

Explorations with a Curriculum in Compassion

Brandon P. Thompson, M.A.

Sofia University
Palo Alto, California

Introduction

In the *lojong* mind training tradition, a central practice in Mahayana Buddhism, there is a slogan that reads: “Work with the greatest defilements first” (McLeod, 1987; Trungpa, 1993). This slogan prompts the practitioner to confront his or her greatest obstacles, for only once they are overcome can freedom be attained. “The time is now, not later. This slogan is suggesting that you start working where you feel most stuck” (Chodron, 2003, p. 178). For me, identifying my greatest defilements has never been difficult. Arising from a childhood in which it was seldom acceptable to “just be myself,” self-loathing and a vicious inner critic have been the main obstacles in my journey towards awakening.

The practice of befriending myself has been at the core of my spiritual life from the very beginning. Initially, I had difficulty learning that the Buddhist path is based largely on gentleness. Ladner (2004) asserts very directly: “You must have compassion for yourself before you can have compassion for others” (p. 49). I have only been ready to fully understand this fact for a brief time, perhaps as recently as one year ago when I first discovered the *lojong* teachings. I have realized that, regardless of the nature of my neurosis or how conditioned it has been by past experiences, compassion can release me from its grip. It takes little reflection to conclude that compassion – both for others *and* for myself – has been the chief catalyst for healing in my life. It is from this work with compassion, a deeply heartfelt and lifelong endeavor, that the present project has arisen.

In this project, I will draw upon the many facets of compassion by developing a curriculum of activities based on compassion practices from various spiritual traditions. Each activity will be aimed at fostering compassionate attitudes and experiences in elementary-age children. Through the use of various mediums, these curricula activities will first address the need for self-compassion, and will subsequently expose children to concepts such as forgiveness, silence, contemplation, and self-reflection. Finally, my curriculum will explore how to cultivate authentic compassion towards others. In addition to this compassion curriculum, the centerpiece of my project, I will also address the *need* for compassion education for children. By exploring the ideas of various theorists, (see also “On Ego Development and Estrangement” section), I will address the process of estrangement that seems to alienate children from compassionate attitudes as they grow into young adults (Kessler, 2000; Trungpa, 1991).

The subject matter for this project is twofold, with both facets originating from my current life situation. The Buddhist compassion practices of *lojong* and *tonglen* comprise the heart of my spiritual life. Both part of the Mahayana Buddhist path, they are methods which enable the practitioner to use all of life’s situations to generate compassion for himself and others. These practices have transformed my life and helped me to understand the power of awakened heart. The first facet of my project, as I have explored here, comes from my experiences with these compassion practices. More importantly, however, it has arisen from my aspiration to share them with others.

Currently in my professional life, I am an after school childcare provider with the YMCA of Central Kentucky. My work each day involves supervision of staff, caring for the needs of a large group of children, and writing curricula each week to enrich their after school experience. I was initially unsure about accepting this job, which I did so, reluctantly. However, two years later, I have had the blessed opportunity to touch the lives of hundreds of children, families, and aspiring young staff members. And they, in turn, have deeply affected mine. An unremarkable job that began as “just a way to pay the bills” has transformed into my life’s greatest blessing in disguise. Therefore, for my Application/Integration Project, I will be taking the advice of Chodron (2003). I have decided to “start where I am” by fusing both my spiritual and professional lives in the present project.

To conclude, I would like to mention the deepest intentions of my heart. In addition to being a culmination of the intellectual and spiritual work that I have done while studying with ITP, this project is also a way for me to give my service to others. That *others* – children, teachers, schools, and families – may benefit from my work is my highest aspiration.

Defining Compassion

“It is our interconnectedness that is reflected in natural compassion” (Wegela, 2003, p. 23).

Fragments

Across the literature, the concept of compassion is not easily defined. Despite being a cornerstone ideal in many of the world’s religious/spiritual traditions (Gates, 2005; Ladner, 2004; Trungpa, 1993; Zaehner, 1997), compassion remains an elusive notion, difficult to digest in a single sitting. Compassion is a concept often referred to by its implications rather than by the deeper meaning contained therein; it is more easily defined *connotatively* than by its more complex undertones (Rahula 1959; Snelling, 1991). Indeed, the casual researcher is hard-pressed to locate a statement that reads “Compassion is...” which is then followed by a definition that suits all tastes. Therefore, one can plainly see that many questions arise when contemplating this elusive topic. What *is* compassion? Is it an emotion? Is it an action? Could it be a state of mind, more temporary than stable, or is it a way of life, a more permanent way of relating to the world?

It seems as if the definition of compassion depends greatly on the tradition from which it is being defined. For Buddhists, compassion is a way of life, a type of immanent, pervasive quality of mind that one can never truly be without (Ladner, 2004; Trungpa, 1993). However, even within the same spiritual tradition, various schools explain compassion from different, seemingly *opposing*, viewpoints. For instance, Mahayana Buddhists hold that compassion is a tool used primarily for the benefit of others (McLeod, 1987; Trungpa, 1993). “When we hear about compassion, it naturally brings up working with others, caring for others” (Chodron, 2003, p. 2). Attending to the ideal of the *bodhisattva*, the enlightened being who vows to remain on Earth until all beings have reached enlightenment, Mahayanists focus on serving others; it is an overtly *other*-centered tradition (Snelling, 1991). Conversely, Snelling cites that Hinayana *arhats* – another Buddhist sect with compassion practices not unlike the Mahayana tradition – spend the greatest portion of their lives in seclusion, cultivating compassion for themselves in hopes of attaining enlightenment. In this tradition, practitioners “...win [enlightenment] privately and never seek to impart the *dharma* to others” (p. 83).

Other religious traditions, each professing their own version of compassion (Zaehner, 1997), serve to further fragment one’s understanding of the concept. In Sufism, there is a pervasive focus on interconnectedness, on traveling inward and uncovering the roots of compassion from self-realization (Barks & Green, 2000). In the Islamic faith, Sufism’s less-mystical parent tradition, compassion is held in a slightly different light, as “...more related to the Koran, in which the race of men in a pre-eternal existence bound themselves to the worship of and obedience to God” (Zaehner, 1997, p. 187). In this deeply reverent faith, compassionate action is seen as a form of worship.

The focus of the Hindu tradition is slightly different from others that we have discussed, as compassion is not a central matter to many sects of the faith. However, its undertones are immanently present. “Hinduism maintains that all living beings are essentially equal...this doctrine [of compassion] has given a very distinctive character to much Hindu thought and philosophy” (Zaehner, 1997, p. 217).

Finally, those in the West are perhaps most familiar with the quality of compassion as a Christ-like attribute (Judy, 2003). Striving always to become more like Jesus Christ, those of the Christian faith practice to become more like “...the compassionate Jesus reported in scripture. [This is] always a test for Christian discernment” (p. 55). Here, Judy holds that the ideal of Christ-like compassion is an aspiration that Christian practitioners aim towards. However, even in the world’s largest organized religion (Gates, 2005), compassion remains a fragmented, misconstrued, and oftentimes *debated* topic (Zaehner, 1997). Theorists Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison (1982) often refer to compassion as “the least understood virtue” in Christianity. “Oftentimes compassion...evokes in us [Christians] a deep resistance and even protest” (p. 4). These authors hold that, despite its place at the core of Christian teachings, compassion remains widely a misunderstood and mysterious notion. Much work has been dedicated to resolving this internal debate about the nature and definition of Christian compassion.

Unifying Principles

The preceding sampling of various religious perspectives on compassion demonstrates that nearly all faiths shine a different light on the subject (Zaehner, 1997). However, any one particular religious perspective is not necessarily in *opposition* to another. To the contrary, the confusions that so often occur when defining compassion arise from its natural state as a dense, multi-faceted concept (Chodron, 2003; Trungpa, 1993; Zaehner, 1997). Chodron (2001) holds that compassion "...is more challenging than loving-kindness because the warrior must tolerate its many meanings" (p. 63).

In order to achieve a fuller understanding of the many meanings contained in a single word, one must examine the things that *all* cultures can agree characterize the ideal of compassion. Discussion will now turn towards three *unifying principles* of compassion. Each principle presented here is an aspect of compassion that can be agreed upon by most or all religious traditions around the world (Zaehner, 1997).

First, compassion is universal (Gates, 2005; Zaehner, 1997). Though interpretation, practice, and terminology certainly differ, the tradition devoid of its own understanding of compassion does not exist. Says Ladner (2004) when addressing the benefits *tonglen* meditation, a prevalent Buddhist compassion practice: "As we analyze the psychological principles underlying this method, you'll see that they are not uniquely Buddhist at all. They are *universal* principles of conquering our narcissism" (p. 242). Christian authors Nouwen et al. (1982) hold that "...an incompassionate human being is inconceivable. Being human and being compassionate are the same" (p. 3). Barks and Green (2000) express the universality of discovering our innermost nature from a Sufi perspective: "The Way is not 'religion,' it is the root from which all religions grow...[and] compassion is essential to finding and maintaining the Way" (pp. 28-29). The Way, according to the Sufi tradition, is a universal method of "returning" to our basic, most compassionate nature. Sufis assert that the Way can be found in all spiritual traditions, and cannot be followed without compassion in one's heart.

Finally, Kessler (2000), a leading voice for the necessity of compassion and spiritual attitudes in American educational systems, holds that: "Simply seeing the universality [of compassion] helps students validate their own questions and nourishes their souls" (p. 63). Therefore, our first principle of compassion is its universality: the idea that every sentient being has the ability to experience compassion in some form.

A second unifying principle of compassion comes from its original Sanskrit, *karuna* (Snelling, 1991). This ancient term points toward another common understanding of compassion: the realization that one's own suffering is not separate from the suffering of others. Suffering, according to this understanding, is a *shared* experience. "Compassion has connotations of being able to feel the sufferings of others as if they were one's own, which, indeed...they really are" (p. 84). However, Snelling and other authors (Trungpa, 1984; Welwood, 2000) point out that the common human tendency is to behave *contrary* to this notion. Because of our predisposition for self-cherishing, many of us act in ways that propagate aversion and indifference, widening the divisions between us and our fellow human beings (Ladner, 2004; Trungpa, 1984; Welwood, 2006). "We're conditioned...to cherishing ourselves and our way of relating to others. We do what we're used to, and we're not used to thinking about other people as wanting happiness and not wanting suffering" (Hopkins, 2001, p. 38).

The understanding that compassion involves sharing in the suffering of others is not exclusive to Eastern thought. Christian authors Nouwen et al. (1982) point out that compassion, deriving from the Latin *pati* and *cum*, literally means "to suffer with." In this direct and plain translation, we see precisely the same meaning as was contained in ancient Sanskrit. It is interesting indeed how these dissimilar cultural perspectives can have such *similar* conceptualizations of compassion.

Concluding the present discussion of the second unifying principle of compassion, Chodron (2003) states: "The more you know your own [suffering], the more you're going to understand others" (p. 74). Here, Chodron points to a widely-held spiritual truth: the more intimately one can connect to one's own suffering, the more available one becomes to work with the suffering of others (Trungpa, 1993; Welwood, 1994). In an earlier work, Chodron (2001) reaches the heart of this, the second principle of compassion: "Compassion [is] our ability to share the pain that we feel with others" (p. 4).

As a final addition to these unifying principles of compassion, it is important that one is able to hold multiple meanings simultaneously. In Tibetan, the word *nyingje* is often used when describing compassion (Trungpa, 1993). However, *nyingje* does not imply a singular, one-sided definition of compassion.

Literally translated as “noble heart,” this word means both a willingness to commit oneself to serving other sentient beings and also a wholehearted aspiration to cultivate friendliness, or compassion, towards oneself. Its meaning encompasses both self-compassion *and* compassion for others. “...we experience a sense of gentleness towards ourselves [and also] are willing to commit ourselves to working with all sentient beings” (p. 1). Therefore, in order to fully understand *nyingje*, one must learn to tolerate its double meaning.

This – the ability to tolerate multiple meanings – is a peculiar idea to many Westerners (Zaehner, 1997). Even abstract, subjective concepts such as justice or love seem extremely direct and single-pointed in the light of the paradoxes inherent in Eastern language. It is common that the Western mind finds it difficult to accept the both/and relationship, rejecting multiple meanings in favor of a simpler, singular definition for our concepts (Snelling, 1991). Opposing these tendencies, however, Welwood (1984) holds that compassion contains elements of both heaven *and* earth, and that we must tolerate this both/and relationship if we are to lead wholly compassionate lives. “Compassion develops out of our involvement in the world of form, as well as our sense of the possibility of transcending its limitations” (p. 70).

Conclusion

In the world of gemology, a diamond’s luminescence is dependent on two things: the number of its facets and the amount of light shining through them (Crowe, 2006). These two variables, facets and light, come together to create the dazzling sparkle that is treasured throughout the world. In much the same way, it is my experience that compassion can only be *fully* integrated into one’s Being after one is able to appreciate its many implications as One. By doing so, in the words of Trungpa (1984), “...then the warrior can make a proper cup of tea” (p. 149).

The present project proposes, then, a radical idea: in order to achieve a full understanding of compassion and compassionate action, it is necessary to hold its various meanings simultaneously. Compassion is universal, compassion connects the suffering of others to one’s own experience, and, like the Tibetan word *nyingje*, compassion encompasses both gentleness towards oneself and other beings. Its meaning lies within each human heart as a perfect juxtaposition of all these things. With deep reverence, I bow to all beings, for *each of us* has the ability to experience compassion in all of its forms.

On Ego Development and Estrangement

Something’s Missing: The Basic Dis-ease of Humanity

“I’m dizzy from the shopping mall
I searched for joy, but I bought it all.
It doesn’t help the hunger pains
and the thirst I’d have to drown first
to ever satiate.

Something’s missing
and I don’t know how to fix it.

Something’s missing
and I don’t know what it is
at all”

(Mayer, 2003, track 3).

In his song “Something’s Missing,” contemporary singer/songwriter John Mayer (2003) provides an account of a very common, extremely *pervasive* human experience. As his longing, minor rock melodies flesh out the profound lyric that he himself has written, it becomes increasingly easier to identify with his message. One begins to adopt the feeling that something, indeed, is missing. But what? Mayer leaves it up to his listeners to decide for themselves.

The words contained in Mayer’s (2003) contemplative melody point directly to the Buddha’s First Noble Truth, the truth of suffering, or *dukkha* (Rahula, 1959). Difficult to translate into a single English term, Rahula cites that *dukkha* indicates craving, attachment, and thirst – the very same thirst that Mayer is grappling with in his aforementioned lyric. This said, however, the most common English translation of *dukkha* is simply “suffering” (Snelling, 1991). It is from this primary focus – that all of life is suffering and pain – that Buddhism is often misunderstood to be a pessimistic tradition. However, Rahula asserts that this is a misinterpretation of doctrine. While including the Western understanding of suffering, *dukkha* “...also includes deeper ideas such as ‘imperfection,’ ‘impermanence,’ ‘emptiness,’ [and] ‘insubstantiality’” (p. 17).

Therefore, the First Noble Truth in Buddhism is not a negativistic, dismal claim based on the pain inherent in human life. Instead, it is a realistic declaration of *truth*: because of attachment to sense pleasures and egoic self-cherishing, suffering exists (Ladner, 2004; Rahula, 1959; Trungpa, 1984). And, according to Buddhist thought, suffering can be transcended by means of understanding its root causes.

Buddhist psychologist Epstein (1995) asserts that *dukkha* is more accurately translated as “pervasive unsatisfactoriness.” Recognizing the deficiencies in the English language, Epstein holds that this translation fits more closely with deeper meaning contained in the ancient Sanskrit term. Indeed, many theorists (Rahula, 1959; Snelling, 1991; Zaehner, 1997) agree that simply translating *dukkha* as “suffering” is both insubstantial and erroneous. “...it is better to leave it [*dukkha*] untranslated, than to give an inadequate and wrong idea of it by conveniently translating it as ‘suffering’ or ‘pain’” (Rahula, 1959, p. 17). This said, the words of Epstein (1995) capture a more complete understanding of *dukkha*, speaking to the very heart the First Noble Truth: “We are all touched by a gnawing sense of imperfection, insubstantiality, uncertainty, or unrest, and we all long for a magical resolution of that dis-ease” (p. 46). One might say that, if John Mayer had lived in the days of the Buddha, his song “Something’s Missing” would have become an anthem to *dukkha*, the First Noble Truth of suffering.

In Sufism, humanity’s basic flaw is analogous to the Buddhist perspective presented above. Sufis profess that we are all born of one “oceanic unity,” and that estrangement from our primordial nature makes us feel separated, insubstantial, and alone (Barks & Green, 2000). One common Sufi metaphor further clarifies this notion. Setting the stage in a vast ocean, this metaphor follows the human life cycle from birth to death. Birth occurs while the individual is still underwater and connected to all other living beings. However, as one grows older, the body physically lifts above the waves and floats alone, separated from everyone else. In death, one’s body falls back into the ocean, only to begin the cycle of remembrance and estrangement once again. Sufis hold that, as human beings mature, each individual *forgets* that he or she is interconnected with all other beings, resulting in feelings of hopelessness and confusion. “We slowly discover that our self-entity exists within an atmosphere of aloneness and *separation*” (p. 22). In summation, the Sufi tradition agrees that there is “something missing” in most human lives, and that something is simply *remembering* that we are all One (Fadiman & Frager, 1997; Shah, 1967).

