toward mindfulness, appeared to influence reports of themes related to self-management and transfer of learning in post-class conflict descriptions.		
2. How do adult learners in an undergraduate conflict resolution course describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) on emotional self-management during situations of interpersonal conflict?	<b>Finding #3:</b> In describing the influence of mindfulness on emotional self-management, some subjects described anger as the primary emotion they had to manage, while others described fear as the primary emotion. This had implications for the types of self-management strategies used.		Effective management of a range of emotions influences the ability to learn in situations of conflict.

Research Question	Finding Statement	Outcome/Consequence (in terms of Research Problem):	Analytic Category
3. How does this group of adult learners describe (through self-reports) the influence of mindfulness practice (if any) in supporting the transfer of learning of conflict resolution skills from the classroom into actual conflict situations?	<b>Finding #4:</b> Subjects who were able to manage their emotions successfully in post-class conflicts also reported transfer of learning more frequently, specifically of analytic skills, receptive communication skills, and the integration of mindfulness into one's approach to conflict.	Transfer of learning in the context of conflict resolution education implies that learners not only think differently about conflict, but act differently in situations of conflict.	Category #3  Being "mindful" in conflict
	<b>Finding #5:</b> Self-awareness – emotional, cognitive, and physical – may support emotional self-management and transfer of learning.	Developing self-awareness and emotional self-management may require methods other than those that are primarily analytic.	Category #4  Learning methods in conflict resolution education

## Appendix O

Emotional Self-Management in Post-class Conflict Descriptions: The Ability to Interrupt Automatic Reactions in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

Name	Frequency of mindfulness practice	Able to Interrupt Automaticity	Interrupted Automaticity Using Mindfulness	Interrupted Automaticity Using Strategies Other than Mindfulness	Reported Difficulty Interrupting Automatic Responses
<b>Higher frequency of practice</b>					
Margaret	H	X	x		
Nina	H	X	x		
Jackie	H				x
Elizabeth	H	X	x	x	
Yvonne	H				x
Sarah	H	X		x	x
Harriet	H	X		x	
Viola	H	X		x	x
Rita	H	X	x		
<b>Totals: Higher frequency:</b>		7	4	4	4
<b>Lower frequency of practice</b>					
Barbara	L	X	x	x	
Louise	L				x
Tanya	L	X	x	x	
Lisa	L	X		x	
Frances	L	X	x		
<b>Totals: Lower frequency:</b>		4	3	3	1



## Appendix P

Transfer of Learning: Analytic Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts,  
in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

Name	Frequency of mindfulness practice	Analytic Skills					
		Identify causes of conflict	Identify needs of other	Identify own needs	Identify goals	Identify options	Use of course concepts (anger volcano, fight-flight, conflict styles)
<b>Higher frequency of practice</b>							
Margaret	H	x	x	x			
Nina	H	x	x	x			
Jackie	H			x			
Elizabeth	H	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sarah	H			x			
Yvonne	H						
Harriet	H		x				
Viola	H	x		x	x		x
Rita	H	x	x	x	x		
<b>Totals: Higher frequency:</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Lower frequency of practice</b>							
Barbara	L	x					x
Louise	L		x	x	x	x	x
Tanya	L		x	x			x
Lisa	L	x		x			
Frances	L	x	x	x	x	x	
<b>Totals: Lower frequency:</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

## Appendix Q

Transfer of Learning: Communication Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts,  
in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

Name	Frequency of mindfulness practice	Expressive skills				Receptive skills		
		Assertiveness	Modify own non-verbal behavior	Calm the other	Apologize	Attentive listening	Ask open-ended questions	Paraphrase
Higher frequency of practice								
Margaret	H					x		x
Nina	H	x				x	x	
Jackie	H	x						
Elizabeth	H	x					x	
Sarah	H							
Yvonne	H	x			x			
Harriet	H	x	x			x		
Viola	H	x						
Rita	H	x					x	
Totals: Higher frequency:		7	1	0	1	3	3	1
Lower frequency of practice								
Barbara	L					x		
Louise	L	x						
Tanya	L	x						
Lisa	L	x				x		
Frances	L	x		x			x	x
Totals: Lower frequency:		4	0	1	0	2	1	1

## Appendix R

Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts  
and Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