Furthermore, in his Christian-oriented psychotherapy practice, Judy (2003) has discovered that this same sense of isolation or insubstantiality is the primary reason that many Christian individuals enter therapy. Because of what Judy believes is a lack of compassionate understanding, “Western Christianity has lost its connection with Christ as a ‘living,’ transpersonal healer...” (p. 45). Judy holds that this loss of connection has caused many Christians to feel alienated from the sacred, mystical experiences that were once so prevalent throughout their faith.

Insubstantiality. Alienation. Uncertainty. Unrest. Forgetting. Loss of connection. Pervasive unsatisfactoriness. All of these terms have been used to describe the basic *dis-ease* of humanity (Barks & Green, 2000; Epstein, 2005; Judy, 2003; Rahula, 1959; Snelling, 1991; Welwood, 2000). Despite widespread attempts to fill this void with materialism and sense pleasures, much of humanity cannot seem to escape from the sense that something is missing from their lives (Welwood, 2006). Interestingly, each of the terms used to describe this basic *dis-ease* can also be used to describe various states of ego, the chief psychological mechanism responsible for the suffering inherent this prevalent human condition (Chodron, 2003; Hopkins, 2001; Trungpa, 1993). The following sections will further explore the definition and development of ego, in hopes of illuminating this basic *dis-ease* that is present throughout the world (Zaehner, 1997).

“I can't be sure that this state of mind
is not of my own design.

I wish there was an over-the-counter test
for loneliness like this.

Something's missing
and I don't know how to fix it.

Something's missing
and I don't know what it is.

No, I don't know what it is”
(Mayer, 2003, track 3).

The Great Debate: Defining Ego

Identifying a definition of ego that can be agreed upon by all theorists is a subject that has been debated for decades, creating divisions between psychological theorists and practitioners (Gates, 2005; Kessler, 2000). Generally, debaters can be divided into two camps. One faction, comprised primarily of more traditionally-oriented theorists, holds that developing an ego is a completely normal, *necessary* process, the fruition of which represents the pinnacle of psychological development (Fadiman & Frager, 2002). “The ego is the center of consciousness...[and] personal development involves establishing a connection between the ego and the self” (p. 84). Fadiman and Frager report that, according to these traditional theorists, ego is considered a vital mechanism of the psyche with functions that include organization of thought processes, representation of concepts, and the establishment of a stable self structure.

The other camp, comprised mainly of more contemporary thinkers, (many in the field of transpersonal psychology), defines ego as a mere *stepping stone* towards full human development (Fadiman & Frager, 2002). These theorists hold that the ego is “...at best an early stage of development, rather than an ultimate, indispensable organizing principle of consciousness” (Welwood, 2000, pp. 38-39). The words of Welwood accurately sum up this division of opinion regarding ego. “Western psychology emphasizes the need for a strong ego, defined in terms of impulse control, self-esteem, and competence...[whereas] Eastern contemplative psychologies regard the ego as ultimately unreal and unnecessary” (p. 35).

The definition of ego that will be utilized by the present project differs greatly from the traditional Freudian conception. Freud’s concept of the “ego” is one-third of his classic theory of personality; it functions as a mediator between the id and the superego, two psychological structures that are generally at odds (Fadiman & Frager, 2002). To Freud, the ego “...merely has the task of ensuring the health, safety, and sanity of the personality” (p. 24). Ego as it will be discussed here is more difficult to define, but may be altogether more integrative and relevant to the project at hand.

As described by Welwood (2000), “...[ego is] the habitual activity of grasping onto separate images and concepts of oneself, an activity that separates us from our true nature” (pp. 300-301). According to this understanding, ego is recognized as an organized pattern of *forgetting*, of becoming estranged from the luminous, interconnected unity from which we were born (Barks & Green, 2000; Chodron, 2003; Welwood, 2000). “When the conceptualized I, based on identifications and conditioned beliefs, becomes the command center of the psyche...this cuts us off from the more authentic knowing that arises from our true nature” (Welwood, 2000, pp. 36-37). Of course, Welwood’s “conceptualized I” is the ego, a conditioned web of thought patterns, beliefs, and defensive strategies that ineffectively attempts to manage the experiences of the individual.

Herein lies the greatest misfortune for those who rely solely on ego to govern their lives. “The tragedy of ego...is that we start to believe that this manager – this frontal self that interfaces with the world – is who we are” (Welwood, 2000, p. 37). Many theorists (Chodron, 2001; Ladner, 2004; Snelling, 1991) agree that there is a certain poignancy in believing that ego is the true sovereign of the psyche. Because they rely exclusively on ego’s conditioned responses when contending with difficult circumstances, these individuals tighten into aversion, strive for superiority, or engage in tactics such as blame or self-loathing. Each of these strategies is merely ego’s way of extending its own life, keeping the individual locked in a cycle of uncertainty and fear (Welwood, 2000). “All of these trips that we lay on ourselves – the feeling that we’re bad the identities that we so dearly cling to – are ego...they are like the clouds that temporarily block out the sun” (Chodron, 2003, p. 1). Indeed, if one’s true nature is like the sun, luminous, compassionate, and omnipresent, then ego is like the clouds that temporarily obstruct its light.

A Pattern of Estrangement

“But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy”
(Woof, 1991, p. 39).

In an earlier section, the basic *dis-ease* of humanity was identified. Characterized by experiences of alienation, forgetting, estrangement, uncertainty, and unsatisfactoriness, spiritual traditions from all over the world recognize this condition as a troubling reality of human existence (Barks & Green, 2000; Judy, 2003; Rahula, 1959). Building upon that discussion, the previous section provided a more tangible definition for this *dis-ease*: ego, a psychological construct that obstructs the luminousness of basic human nature (Chodron, 2003).

One may feel inclined to question, however, how this condition called ego originates. Surely there is a period in the human life cycle in which the limitations of conditioned personality are less in control. In response to this, Trungpa (1991) states that, during childhood, the troubling circumstances of *dukkha* are very seldom present. However, once individuals reach adulthood, "...we have become strangers to others and also to ourselves" (p. 12). This seems to suggest some kind of alienation, some type of *estrangement*, from the innate quality of our being that Welwood (2000) calls "...an open, wakeful, luminous, compassionate presence [which] allows us to relate to our life in a much richer and more powerful way" (p. 3). Therefore, if it is true that childhood is normally a time of psychological and emotional peace (Gates; 2005; Kessler, 2000), what is it that shifts between childhood and adulthood that causes us to become alienated from this basic nature? What has changed? What has been forgotten? To answer these questions, it is necessary to explore the ideas of those individuals and traditions that have attempted to demystify this prevalent pattern of estrangement.

One analogy that has captured this issue of estrangement is Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave (Biffle, 2000). It is a profound portrayal of the human condition which represents one of the first known efforts to introduce a hierarchical model of spiritual development. Beginning in the deepest, darkest bowels of a cave – a place where human beings are chained to a wall and believe only in the reality of shadows – Plato portrays one man's journey into the light. After breaking his chains at the lowest level of the cave, the protagonist begins his journey to the surface. Plato speaks in metaphor throughout the Allegory, relating his protagonist's upward journey to ascending levels of human understanding. By the end of the Allegory, Plato's main character has traveled from the darkest depths of the cave all the way to the surface, a place illuminated by the light of the sun.

Like the ideal of compassion itself, the meaning hidden in Plato's Allegory – of estrangement from our basic nature and the journey towards remembering – echoes perennially throughout nearly *all* of the world's religious traditions (Zaehner, 1997). Each tradition, using its own unique language, teaches that much of humanity has forgotten the profound, interconnected nature of existence, accepting instead a self-created world dense with feelings of separation and aggression (Fadiman & Frager, 1997; Trungpa, 1984; Zaehner, 1997). By accepting these narrow, illusory worlds as ultimate reality, one begins to witness the pattern of estrangement taking hold (Welwood, 2000). "The more we hold ourselves separate from the world, the more we fall prey to inner struggle, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and alienation" (p. 42). This cycle of dissatisfaction and alienation – in short, the development and perpetuation of ego – is perhaps best captured in the Buddhist concept of *samsara*.

Samsara is the name given by Buddhists to the cycle of attachment, fear, and death that comprises most of human life (Rahula, 1959). Often equated with "thirst" or craving for sense pleasures, Buddhists hold that *samsara* will continue until its roots have been clearly seen, understood, and transcended. *Samsara* represents the bottom level of Plato's Allegory, in which human beings remain chained to a wall, slaves to their sense perceptions and cravings. "As long as there is this 'thirst'...the cycle of *samsara* goes on. It can only stop when its driving force, this 'thirst,' is cut off through wisdom which sees Reality, Truth" (p. 34). Like Rahula, Epstein (1995) holds that this world of craving is created by the individual. His idea of "pervasive unsatisfactoriness," (identified earlier as one way to describe basic *dis-ease* of humanity), stems from an estrangement from our original, basic nature. He asserts that the highest purpose of spiritual practice is to "...overcome the estranged and alienated self-feelings...of the Western mind" (p. 220).

The realm of Buddhist psychotherapy provides further support for this phenomenon of estrangement. Drawing upon his many decades as a clinician, Welwood (2000) reports that many adults enter psychotherapy because their neuroses dominate their lives so fully that they often feel trapped, slaves to their own conditioning. "It's quite common [for therapeutic patients] to feel alienated from themselves and the larger social whole...which is lacking in nourishing soul qualities that allow people to feel deeply connected to one another" (p. 206). Welwood asserts that patients often feel so estranged from their basic nature that they are unable to lead whole, fulfilling lives. He goes on to say that even depression can be viewed as a *loss of heart*: a type of "giving up" that occurs when one feels so distressed by one's conditioned personality that hopelessness eventually takes over.

From a Sufi perspective, all sentient beings are born of the same God, the same Source (Barks & Green, 2000). Like drops of water that make up a vast ocean, each human life is interconnected with every other human life. However, Sufis say that over time, this knowledge becomes lost. "...before too long in our life-trajectory, we pull ourselves free of such oceanic unity and we *individuate*" (p. 22). This individuation, though necessary at first, soon becomes an aching feeling of loss and isolation. "We try to dull the ache with entertainment...or therapy. No matter. Nothing quite delivers the abiding wholeness we sense is *really the way we ought to be*" (p. 22). This type of *forgetting*, of becoming estranged from the interconnected unity from which we were born, is the method by which Sufis profess their model of ego development and estrangement from our basic nature.

It is more difficult to extricate a theory of ego development or estrangement from the Christian faith. Christian theorists Nouwen et al. (1982) hint at the commonality of Western estrangement by saying: "We [Christians] want to forge our identities by carving out for ourselves a niche...where we can maintain a safe distance from others. Paradoxically, this 'carving' alienates us from ourselves *and* others" (p. 6). According to these authors, a great deal of Western Christianity has lost touch with its more mystical roots, resulting in an unnaturally self-centered faith that has become disconnected from God. "We will never really know God as a compassionate God...until we can remember what we have forgotten" (p. 13).

Buddhist, Sufi, or Christian, each tradition shares an understanding that estrangement from one's basic nature is a universal, *human* experience (Barks & Green, 2000; Judy, 2003; Nouwen et al., 1982; Rahula, 1959; Trungpa, 1984). "We are all beings with the ability to forget" (Welwood, 1984, p. 66). However, there *do* exist places in the world where this pattern of estrangement has less dominance (Ladner, 2004; Welwood, 2000). Why is this so? What is different about Eastern cultures that seems to preclude them from much of the suffering that is common in the West? To answer these questions, it is appropriate to compare the prevalence of ego development and estrangement in Eastern cultures to that in the West.

Cultural Differences

Specifically citing Eastern Buddhist or Taoist cultures, various authors (Hopkins, 2001; Snelling, 1991; Trungpa, 1993) note that the self-loathing that seems so prevalent in Western culture is far less widespread. To illustrate this point, a story. When he found out that many Westerners suffer from a problem called "low self-esteem," the Dalai Lama, completely awestruck, walked around the meeting room and addressed each Westerner by saying: "Do you have this?" (Ladner, 2004). Treating their difficulty as if it were a disease, His Holiness simply could not believe that Westerners suffer as prevalently as they do. In the East, says Ladner, largely because societies are more collectivistic and interdependent, self-esteem issues seldom arise.

The work of Welwood (2000) serves to further support this idea. He states: "Because the traditional Asian's sense of self is embedded in a soulful culture...people do not lose themselves or become alienated from their own humanness in the way that Westerners have" (p. 206). Because of their focus on tradition, ritual, and interconnectedness, many Eastern spiritual teachers come to the West only to find themselves disoriented by the range of personality disorders that are unique to their Western students. "They [Eastern teachers] often do not understand the pervasive self-hatred, shame, and guilt, as well as the alienation and lack of confidence in these [Western] students" (p. 207). Here, we not only see the tremendous differences in Eastern and Western ego development, but also how an understanding of such can be greatly influenced by cultural differences.

All of this established, however, individuals in Eastern cultures are not exempt from the suffering and confusion of humanity's basic *dis-ease* (Epstein, 1995). "Life, he [Buddha] says, is filled with a sense of pervasive unsatisfactoriness...for all peoples. It is inescapable" (p. 46). It may be true that, because of their deep reverence for interconnectedness and spiritual living, Easterners experience less alienation from their basic nature than many of those in the West (Ladner, 2004; Welwood, 2000). However, as Epstein has stated, there is no one exempt from experiencing *dukkha*, even if it is less prevalent for some than others.

Ego as Path

Thus far in the present discussion, it seems that the development of ego might be a hindrance toward reaching one's full, human potential. At best, ego may seem like a psychological veneer, an insubstantial representation of what human experience *should be*. "It [ego] is incomplete because it operates only on the surface of our nature, as an outer façade, and is not grounded in the true reality of our being" (Welwood, 2000, p. 38). Adopting this paradigm alone, it is not difficult to consider ego a disease, a psychospiritual sickness that should be dealt with contemptuously and with haste.

Indeed, with this incomplete understanding, one may begin to wonder just how one may avoid developing an ego altogether. Isn't it possible to just "skip" ego development and proceed directly to transcendent, illuminated understanding?

To the contrary of this quandary, it is a widely-held understanding that the development of ego is a vital and necessary stage of human life (Fadiman & Frager, 2002; Trungpa, 1993; Wilber, 2000). Welwood (1984) reminds his readers that ego development is not necessarily a pitfall of existence, but rather is a natural by-product of what it means to be human: "Because we sit with our front exposed...the world and other people can enter and touch our heart. So it's not surprising that we develop character armor" (p. 67). Epstein (1995) also defends the normalcy of developing an ego: "In this [Buddhist] view, the ego need not be condemned, but embraced as the greatest learning tool we have" (p. 212).

Recognizing that many individuals loathe their egos with such ferocity that it becomes a source of psychological distress, Welwood (2000) holds that "Criticizing the ego is like condemning a child for not being an adult. Our personality is simply a stage on the path" (p. 38). Here, Welwood professes that ego development is like a stepping stone towards deeper human realization. He holds that cultivating a *compassionate* relationship with ego may, in fact, lead to a deeper understanding and eventual transcendence of its limitations. "Instead of indulging in ego-bashing, a more helpful approach is to appreciate how ego tries its best and have some compassion for its ultimate failure" (p. 38).

In this way, one may begin to find it possible to view ego development more realistically: as a stage in one's development from which much learning and growth can occur (Epstein, 1995; Fadiman & Frager, 2002; Ladner, 2004). Indeed, as Wilber (1980) famously asserts: "You have to be someone before you can be no one" (p. 129). Even if this is so, however, the illusory nature of "being someone" seems to be the source of great psychological, emotional, and spiritual distress (Hopkins, 2001; Ladner, 2004; Welwood, 1984; Welwood, 2000). Though ego should be handled compassionately, it should not be viewed as an ultimate, final level of human development.

A final question may be posed. Once one *has* a fully developed ego, what is one to do with it? Many theorists (Snelling, 1991; Trungpa, 1984; Welwood, 1984; Zaehner, 1997) agree that whether developing an ego is considered pathological or a necessary component of human development, those who are interested in transcending its limitations often enter into a spiritual path of one type or another. Whether through prayer, meditation, monasticism, ritual, chanting, or regular church attendance, over 92% of human beings on this planet are involved in one form of spiritual path or another (Gates, 2005).

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, it is held as a universal truth that the very purpose of spiritual work is to transcend the limitations of ego (Trungpa, 1993). "All teachings are basically a way of subjugating or shedding our ego" (p.128). Therefore, though all individuals progress along the spiritual path at different speeds, it seems that one practice or another is often utilized in the path towards transcending ego. In a later section, discussion will focus on a small number of such practices, from which the subsequent curricula activities have taken their inspiration. Each of these activities, (and their parent spiritual practices), are aimed at reversing this estrangement from our true nature that is called ego.

Starting Early: Compassion and Children

Through the theories and ideas presented in this section, the phenomenon of ego development and estrangement from our basic nature has been identified. It has been determined that, though it may be a natural and inevitable process, the ego eventually functions to alienate the individual from his or her basic, primordial nature (Barks & Green, 2000; Epstein, 2005; Judy, 2003; Rahula, 1959; Snelling, 1991; Welwood, 2000). Cultural differences in ego development have been discussed, further illuminating the Western predicament of estrangement (Ladner, 2004; Welwood, 2006). Finally, it was acknowledged that a common human motivation is to shed this troublesome web of conditioned personality by means of spiritual practice (Trungpa, 1993). But how, exactly, does all of this relate to compassion work with children?

Differentiating between the ego development of adults and children, Trungpa (1991) states that adults "...have the goodies inside of us already; we only have to uncover them. It is a question of waking up and shedding our covers" (p. 5). However, children "...know innately that the goodies are there, there is no question" (p. 6). As discussed previously, we can see here that *something* has happened between childhood and adulthood that has covered up, or disguised, the intrinsic goodness of the human heart. Trungpa (1984) holds that compassion is what we most lack in adulthood.

Because of the inevitable development of ego, (appropriately nicknamed “the cocoon” by Shambhala Buddhists), we have forgotten to be compassionate, first with ourselves, and then with others.

In order to recover these compassionate attitudes that have been forgotten, many practitioners and theorists (Hopkins, 2001; Trungpa, 1984; Welwood, 2000) assert that a change in perspective is all that is needed. Ladner (2004) asserts that, once self-cherishing attitudes and vehement defense of individual opinions and positions gives way to viewing others as more important than oneself, things quickly begin to change. “This turn is considered the key to expanding awareness from its habitual imprisonment in self-centered states of mind, by nature always unsatisfactory, and to connecting with the feelings of others” (p. iv). In short, if humanity’s *dis*-ease is the sense of inadequacy and uncertainty that arises from self-cherishing, *compassion* may be the cure.

With more support for the transformational power of compassion, Welwood (2000) holds that it is “...the most powerful transmuting force there is, precisely because it is a willingness to be there with our experience” (p. 117). Here, Welwood is claiming that, by inviting in those things that cause us pain as opposed to rejecting them, the root of one’s own suffering and the suffering of others finally becomes apparent. One may then begin to feel drawn *away* from the shallow, surface concerns of daily life, connecting more and more to the suffering of others (Trungpa, 1993). Paradoxically, by surrendering the struggle to obtain constant happiness and satisfaction, it becomes possible to find *true* happiness after all. Says Ladner (2004), “To feel compassion, you must turn away slightly from your own focus on superficial happiness to sense the true condition of others, honestly facing their pains” (p. iv).

The present work with children builds upon the notions of compassion discussed here. It is my idea that, though neither children nor adults are more *innately* compassionate than one other, children are generally more readily able to access compassionate thoughts and attitudes. Through years of study, combined with insight gained through spiritual practice, I have come to realize that the seed of compassion exists in each human being. However, it requires significantly less practice, prompting, or nurturing to appear in children. This understanding is supported throughout a wealth of spiritual literature (Vascak, 1999; Zaehner, 1997), but can be found abundantly in the work of Trungpa (1984), Chodron (2003), and Gates (2005). “In the hearts of children, we adults find many things that we are missing. Not the least of them, compassion and unconditional love for others” (Nouwen et al., 1982, p. 49). Responding to this notion, the present project contains a curriculum of compassion-centered activities focused on cultivating this quality in elementary-age children. In a later section, I will reflect upon my experiences carrying out a number of these curricula activities with the children in my after school program.

I have chosen to conduct this work with children intentionally; I believe that childhood is a crucial time for psychospiritual development. In support of this claim, Welwood (2006) holds that childhood is a critical period for fostering an understanding of compassion. He asserts that, after experiencing the initial spark of love, children come alive with compassionate action. “This quality [compassion] is our birthright, and requires an initial spark to ignite it. For children, that spark is knowing that they are loved” (p. 31). Providing further support, Kessler (2000) advocates the fact that childhood is a key window for spiritual development. “The search for spiritual meaning is critical [during childhood], but is largely omitted from the schools where our children spend most of their lives” (p. 62).

As will be explored in subsequent sections, it is my belief that exposing children to rudimentary, relatable, age-appropriate compassion exercises may provide them with a means for identifying their basic *dis*-ease earlier in life. Of course, I do not intend for the curriculum presented in this project to take the place of a more stable, lifelong spiritual practice. There is no substitute for finding one’s own Path. However, though it is an uncommon practice in the West (Zahner, 1997), why not introduce children to deeply spiritual ideals and practices at an early age? Why not teach our young people to be gentle with themselves, to embrace the hardships in their lives as opposed to fighting against them, and to see that others’ suffering is just as real as their own?

This project is intended to aid *all* of those who receive it, children and adults alike, in identifying just what is missing from their lives. After that, perhaps some amount of sanity, love, understanding, and wisdom may touch our hearts and help us to see that what we have been looking for has been with us all along.

Conclusion

Based on the facts presented here, it may appear that the world is in relatively poor sorts. However, as the above research has suggested, children lead lives in which both inner and outer wars have not yet been waged (Gates, 2005; Trungpa, 1984). Welwood (2006) holds that compassion arises in children if they are simply nurtured by a loving environment. Kessler (2000) asserts that compassionate behaviors take place spontaneously in children. Trungpa (1991) claims that the innate compassion of children is often greater than that of adults, who instead must *effort* to uncover their basic goodness. From what we have seen here, I must conclude that childhood is the right time to promote the abilities of communication, understanding, empathy, and compassion. If it is true that childhood is a time in which the fully-formed adult ego has not yet buried its roots in the soil, then this window in human development is an ideal time to cultivate *alternative* ways of relating to the world.

As children grow older, we are able to watch them learn about anger, prejudice, conflict, and indifference (Kessler, 2000; Trungpa, 1991). As Welwood (2000) has noted, the human growth process often involves unconscious reenactments of maladjusted patterns established during childhood. Quite literally, as stated earlier by Trungpa (1991), we are observing the process of our own alienation. By executing the curricula activities included in this project, I intend to arouse compassionate attitudes in children, and by doing so, I will be exploring the possibility that this process of estrangement and alienation may loosen its grip if appropriate conditions are present.

Discussion of Compassion Practices

“The basic purpose of spiritual practice is to help liberate us from attachment to an imprisoning self-structure” (Welwood, 1984, p. 65).

Introduction

The present project owes its inspiration to the various notions of compassion held by religious/spiritual traditions from all over the world. Throughout, this project has cited a plethora of religious traditions, from Hinduism to Taoism, Islam to Judaism. Each religion explored here, no matter how briefly, has supported the present project significantly by allowing for a more complete, integrative understanding of compassion. This said, however, there are three religious traditions upon which this project has drawn most heavily. Easily, those traditions are Buddhism, Sufism, and Christianity.

In the present section, discussion will focus on relevant compassion practices from each of these three traditions. Note that those practices that are considered relevant are limited to those that have been drawn upon to create the Curriculum in Compassion that is the centerpiece of this project. This section is not meant to function as an exhaustive review of each religious tradition. Instead, the present discussion is intended to serve as a brief overview of the compassion practices that have inspired the various activities in this curriculum. For a more complete description of the specific compassion practice or concept, please refer to the “Religious/Spiritual Antecedents” sections of the curriculum activities themselves.

Buddhist

Buddhism is the foremost religious tradition that has been drawn upon in the present project. The Buddhist notion of *bodhichitta* (Trungpa, 1993) is intimately connected to compassion, containing its own system of practices that develop and cultivate compassionate action. *Bodhichitta*, most easily defined as the experience of awakened heart, cultivates compassion by allowing human beings to get in touch with their own woundedness, their own “soft spot.” “Why is this ‘soft spot’ an analogy for compassion? Because even in the midst of immense aggression, insensitivity, or laziness...there is still an openness” (p. 13). Tapping into this soft spot allows Buddhist practitioners to connect intimately with the suffering in their own lives, and subsequently generate compassion for other humans who suffer just as they do.

The Buddhist practices of *lojong* and *tonglen* contain and protect this ancient concept, allowing for *bodhichitta* to thrive as a living teaching. *Lojong* and *tonglen* are the primary compassion practices from which many of the present curricula activities have been inspired. Both share the concept of *bodhichitta* as their foundation, as both are aimed at awakening the heart of the practitioner (Chodron, 2003; McLeod, 1987; Trungpa, 1993).

The mind training tradition of *lojong* is a daily Buddhist practice that utilizes fifty-nine pithy slogans as its core teachings (Trungpa, 1993).

Containing such slogans as “Be grateful to everyone” and “Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation,” the *lojong* teachings cultivate a deep, experiential understanding of *bodhichitta* by using difficult circumstances as the path towards liberation. These teachings are intended to expose the practitioner’s soft spot with gentleness and precision, prompting him to generate deep compassion for himself and others who suffer in similar ways.

The partner practice to one’s work with *lojong* is *tonglen* meditation, an extremely lucid, experiential method of cultivating compassion for others by identifying the very places in which compassion is needed in one’s own life (Chodron, 2003; McLeod, 1987; Trungpa, 1993). The two practices are like fire and air, each growing in intensity and drawing its strength from the other. Also known as “exchanging oneself for others,” *tonglen* meditation first acts to connect the practitioner to his own suffering. Then, encouraged to open fully in the midst of his pain, the practitioner sends out his wholehearted wish that all beings be free of this, his personal experience of suffering. Asserting that *tonglen* practice is essential in the cultivation of compassion, Trungpa states: “*Tonglen* is a very important term; you should remember it. It is the main practice in the development of...*bodhichitta*” (p. 39).

Across this curriculum, the compassion practices of *lojong* and *tonglen*, (as well as their parent concept of *bodhichitta*), can be found in nearly every activity. The exercises entitled “Eye Contact, Heart Contact” and “In Their Shoes” involve these practices very directly, challenging children to first identify their own soft spots and then, as a result, to cultivate compassion for others based on their personal experiences of suffering.

Sufi

Sufism, the more mystical component of the Islamic faith (Fadiman & Frager, 1997), is another deeply spiritual religious tradition that has influenced the curriculum in this project. While, upon first glance, compassion practices have a less noticeable presence in Sufism, the undertones of said practices are irrevocably present throughout the faith. In the words of authors Barks and Green (2000), “How wonderful that mercy and compassion are given as the essential textures of an all-transcending Creator...they are the solid rocks upon which all of Sufism rests” (p. 7).

A unique aspect of Sufism lies within the Sufis’ creative use of stories to foster the spiritual development of the practitioner. Stories are told in such a way that earnestly contemplating a Sufi story becomes a deeply spiritual practice, bringing about realization and enhanced spiritual understanding for the listener. The Sufi story entitled “The Beggar at the Door” is a tale that evokes a heightened understanding about compassionately serving others (Fadiman & Frager, 1997; Shah, 1967). The intention of this particular story is to bring about the realization that serving others is analogous to serving God Himself. One particular activity in this curriculum was so inspired by this Sufi story that they even share the same name.

The Sufi practices of remembrance and ablutions, though not specifically compassion-oriented, generate compassionate attitudes by their very nature (Barks & Green, 2000; Fadiman & Frager, 1997). The practice of remembrance tasks the practitioner to recall, many times each day, the interconnectedness that all human beings share with one another and with God. “When self falls away, God remains. When only God remains...one cannot be without compassion for others” (Fadiman & Frager, 1997, p. 210). The curriculum activity “Different but the Same” encourages this very same attitude, challenging children to dwell in an understanding of the equality and interconnectedness of all human beings.

By practicing ablutions each day, the Sufi practitioner *literally* bathes oneself, “...washing away the grime of the world” (Barks & Green, 2000, p. 62). The focus during ablutions is on gentleness, self-compassion, and forgiveness. As each bodily area is washed, the practitioner experiences deepening levels of connection with God and an enhanced ability to be self-compassionate. “We honor the power of water to renew the spirit and wash away our transgressions” (p. 62). The curriculum activity “Mistakes and Forgiveness” has been inspired, in part, by the Sufi practice of ablutions, as children are prompted to cultivate compassionate and forgiving attitudes towards themselves, washing away the ego’s urges to be self-critical or loathing.

Christian

Certainly the compassion of Jesus Christ is a prominent topic in much of the Christian faith (Judy, 2003), and should not be overlooked or disregarded in the present project. However, it is difficult to pinpoint any practices in Christianity that are specifically aimed at cultivating compassion (Nouwen et al., 1982).

It has been addressed previously that, despite being a cornerstone ideal throughout much of Christian doctrine, compassion remains a debated and fragmented topic within the tradition. There *are* a few hidden jewels in this faith, however, that demonstrate the transformative power of compassionate prayer.

For example, the well-known prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (Egan, 1999) is a moving evocation of compassionate intentions. Calling upon God to make him a tool for the healing of the world, the prayer of St. Francis contains such affirmations as “make me a channel for your [God’s] peace” and “where there is doubt, let me bring faith” (p. 32). Mother Theresa was so inspired by this common prayer that she adopted, practiced, and taught using its message very often throughout her life. The curriculum activity “Make me an Instrument,” an exercise on cultivating compassionate/altruistic intentions, was inspired solely by these Christian notions of altruism, compassion, and service.

In Catholicism, there exists a lesser-known prayer called the Litany of Humility (Egan, 1999). Another that was close to Mother Theresa’s heart, this prayer, when prayed with sincerity, is a powerful method of uprooting ego. “Praying selflessly the phrases ‘from the desire of being esteemed, from the fear of being ridiculed, deliver me Jesus’ is the most healing thing a Christian can do in one day” (p. 71). It is in these words of selflessness that ego, preferring selfishness and narcissism, is exposed and eventually dissolves. In short, the Litany of Humility represents an aspiration to overcome the illusions of one’s ego in order to be of benefit to others (Judy, 2003; Zaehner, 1997). This theme of selfless intentions is present throughout the curriculum, most notably in the exercises “Make me an Instrument” and “Different but the Same.”

The Curriculum in Compassion

Curriculum Format and Introductory Comments

According to Kessler (2001), a curriculum can be comprised of almost anything, as long as its activities are aimed at the education, instruction, or enrichment of its recipients. Unless one is writing a standardized lesson plan for an educational institution such as a University or a public High School, there is seldom a prescribed structure to follow or a predetermined quota to meet. I have adopted this open-ended format for my Curriculum in Compassion. By *not* relying on a stringent design or structure, I gave myself permission to develop these activities organically. In addition to this, the unstructured nature of the curriculum will decrease the chances that the instructor may feel stifled or limited by the constraints of the activity. Simply, if these activities are meant to awaken the heart, I could not envision them being undertaken with any presuppositions or restrictions beyond that which are unavoidable. Just as awakening compassion itself is a slow and organic process, not unlike a rose gently blossoming at dawn, so too should my curriculum allow for spontaneity, creativity, and freedom of interpretation. What follows are some other relevant comments about this curriculum.

It is perhaps most important to note that these activities may be presented to the classroom in two different ways. First, the instructor may choose to execute this curriculum in the presented order over the course of a number of days. The order in which the activities appear here is intentional: they progress from simpler activities aimed at fostering self-compassionate attitudes to more complex exercises, dealing with themes such as suffering and compassion for others. Therefore, this curriculum can be treated as a whole, with each activity subsuming and including those that came before.

However, the instructor need not limit herself to even *this* suggested format. Each activity is executable separately, entirely independent of the others, and may function as its own individual lesson. If there is not sufficient time or if available resources are low, the individual activities in this curriculum can act as “pull and go” lessons. Even the more advanced activities can be executed separately, provided that the instructor does so mindfully and exercises her freedom to tailor the activity to her students’ needs. In this way, the required school age curriculum can be supplemented, time that must be spent on other areas is not lost, and most importantly, children are still being exposed to these invaluable, universal concepts.

As with all of the activities across this curriculum, the general atmosphere of the classroom setting must be one of acceptance, understanding, warmth, and love. To promote this atmosphere, a great deal of quiet, open space in the conversation is encouraged. Silence will also prompt children to answer thoughtfully when speaking and listen carefully, without bias, when listening (Kessler, 2000). Commenting on the necessity of silence practice in religion, Kessler states: “It is no coincidence that most of the world’s religions have devised a ‘rest note’ into the symphony of the human day...[silence] cultivates the spaciousness of soul” (p. 36).

I have so strongly emphasized that silence play a role in these exercises so that the environment may be prepared for open, authentic connections.

Furthermore, I would recommend a circular meeting space, either in the form of a table or arrangement of chairs, in order to promote the idea of equality amongst all the participants. Whenever possible, the instructor herself should join this seating arrangement, facilitating the activities from the perspective of a participant. In short, throughout all the activities provided in this curriculum, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the environment fostered by the instructor.