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Name	Frequency of mindfulness practice (higher or lower)	Mindful awareness described in post-class conflict?
Higher frequency of practice		
Margaret	H	Yes
Nina	H	Yes/No
Jackie	H	No
Elizabeth	H	Yes
Yvonne	H	No
Sarah	H	No
Harriet	H	Yes/No
Viola	H	No
Rita	H	Yes
Total for higher frequency:		5
Lower frequency of practice		
Barbara	L	Yes
Louise	L	No
Tanya	L	Yes
Lisa	L	No
Frances	L	Yes
Total for lower frequency:		3

## Appendix S

## Length of Mindfulness Practice in Relation to Self Management, Transfer of Learning, and Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts

Longer length of practice: Nine minutes or more daily.

Shorter length of practice: Six minutes or less daily.

Name	Average length of daily mindfulness practice (minutes)	Able to interrupt automaticity	Difficulty interrupting automaticity	Transfer of learning: Analytic skills	Transfer of learning: Expressive Communication skills	Transfer of learning: Receptive communication skills	Mindful awareness in conflict
<b>Longer daily practice time</b>							
Yvonne	16		x		x		
Rita	15	x		x	x		x
Viola	13	x	x	x	x		
Margaret	11	x		x	x	x	x
Elizabeth	10	x		x	x	x	x
Harriet	9	x		x	x	x	x
Sarah	9	x	x	x			
<b>Totals: Longer practice time:</b>		6	3	6	6	3	4
Barbara	6	x		x		x	x
<b>Shorter daily practice time</b>							
Louise	5.5		x	x	x		
Tanya	5	x		x	x		x
Jackie	4		x	x	x		
Frances	3	x		x	x	x	x
Lisa	3	x		x	x	x	
Nina	3	x		x	x	x	x
<b>Totals: Shorter practice time:</b>		5	2	7	6	4	4

## Appendix T

Length of Descriptions of Experience of Mindfulness in Relation to Self Management,  
Transfer of Learning, and Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts

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Longer length of descriptions: 12% or more of total interview.

Shorter length of descriptions: 10% or less of total interview.

Name	Percentage of post-class interview focused on experience of mindfulness	Able to interrupt automaticity	Difficulty interrupting automaticity	Transfer of learning: Analytic skills	Transfer of learning: Expressive Communication skills	Transfer of learning: Receptive communication skills	Mindful awareness in conflict
<b>Longer descriptions</b>							
Barbara	33	x		x		x	x
Lisa	19	x		x	x	x	
Rita	17	x		x	x		x
Viola	17	x	x	x	x		
Tanya	16	x		x	x		x
Louise	13		x	x	x		
Harriet	12	x		x	x	x	x
Totals: Longer descriptions:		6	2	7	6	3	4
<b>Shorter descriptions</b>							
Nina	10	x		x	x	x	x
Frances	9	x		x	x	x	x
Jackie	9		x	x	x		
Margaret	8	x		x		x	x
Elizabeth	7	x		x	x	x	x
Sarah	5	x	x	x			
Yvonne	5		x		x		
Totals: Shorter descriptions:		5	3	6	5	4	4

## Appendix U

## Emotional Self-Management in Post-class Conflict Descriptions: The Ability to Interrupt Automatic Responses to Conflict in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness

Name	Stance toward mindfulness	Able to Interrupt Automaticity	Interrupted Automaticity Using Mindfulness	Interrupted Automaticity Using Strategies Other than Mindfulness	Reported Difficulty Interrupting Automatic Responses
<b>Group 1: Self-awareness</b>					
Barbara	1	x	x	x	
Elizabeth	1	x	x	x	
Frances	1	x	x		
Harriet	1	x		x	
Lisa	1	x		x	
Margaret	1	x	x		
Nina	1	x	x		
Rita	1	x	x		
Tanya	1	x	x	x	
Totals: Group 1 (self-awareness):		9	7	5	0
<b>Group 2: Self-soothing</b>					
Jackie	2				x
Louise	2				x
Sarah	2	x		x	x
Viola	2	x		x	x
Yvonne	2				x
Totals: Group 2 (self-soothing):		2	0	2	5

## Appendix V

Transfer of Learning: Analytic Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts,  
in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness

Name	Stance (Group 1, self- awareness, or Group 2, self- soothing)	Identify causes of conflict	Identify needs of other	Identify own needs	Identify goals	Identify options	Use of course concepts (anger volcano, fight- flight, conflict styles)
<b>Group 1: Self-awareness</b>							
Barbara	1	x					x
Elizabeth	1	x	x	x	x	x	x
Frances	1	x	x	x	x	x	
Harriet	1		x				
Lisa	1	x		x			
Nina	1	x	x	x			
Margaret	1	x	x	x			
Rita	1	x	x	x	x		
Tanya	1		x	x			x
Totals: Group 1 (self-awareness):		7	7	7	3	2	3
<b>Group 2: Self-soothing</b>							
Jackie	2			x			
Louise	2		x	x	x	x	x
Sarah	2			x			
Viola	2	x		x	x		x
Yvonne	2						
Totals: Group 2 (self-soothing):		1	1	4	2	1	2

## Appendix W

Transfer of Learning: Communication Skills Reported in Post-Class Conflicts,  
in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness

Name	Stance	Expressive skills				Receptive skills		
		Assertiveness	Modify own non-verbal behavior	Calm the other	Apologize	Attentive listening	Ask open-ended questions	Paraphrase
(Group 1, self-awareness, or Group 2, self-soothing)								
<b>Group 1: Self-awareness</b>								
Barbara	1					x		
Elizabeth	1	x					x	
Frances	1	x		x			x	x
Harriet	1	x	x			x		
Lisa	1	x				x		
Nina	1	x				x	x	
Margaret	1					x		x
Rita	1	x					x	
Tanya	1	x						
Totals: Group 1 (self-awareness):		7	1	1	0	5	4	2
<b>Group 2: Self-soothing</b>								
Jackie	2	x						
Louise	2	x						
Sarah	2							
Viola	2	x						
Yvonne	2	x			x			
Totals: Group 2 (self-soothing):		4	0	0	1	0	0	0



## Appendix X

Transfer of Learning: Use of Mindful Awareness in Post-Class Conflicts  
and Stance toward Mindfulness

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Name	Stance (Group 1, self-awareness, or Group 2, self-soothing)	Mindful awareness described in post-class conflict?
<b>Group 1: Self-awareness</b>		
Barbara	1	Yes
Elizabeth	1	Yes
Frances	1	Yes
Harriet	1	Yes
Lisa	1	No
Margaret	1	Yes
Nina	1	Yes
Rita	1	Yes
Tanya	1	Yes
Total: Group 1: Self-awareness		8
<b>Group 2: Self-soothing</b>		
Jackie	2	No
Louise	2	No
Sarah	2	No
Viola	2	No
Yvonne	2	No
Total: Group 2: Self-soothing		0

## Appendix Y

## Self-awareness in Relation to Frequency of Mindfulness Practice

Name	Self-awareness of own emotions			Self-awareness of own thoughts				Self-awareness of own physical sensations
	Range of emotions	Sources of own emotions	Sense of control/choice over emotions	Clarity	Assumptions/interpretations	Identify own role	Examine/shift own perspective	
Higher frequency of practice								
Nina	x		x			x		x
Margaret	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Jackie	x	x				x		
Elizabeth	x	x	x	x		x		
Yvonne	x							
Sarah	x	x			x			x
Harriet	x		x			x		x
Viola	x	x		x	x	x		
Rita	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Totals:	9	6	5	4	4	7	2	5
Lower frequency of practice								
Barbara	x			x	x	x		
Louise	x	x	x					
Tanya	x	x	x	x		x		
Lisa	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Frances	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Totals:	5	4	4	4	2	4	1	0

## Appendix Z

## Self-awareness in Relation to Stance toward Mindfulness

Name	Self-awareness of own emotions			Self-awareness of own thoughts				Self-awareness of own physical sensations
	Range of emotions	Sources of own emotions	Sense of control/choice over emotions	Clarity	Assumptions/interpretations	Identify own role	Examine/shift own perspective	
<b>Group 1: Self-awareness</b>								
Barbara	x			x	x	x		
Elizabeth	x	x	x	x		x		
Frances	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Harriet	x		x			x		x
Lisa	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Margaret	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nina	x		x			x		x
Rita	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tanya	x	x	x	x		x		
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Group 2: Self-soothing</b>								
Jackie	x	x				x		
Louise	x	x	x					
Sarah	x	x			x			x
Viola	x	x		x	x	x		
Yvonne	x							
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>