Each curricula activity is organized into four main components: introduction, perceived purpose/intended outcome, spiritual/religious antecedents, and execution. In the introduction section, I will sum up the main purpose of the activity, providing concise background information and reference material. I may also briefly describe my personal intention for the current activity. The perceived purpose/intended outcome section will delineate, (based on the spiritual antecedents specific to the particular activity), what outcomes the instructor may anticipate. This section will summarize the transpersonal qualities that children are expected to display in their concluding creative expression projects, and therefore, the instructor should give increased attention to this section when reviewing said projects. The spiritual/religious antecedents section will provide the instructor with a background and rationale for each activity, drawing upon a wealth of spiritual texts, scholarly sources, and personal experiences. The execution section will provide the physical, step-by-step instructions for engaging children in the current exercise. The instructor should spend the most time with this section before engaging children in the curricula activity. The fifth and final component of each activity is a “quick reference” guide. The instructor can return to this brief, bulleted list any time she needs to be reminded of the steps laid out in the execution section.

Each separate curriculum exercise concludes with its own creative expression activity. These activities vary across the curriculum, ranging from watercolor painting to dramatic performances. As a wealth of research has shown (Fadiman & Frager, 2002; Gates, 2005; Welwood, 2006), engaging children in creative/artistic expression is a profound tool for understanding the deeper meanings of their experience. Though the success of this curriculum is measured entirely by the subjective experiences of the children, some semblance of transpersonal qualities should be observable in their creative expression projects. Some examples of these qualities are, but should not be limited to: increased compassionate understanding, generosity, evidence of empathetic resonance, altruistic intentions, and self-compassionate attitudes.

Furthermore, it is vital that children are given a proper frame of reference when beginning their final creative expression projects. For each activity across this curriculum, the instructor should make it clear that children’s projects will be received with no judgment, criticism, or scrutiny. Much to the contrary, whatever comes out onto the page (or stage) is entirely acceptable, invited, and welcomed. The goal is never to compete or to paint the “prettiest picture.” Fostering this nonjudgmental atmosphere is paramount in establishing the warm, safe environment that children require to express themselves fully and completely (Fadiman & Frager, 2002). It is also a powerful way in which the instructor can facilitate the beginnings of self-compassionate attitudes (Kessler, 2000; Trungpa, 1993).

Finally, a note about the intended use of this curriculum. Though these activities were intended for use in a group or classroom environment, they are more than appropriate for use in other settings. I would encourage parents, grandparents, babysitters, and childcare providers alike to engage their smaller groups of children in any or all of these activities. Whether as a whole or in its individual parts, whether in school, during after school childcare, at the daycare, or at home, this curriculum is my gift to educators, parents, families, and children. My greatest wish is that it will benefit all of these groups in different ways, enriching our lives and our society.

Activity One

My Own Best Friend

Suggested Age Group: Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd Grade (Or any)

“By extending *maitri*, unconditional friendliness...this begins to penetrate the clouds of self-judgment so that one’s life energy can circulate freely once again” (Welwood, 2000, p. 168).

Materials Needed:

- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)

Introduction to Activity

The present activity purposefully appears first in this curriculum. Before introducing children to more advanced concepts like self-compassion, altruism, service, or compassion for others – perhaps even before introducing the word compassion itself – it is suggested that the instructor start simply. In the present activity, children will be presented with the opportunity to pause and consider the benefits of befriending and taking care of themselves. Ultimately, this activity may foster a permanent change in children’s intrapersonal attitudes: from a stance of non-friendliness to a pattern of self-love and respect. By doing so, the present exercise will provide a simple and effective foundation for the compassionate attitudes cultivated in subsequent activities in this curriculum.

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

This exercise will challenge children to identify a number of qualities that they consider to be ideal for a “best friend.” The instructor may anticipate that children will list such attributes as unconditional love, friendliness, acceptance, and encouragement. By doing so, it is expected that children will compare these qualities to the ways in which they currently relate to inner phenomena. Finally, by prompting children to consider how they can apply the qualities of a “best friend” to their own lives, this activity will promote a way of relating to oneself that is more loving, friendly, warm, and compassionate.

When reviewing children’s final creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as increased understanding of self-compassion and enhanced willingness to be friendly/loving towards oneself, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

In Buddhism, the Sanskrit word *maitri* is regularly translated as “unconditional friendliness towards oneself” (Chodron, 2001; Welwood, 2006; Trungpa, 1993). Says Welwood (2000) on the nature of *maitri*: “It is an appreciation of the basic, underlying sense that one is generally good” (p. 166). *Maitri* is a concept that interrupts and opposes the more common, habitual pattern of relating to inner phenomena, which is often marked with hatred, criticism, and self-loathing. Therefore, cultivating a style of relating to oneself with *maitri* represents a radical change in perspective. Chodron (2003) comments on this change: “This is an interesting point, to be able to see what we do without hating ourselves. This can also be a description of *maitri* – loving kindness. We could see what we do with gentleness” (pp. 216-217).

Zaehner (1997) asserts that being friendly towards oneself – the heart of this concept of *maitri* – is a universal spiritual concept. “Christianity, Judaism, Taoism, and Islam...all are proponents of friendliness and self-love” (p. 373). However, the Buddhist tradition professes the most appropriate description of “being one’s own best friend” for the purposes of this activity. *Maitri* will remain the principal understanding of friendliness towards oneself in the present exercise.

Instructions for Execution

As the present exercise is the first in this curriculum, the instructor may find it appropriate to begin with a brief discussion about the nature of the present work. She may feel inclined to speak on the necessity of silence, acceptance, and warmth, both from the children and from the instructor herself. Establishing a conducive, nonjudgmental atmosphere from the beginning is essential for this curriculum to effectively touch children’s lives.

After an appropriate amount of discussion time and a silent pause to prepare the space for the current activity, the instructor may introduce the central question posed by this activity: “What are some qualities that you feel might characterize the ideal best friend?” Of course, we all have friends. Here, the instructor will prompt children to consider the *ideal best friend*, someone who children consider to be the ultimate companion to them. Children may be encouraged to be as excessive and elaborate as possible. For example, instead of “nice,” the instructor could point out that an ideal best friend could be “unconditionally kind without judging you for your mistakes.” Throughout this discussion, children are expected to identify attributes such as unconditional love, a willingness to accept others unconditionally, friendliness and encouragement that exceeds expectations, and other items that seem to characterize the pinnacle of friendliness and love.

After sufficient time has passed and each child has a firm grasp on their impression of the ideal best friend, the instructor should prompt children that the focus of the activity is about to change slightly. Now, instead of focusing on the qualities of an ultimate, definitive “best friend,” children should consider what it might feel like if *they treated themselves* with these loving thoughts and actions. For their final creative expression project, children are instructed to create a picture that represents their personal experience of applying these characteristics to themselves. For instance, the child that mentioned unconditional acceptance may be encouraged to draw a picture depicting what it feels like to accept herself without judgment or blame. If encouragement or praise seemed an important characteristic to a particular child, that child’s picture should express what it might feel like to provide unfailing encouragement to himself. The activity has ended when all children are finished with their projects.

Quick Reference

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Begin with a discussion about the curriculum as a whole in order to foster the appropriate conditions
- Children and instructor discuss the ideal qualities that a best friend might possess
- Children are instructed to create a picture that expresses their *personal experience* of applying these characteristics to themselves

Activity Two

Out of the Ashes: My Own Phoenix Process

Suggested Age Group: Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd Grade (Or any)

“It’s all in the way we approach the changing nature of life...it’s in the way we listen for the messages in the flames and dig for the treasure in the ashes” (Lesser, 2004, p. 56).

Materials Needed:

- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)
- Drama Materials (e.g. assortment of costumes, random props, etc.)

Introduction to Activity

Throughout her work on the human transformational process, Lesser (2004) continually returns to a term that she herself has coined: “The Phoenix Process.” According to Lesser, a single human lifetime contains countless cycles of death and rebirth, not unlike the that of the mythical bird known as the Phoenix. Unlike the Phoenix, however, *our* deaths and rebirths are brought upon by life’s inevitable changes. “Our lives ask us to die and be reborn every time we confront change – change within ourselves and change in our world” (p. 55).

During a Phoenix Process, old conditioned patterns are plunged into the fires of change – often painfully and with resistance at first (Lesser, 2004). Because it is *time* for them to go, these obsolete patterns are burned away, and like a snake shedding its skin, one emerges from their Phoenix Process transformed and renewed. Lesser holds that self-compassion is a natural byproduct of learning to embrace these changes instead of continuing to resist them. This understanding is supported in the work of Welwood (2000), Trungpa (1993), and Hopkins (2001), among others. The present activity will prompt children to identify and acknowledge their own Phoenix Processes, and therefore functions as an introductory lesson in self-compassion.

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

The present exercise challenges children to recall a single event that has, in some way, proven transformative for them. Children will be tasked with relating this event to the mythical story of the Phoenix, in which the bird plunges itself into the fire only to be born again with a higher understanding of life and a renewed sense of purpose and meaning. The purpose of this activity, then, is to provide children a foundation for self-compassionate attitudes by helping them to embrace the changes in their lives – either difficult situations or joyous occasions – as opportunities for growth and transformation.

When reviewing children’s final creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as increased motivation to be self-compassionate, enhanced understanding of the human transformational process, and acceptance of life circumstances as opportunities for growth, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

The hero's trial. The great initiation. The Odyssey. The Grail quest. Dante's descent into Hell. History and literature are dense with stories of trials, hardship, and death that eventually end in triumph and rebirth (Lesser, 2004). These tales weave their way into tapestry of human existence until it is oftentimes difficult to separate fact from fiction. Indeed, myth and legend contain perennial spiritual truths for those who are willing to listen (Ladner, 2004). Religion is not exempt from this trend. In the Christian tradition, Christ literally *dies* on the cross, only to return from the dead in order to ascend into the kingdom of Heaven (Judy, 2003). In Buddhism, Prince Siddhartha suffers greatly, (and nearly dies as an ascetic), until finally resolving to reach enlightenment under the Bodhi tree (Snelling, 1991). Lesser (2004) captures the transformational journey intrinsic to religious practices by stating: "From Jonah in the whale to Jesus on the cross, and from the Hindu hero Arjuna on the battlefield to prince Siddhartha losing everything to become Buddha, the great ones have gone before us on this journey" (p. 55).

Another spiritual antecedent of the Phoenix Process came about long before the contemporary work of Lesser. In the late 16th century, St. John of the Cross, Spanish Christian mystic and major figure in the Catholic Reformation, coined the term "dark night of the soul" (Moore, 2004). Not as much a malady of the mind as they are an awakening of the spirit, dark nights of the soul often occur only when the individual is on the verge of overcoming a great obstacle. They represent *transformation*, not sickness. "A true dark night of the soul is not a surface challenge but a development that temporarily takes you away from the joy of your ordinary life" (p. xiv). There is tremendous opportunity for growth when one experiences a dark night of the soul, much like Lesser's (2004) Phoenix Process. Prompting the seeker to look more deeply into his dark times, Moore asks: "Are you going to open your heart to a mystery that is as natural as the sun and the moon, day and night, and summer and winter" (p. xiv).

Instructions for Execution

Most of us are familiar with the legend of the Phoenix, the mythical bird that, "Knowing that a new way could be found only with the death of his worn-out habits, defenses, and beliefs...sat in the flames, and burned to death" (Lesser, 2004, p. 55). However, few of us realize that we *ourselves* have our own Phoenix stories to tell, complete with difficulties, hardships, renewal, and rebirth. On the other side of the fiery turmoil of a Phoenix Process lies "...our most authentic, vital, generous, and wise self. [And] what stands between that self and us is what burns in the fire." (p. 56). By means of a heartfelt discussion and meaningful creative project, this exercise will allow children to identify a personal transformation worthy of the name "Phoenix Process."

The instructor will begin this activity, as with *all* activities, with a respectful period of silent, open space. After adequate time has passed and the classroom seems prepared for mindful discussion, the instructor should introduce this activity by telling children his or her own rendition of the story of the Phoenix. As this is a common mythical story, particulars will not be included here. It is perfectly acceptable to put the story in one's own words. However, the instructor may also choose to use the reference material provided here when recalling this myth to children. This is an opportunity for the instructor to exercise his or her creative muscles; the present activity encourages freedom of expression and interpretation. The better one is at storytelling, the more children will receive from this activity.

It is important, however, that adequate time is spent on the story of the Phoenix. The instructor must provide enough information, ample open space, and sufficient time for children to fully digest this fable, because the next step in this exercise is to challenge children to identify a period in their lives when *they* underwent a transformation similar to that of the Phoenix. The heart of this activity prompts children to answer the following questions: "What has happened to *you* that changed you like the fire changed the Phoenix? How have *you* been reborn/transformed in your lifetime?"

Of course, this is not an easy task, and children may need the instructor's help identifying their own Phoenix Processes. Oftentimes, a Phoenix Process is evoked by painful or difficult circumstances (Lesser, 2004). To that end, the instructor may encounter children willing to recall the divorce of their parents, the death of a loved one, the fear that they experience because of the wars raging overseas, or any number of trying circumstances in their lives. The role of the instructor here is to guide children's focus onto what *good* came about as a result of these difficult periods.

Some guidepost questions may sound like: “Sure, that sounds like it was a hard time for you and your family. But how has that touched your life and made you a better person? How has that changed you and made you happier,” or “How did that event open your heart?”

It is important for the instructor to understand that a Phoenix Process does not only arise by suffering (Lesser, 2004). Any number of positive, joyous occasions can also evoke stable changes in the ways that children relate to their world. Children may have moved into a new home, or relocated from a different city. The birth of a new sibling or the marriage of an older family member can also be transformative events that are viewed in a positive light by children and their families. The role of the instructor here remains the same: to direct children towards their wholesome, happy, or *positive* feelings regarding these life-changing events.

To culminate this exercise, children are asked to create their own dance, skit, or picture that represents the change that they underwent in their Phoenix Process. The dramatic representations of the Phoenix Process – dances or skits – may resemble the birthing process, with violent or painful beginnings climaxing with a serene and joyful ending. They may also resemble the event itself, and will vary with each child’s personal experience. The option to express one’s Phoenix Process artistically – in the form of a watercolor or painted picture – may also take literally *any* shape, as each will be unique to the individual child’s understanding of his or her Phoenix Process. As with all of the activities across this curriculum, it is not the particular subject matter of children’s projects that matters as much as the expression of the specific transpersonal qualities delineated in the “Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome” section. Here, children are expected to display some measure of self-compassionate attitudes and an understanding of their personal transformational process. Like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, children will take their first steps towards embracing the multitude of changes inherent in human life.

Quick Reference

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Begin with a period of silence/open space
- Instructor tells the story of the Phoenix
 - Ascertain that children are able to relate as deeply as possible to the story
- Children are tasked with identifying their own Phoenix story, or an event in their lives that has brought about positive change
 - Instructor may have to aid children in identifying these events. Events can be literally anything in the child’s life – a positive life event or a difficult situation – that can be viewed as transformative in the present.
- Creative expression project

Activity Three

Mistakes and Forgiveness

Suggested Age Group: Any

“To err is human. To forgive is Divine” (Collins, 1912, p. 31).

Materials Needed:

- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)
- Drama Materials (e.g. assortment of costumes, random props, etc.)

Introduction to Activity

Genuinely forgiving oneself, (not only for simple, daily mistakes but also the wrongdoings of the past that we are still carrying around with us), is the very heart of self-compassion (Hopkins, 2001; Ladner, 2004; Welwood, 2000). Furthermore, it is a tremendously *brave* act to forgive oneself, for it takes great honesty to see how transgressions have affected oneself and others. Says Ladner of the benefits of compassionate forgiveness: “...if honest awareness reveals it [a mistake or wrongdoing] as a cause of suffering, then compassion demands that we let it go” (p. 54). The present activity will introduce children to the benefits of such brave self-awareness and will challenge them to become more forgiving and compassionate towards themselves.

In my life, it is a daily practice to remember to be gentle with myself. Often, in the midst of intense suffering, self-criticism, or confusion, I realize that my pain is a direct result of simply failing to forgive myself. By recalling my gentleness, I am able to surrender my self-loathing emotions to the truth: forgiveness is all it takes to transcend my suffering.

The profound wisdom of *A Course in Miracles* echoes this realization: “Ask not to be forgiven, for this has already been accomplished. Ask, rather, to learn how to forgive” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1995, p. 74).

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

This uncomplicated exercise is intended to introduce children to the possibility that forgiveness is accessible to them at any time. Oftentimes, forgiveness is understood as coming from another, from *outside* of one’s own experience (Judy, 2003). The ideas presented in this activity will attempt to counter this common Western belief. By first providing children with the opportunity to identify a particular situation that is a source of suffering, self-loathing, or distress in their lives, this activity will then prompt children to think of creative ways in which to forgive the transgression and approach it with lightheartedness and warmth. If children were to apply such attitudes to other, similar situations in which forgiveness is needed, an outlook of self-compassion may replace older patterns of self-criticism or loathing (Welwood, 2000). In short, the purpose of this activity is to foster self-compassion by providing an experiential method of forgiveness.

When reviewing children’s final creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as increased self-compassionate attitudes, a willingness to forgive oneself and others, and embracing mistakes/wrongdoings as part of one’s journey, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

Forgiveness is a vital attribute in nearly every world religious tradition, and can be found in abundance in Christianity, Buddhism, Sufism, and Judaism (Zaehner, 1997). For instance, Ladner (2004) holds that the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths – the very foundation of all Buddhist thought – are first and foremost a teaching on forgiveness and self-compassion. “His [Buddha’s] first teaching was...explaining how to practice compassion for oneself...to practice compassion for ourselves, we need to see beyond our distractions to recognize our own suffering” (p. 54).

In Christianity, the forgiveness of Christ is known as both a divine attribute and also an entirely ordinary, basic facility that human beings are encouraged to utilize in their daily lives (Judy, 2003). “He [Jesus] heals spiritually the deep psychological conflict that needing forgiving...however, we as humans are encouraged to forgive others in much the same way” (p. 52). The sacred Jewish day of Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, is regarded as the ideal time for Jews to “...unburden [their] souls in front of the Creator” (Kramer, 2003, p. 116). The focus on forgiveness and renewal during Yom Kippur is so great that many practitioners *literally* travel around to others that they have wronged throughout the year to beg for their pardon. Finally, Barks and Green (2000) assert numerous times how vital forgiveness – both for oneself and others – is for the spiritual development of the Sufi.

To conclude this discussion on the spiritual nature of forgiveness, let us recognize the perennial wisdom of *A Course in Miracles*. By recalling an earlier section of this work, one may experience these words gently extinguishing the illusory nature of our basic dis-ease: “Forgiveness is the great need of this world, but that is because it is a world of illusions. Those who forgive release themselves from illusions, while those who withhold forgiveness are binding themselves to them” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1995, p. 76).

Instructions for Execution

As with most activities across this curriculum, the present exercise should be opened with a period of respectful silence. The subject matter included in this activity requires contemplation, bravery, and honesty on the part of its participants, and it is the responsibility of the instructor to foster a conducive, accepting environment from the beginning.

After an adequate period of open, receptive silence, the instructor should pass out one piece of parchment paper and an assortment of drawing supplies (crayons, markers, etc.) to children, instructing each that any drawing will take place during the second step of this activity. Once all children have received their supplies, the instructor may proceed.

During the first step of this exercise, the instructor will begin by posing children with the following question: “Can you identify a mistake you have made or a wrong that you have committed that you still feel very badly about?” The purpose here is for children to identify a solidified emotion such as guilt, self-directed anger, or self-loathing that is related to a past mistake or transgression. Of course, scenarios will vary with each child, but as long as the child can identify their troublesome emotion, most any situation will do.

If children prefer to keep their personal scenarios to themselves, of course this is acceptable. After the instructor is satisfied everyone has identified their scenario, she may proceed to the next step of this activity.

On their parchment paper, children are asked to *draw* what it might feel like if somebody very close to them, their mother, father, sibling or grandparent, was to forgive them completely for their mistake. Some guidepost statements may sound like: “I want you to take as long as you need to draw whatever it feels like to be forgiven by your mother/father/grandparent. What color is forgiveness from them? What shape? Is it a picture, a scene, or is it just an emotion?” Whatever their personal impression of *forgiveness from another* may be is perfectly fine. Enough time should be given for complete expression of their experience.

After this drawing – one-half of the entire activity – has been completed, the instructor will shift her focus from forgiveness from another to forgiveness from within. Children are asked to turn their paper over and draw another, *different* picture, one that depicts what it would feel like to forgive themselves for this same transgression/mistake. The instructor may need to emphasize that drawing this picture is an entirely different experience from drawing the previous one. As self-compassion may be a foreign concept to many children, the instructor may also feel compelled to speak on the benefits of forgiving oneself from her own experience. Humor may help children to identify these self-compassionate attitudes, and the instructor may recommend that children view this transgression lightheartedly. Some guidepost statements here may sound like: “Would it be so bad to smile at this mistake today? There’s no use to cry over spilled milk! How can you *draw* your sense that this mistake is funny to you?” Whatever form *forgiveness from within* takes in children’s drawings is perfectly acceptable.

A final discussion should ensue, during which the instructor should gauge children’s overall impressions of both forgiveness from another and forgiveness from within. Which felt more natural to them? Which left them feeling more fulfilled/whole/forgiven? And which – self-forgiveness or forgiveness from others – would they prefer to have more of in the future? Of course, there are no *wrong* responses to these questions, as each child’s background and home environment will differ. Some homes may provide abundant amounts of forgiveness from others (parents, grandparents, etc.) while others may promote self-forgiveness more strongly. Regardless of their previous experience with forgiveness, it is the intention of this exercise that children may develop an increased awareness of how both forgiveness and self-compassionate attitudes function in their lives.

Quick Reference

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Instructor opens with a period of silence in order to facilitate contemplation on the part of the participants
- Instructor hands out art supplies and parchment paper
- Instructor asks children to identify a mistake or transgression that they feel bad about
- Children are asked to draw their impression of forgiveness from another
- Children are asked to draw their impression of forgiveness from *within*
 - Humor may be used at this point
- Discussion: Which is preferable to you?

Activity Four

Different but the Same

Suggested Age Group: Any

“Interdependence...leads to a quality of realness, of genuine concern for self and other without conditions or clause” (Gates, 2005, p. 160).

Materials Needed:

- Parchment paper and pens
- Standard 28x22 inch poster board
- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)

Introduction to Activity

Upon achieving a basic understanding of compassion, it becomes clear that others are not as different from us as we previously imagined. We all want happiness, and we all wish to avoid suffering (H.H. Dalai Lama, 2001; Hopkins, 2001; Ladner, 2004).

These universal truths can be seen in literally *all* of our pursuits: for love, in our career, within our familial systems, and within our own individual psychological structures. However, from the color of our skin to the religious beliefs that we hold, we emphasize all too often those things that make us *different*. For children, cultivating an understanding of equality is the fundamental building block for fostering compassionate beliefs and attitudes (Kessler, 2000). To that end, the present exercise will prompt children to explore the many aspects of human existence that unite us as One. Though we *are* different, in many ways we are also the same.

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

Vascak (1999) claims that the most prevalent focus in our society is, by and large, the things that keep up separate, those aspects that make us different from one another. We turn a blind eye to the many things we have in common, investing energy instead in our prejudices. “Once we’re sunk in...selfish activities, the sense of commonality among beings is lost” (Hopkins, 2001, p. 77). The present exercise is intended to offer an alternative to this common pattern of thoughts and beliefs, allowing children to focus for a time on the things that all human beings have in common.

By engaging in this exercise, children are expected to display an increased understanding of equality and even-mindedness when distinguishing between the people in their lives. Instead of habitually drowning in a sea of projected characteristics – of like and dislike, praise and blame, prejudice and attachment – children are expected to give pause to consider the deeper, *shared* characteristics of others. A heightened sense of kinship with others may be observable in children’s creative expression projects. “...understanding that others are so much like oneself creates a different perspective, a startlingly changed worldview...you are no longer confronting another person over a divide, but meeting someone with whom you have much in common” (Hopkins, 2001, pp. 32-33).

When reviewing children’s creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as equanimity, increased capacity for forgiveness, empathy, and increased understanding of interconnectedness/interdependence, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

Often translated as “even-mindedness,” the concept of equanimity has a dual meaning (Snelling, 1991). First, the word connotes a practitioner’s ability to remain calm, tranquil, or poised even in the midst of trying circumstances. This meaning points towards a steadiness of mind, a special type of composure that is characteristic to deeply spiritually-realized individuals. Specific to the Buddhist tradition, equanimity also refers to our ability to see all beings as close to us, as close as our own best friend (Ladner, 2004). Here, equanimity connotes kinship, interconnectedness, and equality. Buddhist scholar Hopkins (2001) states: “Equanimity – recognizing the equality of aspiration to happiness and to get rid of suffering – is the basis for love, compassion, and kindness” (p. 40).

The deep understanding of equality that is brought about by compassionate attitudes is not specific to any one religious tradition (Chodron, 2003; Zaehner, 1997). Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, Muslim, Jew, and Atheist alike are united when they understand that human kinship and equality break down the barriers of indifference and aggression. However, Hopkins (2001) holds that, in order to be truly compassionate, “...it is first necessary to see that all beings in some respects are equal” (p. 34). Cultivating this profound, universal sense of equality is the focus of the present activity.

Instructions for Execution

This straightforward activity is intended to invoke in children an increased understanding of equality and shared human characteristics. This, as we have seen in previous sections, is a necessary component of compassion and compassionate action. By engaging in a very simple but creative list-making exercise, children will gain a wealth of knowledge regarding the many characteristics that all humans have in common.

Unlike others throughout this curriculum, the present activity contains an ongoing creative expression project as its primary focus. Instead of culminating with a project that is later reviewed by the instructor, this activity literally *is* its own final project. In this way, both children and instructor can spend longer amounts of time being creative and finding unique, personal ways to express the content included in this exercise.

The task at hand is extremely simple. Children are separated into small groups of no more than three or four. Each group is given one standard, 28x22 inch poster board that is divided in half on its horizontal axis.

Earlier, when preparing for this activity, the instructor has written “Things that make us different” on the left half of the poster board. On the right half, the instructor has written “Things that make us the same.” Children are given all the time that they need to fill in both columns with the requested content, and should be encouraged to be as creative as they feel comfortable. The instructor may prompt children to decorate each column lavishly, including drawing pictures or writing quotes for each quality they have listed. (The more eye-catching each project is, the better!) To that end, a wide array of art supplies should be provided, and can include markers, crayons, paints, glitter, glue, and construction paper. The instructor should make it clear that these are not lists that will be quickly discarded, but are instead works of art that will educate and enlighten everyone who views them. Projects may remain in the classroom/program area for a very long time.

Once instructions have been given, the instructor’s main function is to circulate around the classroom and facilitate when he is needed, offering suggestions or praise whenever appropriate. Throughout the creation of these posters, the instructor should step down from his normal role as guide and instead become more like a participant: actively engaged with children as their projects take shape. Guidance is still paramount, however, and the instructor should feel comfortable helping those groups who feel “stuck” to come up with more ideas for their posters.

Though specific responses are understandably difficult to predict, the left column (“Things that make us different”) is expected to contain a number of superficial, external attributes. It is perfectly acceptable for responses to include – among many others – items such as skin color, eye color, gender/sex, favorite color, favorite television show, religion, or favorite food. As one may have inferred, it is the *right* column (“Things that make us the same”) that should be the main focus of this project. This column is intended to be filled with more pervasive, universal human attributes, such as emotions, situations, and events/experiences. Some examples include: happiness, sadness, joy and laughter, marriage, sadness, learning and growth. Even so-called “negative” items, such as war, poverty, famine, or death remind us of the suffering that we share as human beings.

To end this exercise, the instructor should conclude by asking children to compare the columns on their posters, examining which attributes seem more important or relevant to them. Discussion questions should ensue. For instance, is the color of another person’s skin more important than their ability to laugh? Is their favorite food or eye color as vital as their ability to cry or feel joy? By engaging children in this final step, the instructor will be evoking feelings of equality and kinship, further instilling the lessons learned in this activity. It is vital that the instructor engages children in this conversation about their work. The greatest intention of this exercise is that children may feel more compassion for others who, as they will discover, are not as different as they may appear to be. Although we *are* different, we are also very much the same.

Quick Reference

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Children are separated into groups of no more than three or four
- Instructor hands out pre-divided posters and gives children instructions
 - Children are tasked with filling in each of the two columns and are encouraged to be as creative/artistic as possible
 - Plenty of time should be given to allow space for creative expression
- Discussion about which of the two columns is more important/relevant to children
 - Ex: “Is the color of another person’s skin more important than their ability to laugh?”
- Projects are hung in the classroom/program area to remind visitors of the equality that we share as human beings

Activity Five

The Beggar at the Door

Suggested Age Group: Any

“I neither eat nor drink, yet to honor my servant is to honor Me. To care for them is to care for Me” (Fadiman & Frager, 1997, p. 221).

Materials Needed:

- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)
- Drama Materials (e.g. assortment of costumes, random props, etc.)

Introduction to Activity

The first four activities in this curriculum are intended to provide a strong foundation for compassionate attitudes, focusing on compassion for oneself. Executed together in succession or separately, these activities are purposefully included at the beginning of this curriculum in order to introduce children to the rudiments of compassion. In the previous activity, the focus shifted slightly from the cultivation of self-compassion to fostering an understanding of equality with other human beings. The present activity provides an even greater shift in perspective. Instead of journeying inward to uncover their hidden caches of self-compassionate attitudes, this activity will challenge children to explore *servicing others* as the basis for compassionate action. Therefore, the present activity is a turning point in this Curriculum in Compassion. Presumably, children have already been exposed to methods for generating self-compassion and equality among human beings. This activity changes the focus of this curriculum from cultivating compassionate *attitudes* to promoting compassionate *actions*.

It should be noted that this activity may not necessarily follow the preceding sequence of activities. If it is the instructor's prerogative that children already have a preexisting foundation for compassionate attitudes – or if the instructor simply wishes to introduce children to the benefits of serving others – this activity can function effectively as an independent lesson.

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

The present activity is intended to allow children to explore their personal motivations to serve others. If said motivations exist in large quantities, this activity will encourage children to maintain or even increase their current capacity to serve others in their lives. If children demonstrate little to no interest in doing good for others, the present exercise is intended to introduce them to the benefits of service. As part of the present activity, children are asked to recall a time when offering aid to another person impacted them significantly. Expectantly, spending even this small amount of time focusing on the needs of others will be like sewing the seeds of compassionate action in children's lives (Trungpa, 1991). In short, engaging in this exercise will promote the compassionate ideal of serving others, in hopes that children will experience an increased willingness to do so in the future.

When reviewing children's creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as altruistic intentions, increased capacity for compassionate action, heightened motivation to be helpful, and increased willingness to serve others, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

The present activity has taken its inspiration (and its title) from a popular Sufi story, often referred to as "The Beggar at the Door" (Fadiman & Frager, 1997; Shah, 1967). For the purposes of this section, I will briefly paraphrase this story. The instructor should be reminded, however, that this curriculum is to be entirely nontheistic in nature. When engaging children in the present exercise, no mention should be made of the characters in this story. For more information on carrying out this exercise with children, please refer to the "Instructions for Execution" section.

In the Sufi story "The Beggar at the Door," Moses is approached by God and told to throw a grand party in His honor, with a lavish banquet, many guests, and an ornate meeting hall fit for the King of Kings (Fadiman & Frager, 1997; Shah, 1967). God promises Moses that, if he complies, He Himself will appear at the party. Doing what he is told, Moses prepares a magnificent party and invites hundreds of guests. The stage is set for the appearance of God. Hours pass, and the guests grow restless, when finally a knock comes at the door. However, instead of God in all His majesty staring back at them, a humble, dirty, blind beggar is revealed, asking for food and water. The beggar is scorned by Moses and all of his guests, told that the party is in honor of God and that a blind beggar has no right to enter such a place.

Saddened, the beggar leaves. More time passes, but the presence of God is felt by no one. Now disdaining Moses, calling him a liar and a cheat, all of the guests leave. Climbing a nearby mountain, Moses calls angrily to God, asking why he was forsaken at the party that God Himself had requested. God replies gently that he *did*, in fact, attempt to enter the party.

God describes that it was He, disguised as the blind beggar at the door, that pleaded for audience with the noblemen. He ends by teaching Moses a valuable lesson about service: “To have served him [the beggar] would have been to serve Me. All the Heavens are too small to contain Me, but not the hearts of My servants” (Fadiman & Frager, 1997, p. 221). Here, through the reverent words of the Sufis, we have witnessed an account of the benefits of acting with a servant’s heart.

Of course, the notion of serving others altruistically is not exclusive to the Sufi tradition (Snelling, 1991; Zaehner, 1997). For instance, from the famous prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (Egan, 1999) to Christ’s washing the feet of his servants at the last supper (Fadiman & Frager, 2002), Christianity is a tradition dense with the ideal of service. Perhaps most recently, however, the Christian ideal of service can be found throughout the life and works of Mother Theresa (Nouwen et al., 1982). Her legacy of servitude began in 1959, when she established the Missionaries of Charity, a Christian group whose purpose is to carry out the will of Christ by serving others around the world. However, “...more than what she did is *who she was*. Mother Theresa was an example of living compassion, as close to Sainthood as anyone who’s lived in our time in history” (p. 120).

The Buddhist concept of the *bodhisattva* – literally “enlightenment being” – is another prominent example of the servant as a common notion throughout the world’s religious traditions (Snelling, 1991). Having dedicated his life to the awakening of others, the *bodhisattva* is a being who, “...due to the momentum of initial compassionate resolve, vows to help free all beings from the coils of suffering” (p. 68). Inherent in the concept of the *bodhisattva* is the idea that compassion is a tremendous motivating factor in serving other people (Chodron, 2001; Trungpa, 1993). It is for this reason that the present activity is a lesson in compassionate *action* as opposed to attitudes. One may say that those who serve others are indeed *bodhisattvas* in training.

In conclusion, the present activity, having been inspired by Sufi stories of service, also has roots in the universal spiritual concept of the servant: the compassionate warrior who dedicates his or her life to the benefit of others.

Instructions for Execution

Even in the tiniest, most insignificant act of giving, generosity, or helpfulness, all children have experienced serving others in some capacity (Welwood, 2006; Trungpa, 1991). Moreover, Kessler (2000) holds that the motivation to serve others helps children to find meaning in their lives. “Young people cannot develop a sense of their own value unless they have opportunities to be of value to others” (p. 71). By engaging children in this exercise, the instructor will prompt them to identify this value and express it artistically.

The execution of this activity is a very simple, two-step process. After ample silent time has been provided to center the minds of participating children, the instructor poses the following question: “Can you identify a time when you helped another person and it really had an impact on you?” Of course, each child’s response will be different. Some children may recall giving to the Salvation Army during Christmas time. Others may have volunteered with siblings or parents at a local soup kitchen. Still others may recount the simple act of giving a birthday present and how their father’s smile touched their hearts. Each child’s particular scenario is not as important as *their personal experience*. If the act of helping, giving, or serving has deeply affected them, nearly any situation is acceptable.

After the instructor is certain that all children have identified their personal scenario, they are instructed to utilize one of two artistic mediums in expressing how it has impacted them. First, children may draw or paint their impression of this act of service. If this is the chosen medium, children should be instructed to be as thorough and detailed as possible, and adequate time should be given so that children can express themselves fully. A second option offered will allow children to express their chosen act of service in the form of a dramatic skit or play. If this is the chosen medium, children may be allowed to form groups in order to express their scenario. The instructor should be very clear at this point: this creative expression activity should not reflect the situation itself, but *how it has affected the child*. Some guidepost statements may sound like: “How has helping that person changed you? What did you feel in your heart after you helped him/her?”

The activity has ended when children have either completed their drawings or presented their plays/skits.

Quick Reference

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Activity is opened with a few moments of silence
- Instructor asks children to identify a time in their lives when they offered help or service to another individual
 - “Can you identify a time when you helped another person and it really had an impact on you?”
- Once all children have identified a situation that has significance for them, a creative expression exercise will ensue

Activity Six

Make me an Instrument

Suggested Age Group: Any

“It’s evocative to consider that a thoughtful activity in a particular place can be tied to the whole cosmos...one’s motivation is so powerful it will make a difference for all” (Hopkins, 2001, p. 43).

Materials Needed:

- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)
- Parchment paper and pens

Introduction to Activity

There is much to be said about aspiration and intention. Aspiring to help other people will certainly be of benefit to them, but it will also tremendously impact *oneself*, sewing the seeds of compassion with each intention that is set (Trungpa, 1984; Chodron, 2003). Recognizing and cultivating one’s aspirations to be useful, loving, and kind is a powerful first step towards leading a life of altruistic attitudes and compassionate actions. In the previous activity, children were simply tasked with *recalling* a significant act of helpfulness or service from their past. Building upon that notion, the present activity will further promote the ideal of compassionate action by challenging children to express their intentions to be of benefit to other people.

In her most-beloved daily prayer, Mother Theresa commonly uttered the phrase “Make me an instrument,” calling upon God to make her a tool of healing for the entire world (Egan, 1999). In much the same way, the present project will allow children to explore the ways in which *they* can be instrumental in serving other people.

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

The present project will challenge children to express a number of their personal intentions to give their service, love, generosity, and helpfulness to other people. If children possess large quantities of these intentions, the present project will serve to solidify their compassionate aspirations. If said intentions exist in smaller amounts, (or even if children seem uninterested in aspiring to benefit others), the present activity functions as a fine introduction to setting intentions and working with others. Final creative expression projects can even be sent home with children, at the instructor’s discretion, so that they may have a daily reminder of their intentions to be instruments of goodwill and service.

When reviewing children’s creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as increased aspirations to serve others and increased willingness to explore one’s own altruistic motivations, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

Many theorists agree (Egan, 1999; Nouwen et al, 1982; Fadiman & Frager, 2002) that the well-known prayer of St. Francis of Assisi is one of the most powerful aspirations of service in the Christian tradition. Evoking such intentions as “where there is despair, let me bring hope,” and “where there is sadness, let me bring joy,” this prayer is a profound representation of Christian compassionate intention (Egan, 1999, p. 32). In addition, Egan has also established that prominent figures in contemporary Christianity, such as Mother Theresa and Pope John Paul II, included this prayer in their daily conversations with God.

In Buddhism, the *bodhisattva* vow is understood to be the ultimate affirmation of the practitioner’s intention to dedicate his life to serving other beings (Trungpa, 1991). “The *bodhisattva* vow is the commitment to put others before oneself...based on the realization of the suffering and confusion of oneself and others” (pp. 108-109).

The vow itself is a deeply spiritual and heartfelt ritual, at which all of the *bodhisattvas* who have ever lived, including great Buddhist deities such as Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri, are said to be present. By taking the *bodhisattva* vow, the Buddhist practitioner vows to spend his life working with *himself* as well as others, engaging in earnest spiritual practice so that he may become more effective when working with the sufferings of the world.

Instructions for Execution

The present activity will challenge children to identify their own aspirations and/or intentions to be of service to the others in their lives. By engaging children in a simple discussion, the instructor will prompt them to recognize and list the many ways in which they can be helpful to other people. After adequate discussion, a creative expression project will ensue that functions to solidify children's intentions and remind them that compassionate action is accessible to them many times each day.

After beginning with a period of open, respectful silence, the instructor will hold a discussion centering on the following question: "In what ways would you *like to be* helpful or beneficial to the people in your life?" This question has been formed specifically to draw out children's intentions and aspirations to be of service, and not necessarily the more general ways in which they have been helpful in the past. Put in another way, though all responses should be met with acceptance and praise, the most desirable responses are those specifically directed towards *altruistic intentions*. For example, "helping to clean up the juice that I spilled" is a far less-relevant answer than "asking my mommy what I can do to help her when she has had a bad day." This may be difficult for children, who may at first cite all of their household chores and consider themselves quite the altruists.

To aid in any difficulties that may arise, the instructor once again adopts the role of facilitator. Guiding the conversation away from irrelevant material with gentleness and nonjudgmental language may be challenging, but the instructor is encouraged to maintain the purpose of this activity at all times. Each child should be given all the time that he or she requires to speak, and the instructor should be prepared to help children with examples or encouragement, should they feel "stuck" in identifying their aspirations.

When adequate discussion time has elapsed and each child has been given ample opportunity to express his or her compassionate/altruistic intentions, one of two creative expression projects will ensue. Whichever medium is chosen, the purpose of each project is to instill in children the lessons they have learned about aspiring to serve others. Children may choose to draw or paint a list of their chosen intentions on a piece of construction paper. If this is the chosen medium, children should be encouraged to be as elaborate and decorative as possible so that their list will stand out as a beautiful piece of artwork. Other children, potentially older groups, may feel inclined to write a poem expressing the significance of their altruistic aspirations. Either of these creative expression projects may be sent home, (the instructor may recommend that projects are hung on children's bedroom walls), so that children may be reminded of the many opportunities that they have to be an instrument of healing, love, compassion, and service each day of their lives.

Quick Reference

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Instructor opens the activity with a period of silence to prepare the space for discussion
- A discussion will ensue, focusing on the following question: "In what ways *would you like to be* helpful or beneficial to the people in your life?"
 - Instructor should be prepared to facilitate as children identify their aspirations to be of service to others
 - The most desirable answers will focus on altruistic/compassionate *intentions* and not necessarily more general helpful acts from past experience
- After adequate time has passed and each child has had equal opportunity to express him or herself to the group, their creative expression project may follow
 - Projects can be sent home as reminders of children's intentions and aspirations

Activity Seven

Eye Contact, Heart Contact

Suggested Age Group: 3rd, 4th, and 5th Grade

"The basis of compassion is nonterritoriality, non-ego...If you have that, then you have compassion. Then further warmth and workability and gentleness take place as well" (Trungpa, 1993, p. 129).

Materials Needed

- Drama Materials (e.g. assortment of costumes, random props, etc.)
- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)

Introduction to Activity

To introduce this activity, I would like to offer a personal story. In 2001, I attended my first meditation retreat at a nearby Shambhala Buddhist center. Having been called towards Buddhism for quite some time, this retreat represented my initiation into the world of spiritual living. It was an amazing, transformative week for me, filled with deep interpersonal connections, many opportunities for authentic communication, and my first contact with meditative awareness. Upon re-entering the world outside the gates of the Shambhala Center, I was astounded at how little eye contact I was able to achieve with other people. Only then, after it fell missing, did I realize how significant eye contact was for me. I craved that deep, heartfelt eye contact, the kind that left me with a sense of “I am with you.”

During my time at the meditation retreat, I had experienced what Buber (1947) calls the I/Thou relationship: a fusion of both compassionate awareness and authentic presence that occurs when two people relate to one another on an extremely subtle, intimate level. Remarking on the I/Thou relationship, Welwood (2000) states that “...it is the intimate resonance between oneself...and another, whose particular suchness we respond to in a very particular way” (p. 224). This intimate moment of connection, for me, first arose through the medium of heartfelt, genuine eye contact. And so, I soon found myself seeking out this intimacy in all walks of my life. I followed a stranger’s gaze at the supermarket. I stared intently at my bank teller. I marveled at the extents to which people went to avoid making eye contact with me, and puzzled at how quickly they shied away once it was established. What was everyone so afraid of? It was as if, without seeking, I had uncovered an understanding of compassion that would change my life forever.

The present exercise, then, is intended to cultivate precisely this experience for children. By establishing and maintaining eye contact in an environment of quiet, safe, open space, children will be given the opportunity to silence the persistent chatter of egoic mind. This, as will be explored in the following sections, will provide ample opportunity for children to *open their hearts* to another, promoting a deep and meaningful understanding of compassion.

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

Numerous theorists assert (Chodron, 2003; Epstein, 1995; Welwood, 2006) that the ego-driven mechanisms of fear, uncertainty, and holding back are all methods of closing our hearts and keeping others separate from us. Trungpa (1993) agrees that it is *ego* that is responsible for this distant, fearful, closed heart, and that this is the basis for all human suffering. “It is because of such clinging to ego that we...suffer endless pain. Since ego-clinging is the source of pain, if I try to maintain ego, there can be no happiness” (p. 119).

Therefore, in opposition to the habitual tendency to maintain ego, this activity will promote the ability to *open the heart* by fostering *bodhichitta*, a Buddhist concept practiced by those who have the deepest aspirations to cultivate compassion in their lives (Chodron, 2003; McLeod, 1987; Trungpa, 1993). By inviting children to stay with the feelings of uncertainty and fear that arise during prolonged eye contact, this activity will cultivate the type of compassionate resonance that occurs when the heart becomes open and receptive to another being. *Bodhichitta* will be discussed in more detail in the “Religious/Spiritual Antecedents” section.

When reviewing children’s creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as *bodhichitta*, empathetic resonance, increased awareness of one’s own egoic mechanisms, and enhanced compassionate understanding, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

Very early in her discussion of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, one of the root texts of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, Chodron (2005) clearly defines the concept of *bodhichitta*. “Specifically, it [*bodhichitta*] is the heartfelt yearning to free oneself from the pain of ignorance and habitual patterns in order to help others do the same” (p. xiii). At its core, *bodhichitta* is a two-fold experience. First, *bodhichitta* allows one to cultivate compassion for one’s own woundedness and suffering. Then, as a result, compassionate attitudes towards others begin to arise (Chodron, 2003; McLeod, 1987; Trungpa, 1993).

Put in another way, when we can see more clearly the ways in which we keep our hearts *closed*, we are more readily able to let our hearts *open*. Says Trungpa (1993), “*Bodhichitta* comes from the simple and basic experience of realizing that you could have a tender heart in any situation” (pp. 18-19).

By *staying with* one’s personal experience of suffering – the awkwardness, the uncertainty, the urge to protect oneself – one eventually comes into contact with an inner woundedness, an inner soft spot, at its core (Chodron, 2003; Welwood, 2006). “Sometimes the completely open heart and mind of *bodhichitta* is called the soft spot, a place as vulnerable and tender as an open wound” (Chodron, 2001, p. 4). This soft spot, *bodhichitta*, is the universal human experience of awakened, open heart.

All of the common egoic armor that we have constructed – our hatreds, fears, projections, and compensatory mechanisms – is softened in the light of *bodhichitta* (Chodron, 2001; McLeod, 1987; Trungpa, 1993). Says Chodron (2001): “We put up protective walls made of opinions and prejudices, barriers that are built on a deep fear of being hurt...fortunately for us, [*bodhichitta*] is like a crack in the walls we erect” (p. 4). Here, we see the nature of *bodhichitta* as transformational force, capable of offering healing and relief from our basic *dis-ease*. To experience *bodhichitta*, all we must do is simply be willing to see the ways in which we separate ourselves from compassion: “Compassion practice is daring...the trick to doing this is to stay with emotional distress without tightening into aversion, to let fear soften us rather than harden into resistance” (Chodron, 2001, p. 64).

A final spiritual antecedent comes from the realm of transpersonal psychotherapy. Welwood’s (2000) *unconditional presence* practice is a therapeutic technique based largely on the Buddhist concepts of meditative awareness and non-doing. Simply put, it is a method of meditation-in-action, as the therapist brings to the therapeutic setting the non-doing stillness she finds while sitting in meditation. Says Welwood of the transformative potential of this practice: “...*unconditional presence* is the most powerful transmuting force there is, precisely because it is a willingness to be there with our experience, without dividing ourselves in two by trying to ‘manage’ what we are feeling” (p. 117-118). The present exercise, then, will promote the emergence of *bodhichitta* as well as *unconditional presence*, both uniquely Buddhist concepts (Chodron, 2003; Trungpa, 1993; Welwood, 2006).

Instructions for Execution

Logistically, instructions for this activity are quite simple. Children are asked to pick a partner with whom they feel relatively comfortable. This partner can be anyone, providing that both parties are willing and a mutual state of comfort can be achieved. Sitting face-to-face, either on the floor or in chairs, children are tasked by the instructor to look deeply into one another’s eyes. The goal is not to look *for* anything, but purely to remain there with that other person, looking into their eyes for as long as possible. Multiple attempts are completely acceptable and may even be encouraged. Finally, a creative expression project (see below) will ensue. The exercise is really that simple.

Of course, anyone with even the tiniest bit of experience working with children will tell you that herein lies the greatest challenge of this exercise. Children – especially younger groups – will find it difficult to resist the urge to break the silence quickly. In part because of the natural feelings of discomfort that arise when meeting another person so intimately (Epstein, 1995), children may find a plethora of ways to become escape artists. The following suggestions are meant to combat this tendency, but more importantly, to allow children to *open* and become receptive to the experience of *bodhichitta* (Chodron, 2003; Trungpa, 1993) and/or Buber’s (1947) I/Thou relationship.

To begin this activity, the instructor is strongly encouraged to open with a period of respectful silence. Kessler (2000) supports the implementation of nontheistic silence into a school-age curriculum, reminding us how beneficial a moment of open space can be for children. “...practices such as silence, prayer, meditation, all cultivate the capacity for tolerating stillness and create the spaciousness for soul” (p. 36). Since this activity challenges children to maintain eye contact with a partner for as long as they are comfortable, beginning with a period of silence will offer children the space that they require to accommodate this task. Beginning with a centering practice such as silence is crucial and may ultimately “make or break” this exercise.

It takes bravery and commitment, especially for children, to be able to stay with another person for as long as this exercise proposes (Kessler, 2000). As Welwood (2000) explains, really *being* with another person takes a willingness to drop one’s agenda, to let go of preconceived notions about self and other.

This is not an easy thing to do, even for adults, and many children may be surprised to discover how difficult it is to maintain eye contact with another human being. The attitude of the instructor is paramount at this point in the exercise, and it may be appropriate to remind children about how much bravery they are showing by staying with their partner, even for a short while. The instructor may tell children that they are becoming “compassionate warriors,” reminding them that they are developing an amazing skill that many people do not possess: the ability to open their hearts to another. When sufficient time has elapsed, the instructor may conclude the activity.

To concretize the experiences cultivated during this exercise, one of two creative expression projects may ensue. Children may choose to work with their partners to create a brief dramatic skit (using provided props) that represents what it felt like to connect with their partner with prolonged eye contact. In addition to this, children should also feel welcomed to create a picture using the provided art supplies. Of course, either option is acceptable. The point is for children to express some aspect of the exercise that was *especially meaningful to them*. Finally, skits and pictures may be presented to the entire group if children feel comfortable doing so. If not, it is perfectly acceptable that their work remain just for them.

Quick Reference

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Children pick a partner with whom they are comfortable
- Instructor opens with a period of silence to center children’s minds and open up the space for the exercise
- Children establish and maintain eye contact for as long as they feel comfortable
 - Multiple attempts may be made for the longest amount of eye contact possible
- Instructor may encourage children that they are being “compassionate warriors”
- Creative expression project

Activity Eight

In Their Shoes

Suggested Age Group: 3rd, 4th, and 5th Grade

“Normally, we imagine...that we’re the center of everything. In those moments when we allow compassion to carry us beyond the boundaries ego sets, we let go of this perspective” (Ladner, 2004, p. 41).

Materials Needed

- Drawing/painting supplies (e.g. paper, crayons, markers, watercolors, paints, etc.)
- Drama Materials (e.g. assortment of costumes, random props, etc.)

Introduction to Activity

One of the simplest and most basic ways we have come to understand compassion is in its inherent ability to allow us to take on others’ suffering. In fact, many great spiritual texts (Ladner, 2004; Snelling, 1991; Trungpa, 1993) go so far as to claim that, through compassion, the suffering of others literally *becomes* our own. However, this is not cause for more suffering in our lives. Much to the contrary, taking on the suffering of others allows us to increase our compassionate attitudes, granting us the ability to meet larger and larger amounts of others’ suffering with increased understanding, empathy, and love (Trungpa, 1993). “We can be shock absorbers of other people’s pain all the time” (p. 45). In this activity, children will practice this ability, thereby generating compassion for both themselves and others.

Perceived Purpose/Intended Outcome

The present activity will invite children to experience the universality of their own suffering and then connect it with the suffering of other people. Sharing a similar intention with many other activities in this curriculum, this exercise is intended to cut into a child’s natural egocentrism and remind him or her that others suffer just as they do. Fully understanding this truth gives rise to authentic compassion (Chodron, 2003; Trungpa, 1993; Welwood, 1984). Trungpa (1993) comments on the realization of suffering as shared by all beings, stating: “The starting part of this practice is realizing that others could actually be more important than ourselves” (p. 24).

By opening to their own feelings of sadness – or in the words of Chodron (2003), by “starting where they are” – children are prompted to experience their own woundedness. The guided visualization included in this activity will prompt children to experience sad feelings, open to them, and resist the urge to run away. In the final step of this activity, children shift their focus from their own suffering to that of another.

At this moment, the entire classroom can become a beacon of compassionate resonance, sending out love and goodwill to all. In brief, this activity is intended to allow children first to experience compassion for themselves, and to then turn that compassionate intention towards another.

When reviewing children's final creative expression projects, the instructor should pay attention to the emergence of such transpersonal qualities as compassionate intentions for others, increased capacity for self-compassion, empathy, and expressions of altruism, as discussed in this section.

Religious/Spiritual Antecedents

In one of the root texts in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, Trungpa (1993) recounts his first experience with compassion. He was but a young boy when the Chinese government invaded Tibet, and as he fled the country aboard a bus of refugees, he witnessed a small, helpless dog being stoned and beaten to death by a crowd of people. Trungpa recalls that witnessing this event opened his heart immediately, and from that day forward, he never had to worry about being able to evoke compassion. By merely reflecting upon the suffering of the poor, helpless animal from his childhood, Trungpa could instantly access all the compassion he needed. It is from this lucid, entirely relatable account of the arising of compassion that this activity takes its inspiration.

When engaging children in this activity, the instructor is prompted a number of times to encourage them to *stay with* their feelings of sadness. This reverses the logic of ego, which habitually acts to push away unwanted material (Welwood, 2000). When we turn towards, or open into, our negative emotions, the intense suffering at their core becomes apparent to us. "Feelings in themselves do not necessarily lead to wisdom, but the process of opening fully to them can" (p. 119). Compassion for ourselves naturally arises when we feel our own woundedness, and is followed by the desire to share that compassion with others (Welwood, 2006).

A pearl of Buddhist wisdom further highlights the need to turn towards our negative mindstates instead of continuing to run away. It is a commonly-accepted truth among the various schools of Buddhism that it is *not* our unwanted feelings, life circumstances, or negative emotions that cause us to suffer at all. Instead, it is our aversion to (or running away from) these things that creates samsara (Epstein, 1995; Rahula, 1959; Snelling, 1991). "Resistance to unwanted circumstances has the power to keep those circumstances alive and well for a very long time" (Chodron, 2003, p. 115). Therefore, this activity is both lesson in self-compassion *and* compassion for others. By learning not to reject their sadness, but instead to *turn towards* their suffering, children are sewing the seeds of self-love. In the final step of the provided visualization exercise, children are prompted to use what compassion they have gained for themselves and turn it towards another. It is here that self-compassion becomes compassion-in-action, and we can see that the two are inseparable from one another (Trungpa, 1991; Trungpa, 1993).

"In Their Shoes" is based primarily on Buddhist notions of compassion. However, it should be noted that this activity also points towards the universal aspect of compassion delineated in the introduction of this piece. Throughout the world, the arousal of authentic empathy and concern for others relates directly to the ideal of compassion (Snelling, 1991; Zaehner, 1997). In addition to Buddhist theory, this activity has arisen from an appreciation of the universality of compassion. Just as Trungpa (1993) was immediately able to put himself in the position of the helpless dog being stoned to death, so children will be prompted to experience compassion when they put themselves in another's shoes.

Instructions for Execution

This activity will take the form of a simple question/answer forum and a brief visualization exercise. During the visualization, the instructor will function as a guide, leading children into their inner landscapes and fostering a safe, accepting environment. After engaging in the provided exercise, (see below), a creative expression activity will ensue that challenges children to express artistically what they have experienced.

Beginning with a simple dialogue about suffering, (or for younger children, "what makes you sad?"), the instructor will lead the group in a number of discussion questions aimed at connecting children with the suffering in their lives. The purpose of this activity is not to run from this suffering, however, but to recognize that suffering exists and to accept it as reality. Then, during the visualization exercise, (see below), children will gain a greater understanding that *everyone* suffers just as they do. The heart of this activity lies in the question: "What would it feel like to be in their shoes?"

The instructor can begin by introducing the topic at hand, which is sadness or suffering. (e.g. “Today, we’re going to talk about being sad.”) Some possible introductory questions are as follows: What does it feel like to be sad? What color is sadness as opposed to happiness? What song does sadness sound like? What song does happiness sound like? How do you act when you are sad? How is this different from when you are happy? If appropriate, a discussion can follow to acquaint the group with this material.

Afterwards, children are asked to close their eyes, everyone at the same time, and to visualize something that makes *them* sad. The point is to contact something personal, and children should be reminded that it does not have to be shared with anyone else. The instructor takes on the role as guide, speaking slowly and softly as he/she leads children into their personal experience of sadness. Some guidepost statements may sound like “Try to remember a time where you weren’t so happy, maybe somebody hurt your feelings or you got a bad grade,” or “What makes you sad? What makes you cry?” Many children will feel the urge to speak immediately and talk about their experience, but the instructor will encourage everyone to refrain from talking and instead to *stay with their experience* of being sad, let it fill them up, and not run away from it. It may be necessary during this visualization to remind children – especially younger groups – that sadness is only temporary and that we’re about to learn something very valuable. It is also the instructor’s responsibility to ascertain that all children remain comfortable and at ease throughout this activity.

The final step in this visualization emphasizes an abrupt shift in perspective. After children have spent adequate time recalling their own feelings of sadness, the instructor asks them the following question: “What if you saw *someone else* who was sad for this very same reason? What if someone close to you, your mother or father, your grandparent, or your brother or sister, was experiencing this exact same sadness? How would you feel for them?” At this point, after a final quiet moment to internalize these questions, the visualization has ended and children may open their eyes. If any discussion seems appropriate, the instructor may lead children in an open dialogue for a few moments.

Quick Reference

Finally, children are assigned to express their experience of the other person’s sadness by drawing or painting a picture. What did it feel like to be in that other person’s shoes? It is important that the instructor be specific here: the picture is not supposed to reflect the other person only, but *the child’s experience of that other person’s suffering*. What would the child like to do, specifically, to aid that other person in their suffering? As an alternative, children may also create a dramatic skit in which they act out the insight/experiences that they have gained during this activity. The activity is finished when all children are done with their pictures or have presented their skits

For quick reference when engaging children in this activity, the following bulleted list may be used:

- Dialogue about suffering/sadness (e.g. “What makes you sad?”)
- Visualization begins, focusing on personal experience of sadness/suffering
 - Encourage children to “stay with” their feelings for as long as they are comfortable
- Instructor shifts the focus of visualization from self to other
- Creative expression project

Findings from Curriculum Engagement with Children

As the final leg of my journey with this project, I spent one week engaging a small group of children in the activities that are proposed here. Much more for me than for the children who participated, it was a time of learning and transformation. During this time of curriculum execution, the activities presented here transitioned from words on a page – the same words that my eyes have passed over hundreds of times – to something much more. It should have come as no surprise that bringing these activities from theory to practice would be an awakening experience for me. All too often, however, I found myself astounded at the subtle transformations that took place each day. To be sure, it was not always what I expected.

In the present section, I will attempt to capture the key aspects of my *own* process while engaging children in this curriculum. Subsequent sections will explore children’s work, briefly assess the curriculum activities themselves, and present relevant child/parent reactions.

Reflection on Personal Experiences

In due course, I ended up with a warm, receptive, and very respectful group of students. Each seemed willing to treat my curriculum with seriousness, levity, and openness. All elementary grades (Kindergarten – 5th Grade) were equally represented. Throughout our time together, my classroom regularly contained fourteen youngsters, each of whom continued to forge deeper and more meaningful relationships, both within themselves and with one another. However, arriving here did not come without its difficulties.

The first challenge that I encountered was in collecting my sample itself. I may find in the future that I recall this difficulty most vividly, for it certainly presented me with many opportunities to practice compassion. Some of my parents were made uneasy by my requests that they read and sign an informed consent form for this project. Though I was quite certain that the wordage of my consent form left no room for misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or reservations, I found that I encountered some opposition in gathering a desirable number of children. One parent/child duo challenged me in a very specific way, criticizing my project repeatedly and stating that it was “pointless psychoanalysis.” The parent, without ever fully reading my consent form, persisted to criticize my presence in the program. The child – undoubtedly because of the negative talk that was going on at home – frequently shot me criticizing and mistrusting glares. She did not hesitate to offer up her share of harsh language and scrutiny throughout the week.

It should go without saying that the rights of this child and her parent were respected unconditionally; the child did not participate in my activities and was offered other things to do during the afternoons. That aside, however, I immediately became aware of the opportunity to practice that was hidden within this difficult situation. I was being offered insight into humanity’s basic *dis*-ease and was able to witness, yet again, the process of alienation taking place before my eyes. Though not all children were unconditionally trusting and receptive to my presence and the activities we did together, the vast majority demonstrated *none* of the mistrust and scrutiny that I encountered with this child and her parent. My wish is that this child’s current home life does not create unnecessary suffering for her in the future.

From a much broader vantage, the opposition that I encountered in conducting this curriculum was minimal. Most parents and children were accepting of this project and, (as will be addressed in a later section), reported having very positive experiences with the curriculum activities and their effects. However, my initial difficulties served to open my heart from the very beginning. Because of this, I found myself more receptive to the subtleties of my experience and less focused on intended results. My attitude shifted drastically from a set of expectations and suppositions – arising from my ego’s attachment to my own work – to an unconditional acceptance of whatever might be. I am so grateful for the challenging circumstances that I encountered at the beginning of this curriculum execution. Without them, perhaps the conclusion would not have been as profound for me.

Another challenging situation came from my direct experience engaging children in these curriculum activities. From the first day, my belief that each child was going to behave, become wholly involved, and benefit spiritually from every single activity was exposed as both naïve and idealistic. I learned, (and certainly not for the first time), that children are *children*. Many would not listen to every word that I had to say. Some did not treat each activity with the seriousness and commitment that I was expecting. Others grew restless and did not listen to directions as well as I had hoped. When these things occurred, I was challenged to surrender my presumptions and change my tactics, often finding myself face-to-face with uncertainty and fear that I didn’t know what to do. By working with these feelings, I began to break down my attachments and reconstruct new ways of relating to the material.

As one may see here, there was *tremendous* opportunity for me to confront my ego during on-site execution of these activities. I could always count on my group of children to show me where I was attached, protecting myself, or clinging on to my personal beliefs or biases. Consistently, I was able to release my ego-clinging into higher states of knowing. Indeed, before I knew it, these curriculum activities had begun to transform *me*, as well. Lesser (2004) may say that, as a result of this work, I underwent my own mini-Phoenix Process. It was a very grounding, sobering experience that I believe, given the opportunity, would make me a better instructor in the future. From conception to fruition, this project has taken me on a journey into uncharted personal territory. Not always pleasant or immediately fulfilling, it has made me more capable of resting in the open space of uncertainty. By doing so, I have discovered that inspiration, wisdom, and compassion oftentimes *only* appear after I abandon my furious search for answers. I feel that I have grown in heart, mind, and spirit as a result of the voyage that was embarked upon at the berth of this project.

Since it has been established that engaging children in these curricula activities was a vehicle for my own transformation, discussion will turn towards the experiences, recorded comments/insights, and created artwork of the children themselves.

Children's Work and Stories

Each activity in this curriculum culminates with a creative expression project that challenges children to express whatever insight they have gained through a selected artistic medium. It should be noted that, no matter the medium, my best efforts were made to provide children with an accommodating and safe environment. I consciously endeavored to foster an atmosphere of openness, acceptance, and nonjudgmentalness.

Oftentimes, children's final projects took the form of a painting or a drawing, in which the child was asked to capture his or her experiences pictorially, using images, symbols, or scenery. When this was the chosen medium, children were encouraged to be as detailed and thorough as possible. Ample time was given in order to allow children to express themselves fully on the page or poster board. Other mediums in this curriculum include puppet shows, poetry/story writing, and dramatic skits. I did not find that any one medium produced more relevant or striking results than the others. However, in some cases, (e.g. dramatic skits), taking photographs would have violated the privacy of the children and families participating in this curriculum. Therefore, I will attempt to capture the relevant items from these mediums in narrative form.

Throughout our time together, all of the activities across this curriculum were presented to my group of children. Note that, for the sake of pertinence and brevity, not every activity will be represented in this section. The figures presented in this section represent children's insights and experiences that are *most relevant* to the topic at hand: the cultivation of compassionate attitudes and experiences.

Some of the most poignant and touching material was produced during the activity "Mistakes and Forgiveness," which appears early in the curriculum as a lesson in self-compassion. For instance, one second grader recalled an instance in which she had forgotten to bring her lunch to school. When asked how she felt about forgetting her lunch, the child replied that she "hated herself." The child then proceeded to create a picture of her face expressing this emotion (see Figure 1). However, in an interesting display of conditioning, the child *first* depicted herself smiling happily. Gently, I asked if her current picture accurately portrayed what it felt like to "hate herself." She looked up at me, laughed, and said: "Whoops! I guess I draw that one [happy and smiling] so often that I forgot how to draw 'sad.'" Over the smile, she then proceeded to draw a stern, pouting mouth. The child made it clear to me that she *intended* to draw an unhappy face, but unconsciously drew herself smiling due to force of habit.



1. Forgot my Lunch

It is interesting to me that this child had difficulties with an assignment that challenged her to express her *unhappy*, more negative-oriented feelings. When a smiling face unintentionally appeared on the child's page after I had clearly tasked her with expressing "I hate myself," it evoked much contemplation for me. I am made to wonder whether or not this subconscious action is linked with the basic *dis-ease* of humanity, the onset of ego development, or estrangement from basic nature. It is, perhaps, fuel for further study.

During the second stage of this exercise, when asked to draw a picture that indicated what it would feel like to *forgive herself*, the child quickly drew a picture of her mother, citing that forgiving herself felt like being cradled in her mother's arms (see Figure 2). Here, we can witness an account of self-compassion from the experience of a seven-year-old child. Incidentally, whenever I encounter feelings of self-compassion, I often experience these feelings as being rocked back and forth in my mother's arms. I was undoubtedly able to connect deeply with this child's account of self-forgiveness.



2. My Mom

Another child, this time a first grader, reported feeling like he “wanted to die” after spilling a glass of milk in his bed. He expressed this disturbing emotion by drawing a picture of himself in his bed, a look of horror and shock across his face (see Figure 3).



3. Spilled Milk

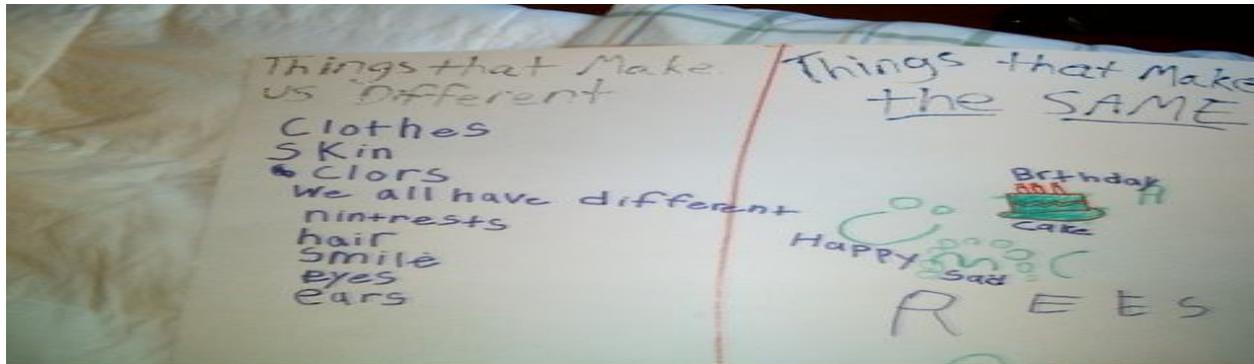
When asked what it might feel like to offer himself real forgiveness, he grew very quiet. After a few moments of contemplation, he expressed to me that self-forgiveness would feel like a gentle whisper in his ear, like “God telling me that he loves me” (see Figure 4). At this point, I became very specific with the child, making certain to note that the forgiveness was coming from *him*, not from anyone else. He immediately became lighthearted, laughed at me, and said: “I *did* forgive myself. God is inside of me!”



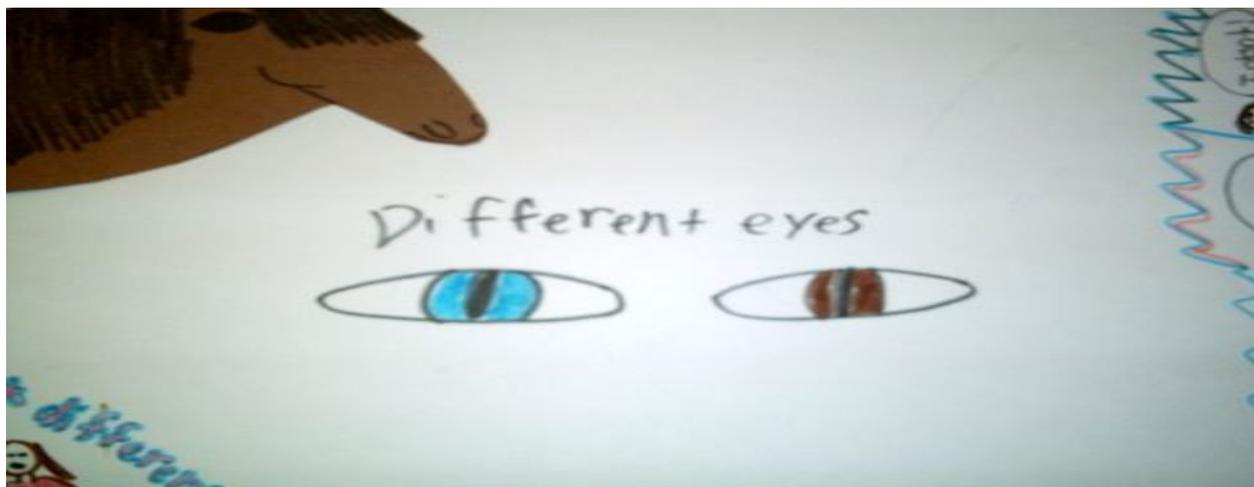
4. The Whisper

The curriculum activity that produced arguably the *most* support for its perceived purpose/intended outcome was the one entitled “Different but the Same.” In this activity, children are tasked with expressing two facets of human existence. First, on the left hand column of their poster board, children express the things that make human beings different. On the right column, children depict what makes us the same: what universal experiences bind humanity together. The intention of this activity is to provide children with a basis for compassionate action by developing their awareness of equality amongst human beings (Hopkins, 2001; Trungpa, 1993).

In the end, a plethora of items appeared that provide support for this intended outcome. For instance, when listing the traits that make human beings different from one another, a number of superficial, “surface characteristics” appeared on children’s posters. Items such as the clothes that we wear, color of hair, eye color, interests, and skin color were cited under this heading (see Figures 5 & 6).



5. Things that Make us Different



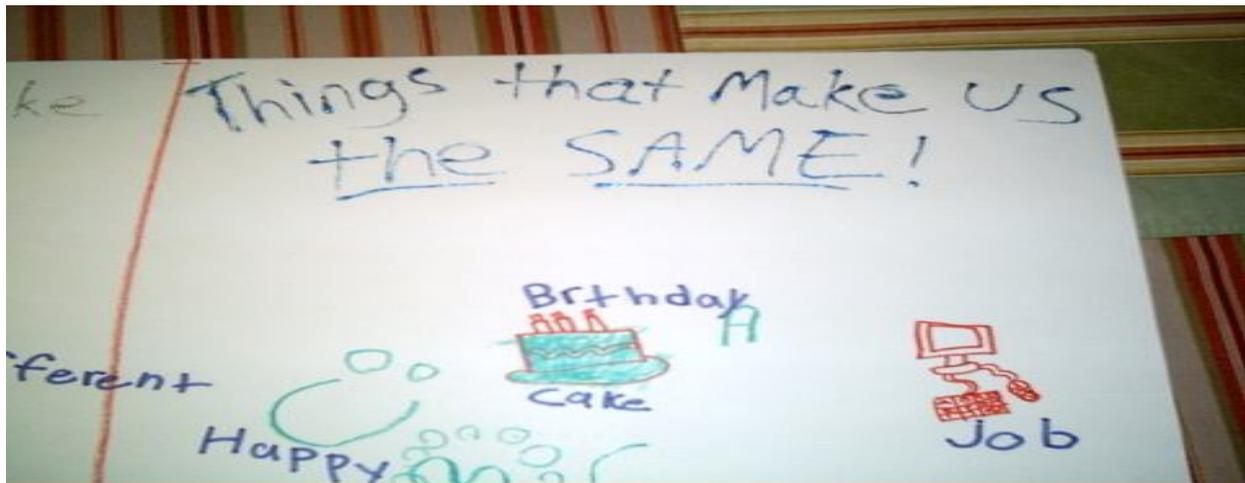
6. Blue and Brown

Many children went even further when expressing these superficial dissimilarities. One particular child was insightful enough to cite *cultural differences*, such as the ways in which people communicate around the world (see Figure 7).

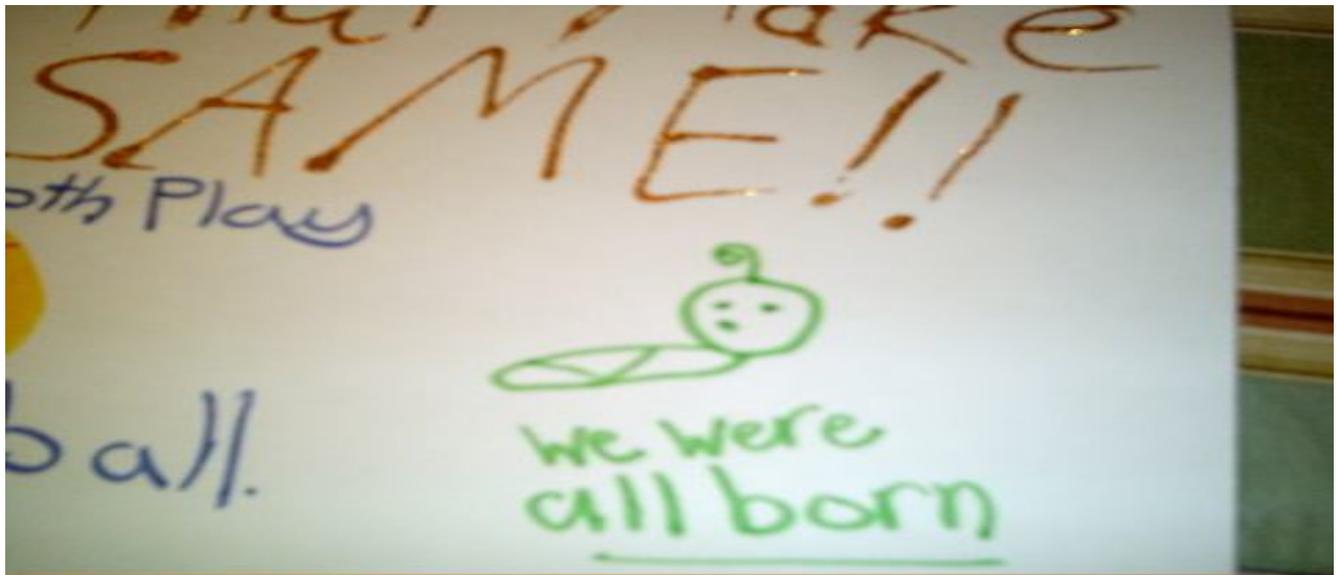


7. Aloha!

When tasked with identifying the things that make us all the same, (the second half of this exercise), children's responses arose quite naturally and with minimal prompting from me. Universal human attributes began to appear on the page. Included were items such as emotions, feelings, and experiences. For example, one group of younger children drew a birthday cake, signifying the universal human experience of birth (see Figure 8). Another group expressed this event more literally, drawing a picture of a baby and adding the caption: "We were all born" (see Figure 9).



8. Happy Birthday

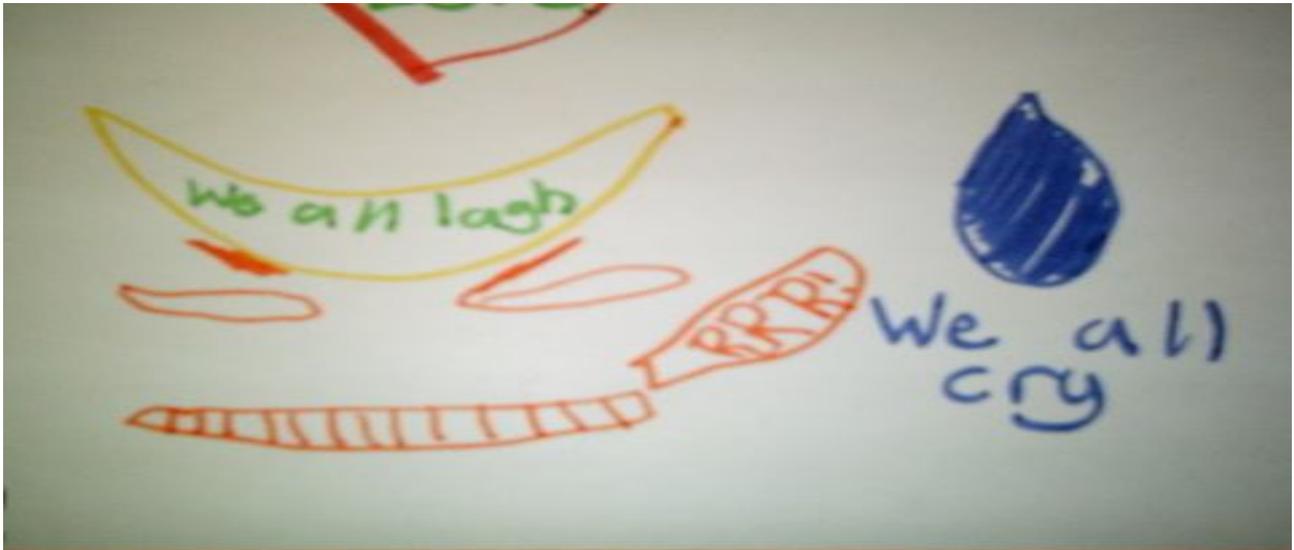


9. The Newborn

Other children chose to express universal human emotions when addressing the things that make us the same. One group of children plainly recognized that all human beings *have emotions* such as happiness and sadness (see Figure 10). Another group became more specific, depicting anger, laughter, and crying as common human experiences (see Figure 11). One human tendency shone above all others, appearing on every poster across the classroom. The ability to love can be found on each piece of artwork created during this exercise (see Figure 12).



10. We all have Emotions



11. Laughter, Anger, and Sadness



12. We All Love

To culminate this exercise, children were asked which side of their poster (differences or similarities) was more important to them. Specifically, I asked children if the clothes that they wear are more important than the fact that they were born, and if the color of their eyes was as vital as their ability to laugh and to cry. Across the classroom, the answers came to me as matter-of-factly as children could muster. “*Of course* the things that make us the same are more important,” one child giggled. “Who cares what color my skin is?”

The activity entitled “The Beggar at the Door,” an exercise based on a common Sufi story, challenges children to consider that serving others is more important than serving themselves. Recounted by a number of prominent Sufi authors (Fadiman & Frager, 1997; Shah, 1967), the goal of this story is the cultivation of compassion for others. To begin the tale, God tells Moses to throw a grand dinner party and that He Himself would be attending. However, hours pass and God never appears. In fact, the only stranger to attempt entrance into the party is a common beggar, who is promptly turned away. It is only later that Moses discovers that the beggar was God in human form, and had the beggar been given food and water that he requested, God would have revealed himself to all of the members of the party. By reading and understanding this story, the Sufi practitioner is expected to realize that working to serve others is serving God, as well.

In the activity that goes along with this story, children are asked to suspend self-serving motives temporarily and express what it might feel like to act with *other-centered* attitudes. As the curriculum presented in the present project is nontheistic, no mention is made of God, Moses, or the Sufi tradition.

Instead, children are simply asked to recall a time in which they provided a service to someone who was in need, and to then express that service artistically. In a simple expression of a deeply spiritual ideal, a fifth grade child created the following piece of artwork using popsicle sticks, crayons, and paints (see Figure 13). Touching me deeply, her project expresses the heart of this exercise: that kindness and compassion can help those who are in need.



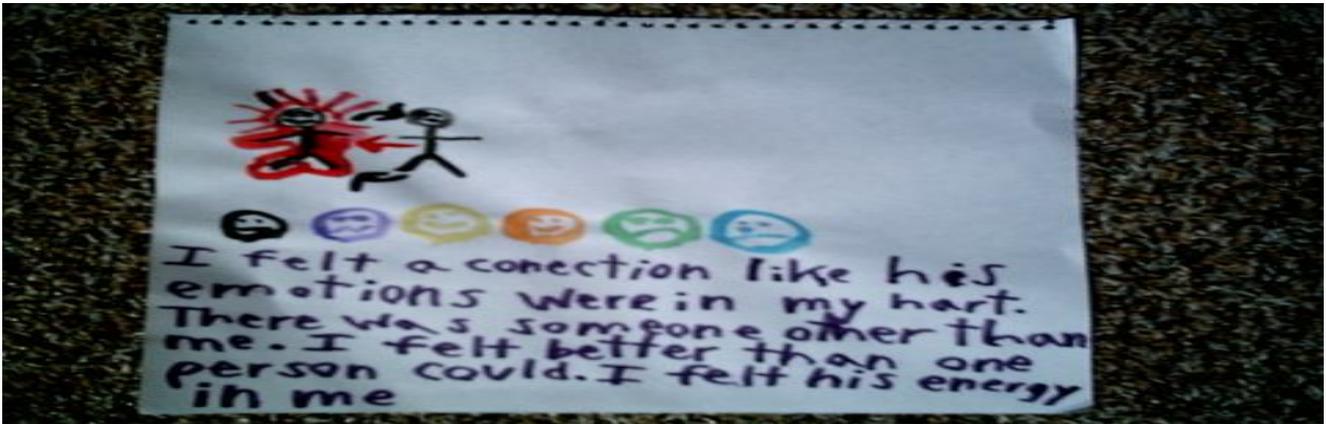
13. Kindness Can Help People

In addition to this piece of artwork, a small group of children chose to create a dramatic skit about helping the homeless. In their performance, one child was selected to portray a homeless man, begging for food on the street, while the other two schemed to provide the man with food, safety, and ultimately a home. The five-minute play included the children feeding the homeless man, clothing him, and building a home in which he could live. It was a moving display of compassionate attitudes in children.

I have chosen to save the activity that impacted me most deeply for last. The activity entitled “Eye Contact, Heart Contact,” is an exercise aimed at cultivating the Buddhist notion of *bodhichitta* (Chodron, 2001; Trungpa, 1993) and Buber’s (1947) I/Thou relationship. It is also the activity that I was most wary about from the start. With the intention of increasing children’s ability to empathize with another, this curriculum activity challenges children to sit in silence, maintaining prolonged eye contact with a chosen partner. I was worried that this requirement to remain seated, still, and silent for an extended period of time would prove problematic for the children in my classroom, who would prefer to be active, moving, and entertained. Indeed, if I had to pick one activity that would be *least likely* to generate support for my perceived purpose, it certainly would have been this one.

I was astounded, then, at how receptive children seemed to be to this exercise. Though I can not say for sure, perhaps this is because it occurs late in the curriculum and the children were prepared for the seriousness and silence it requires. Understandably, the first few attempts to establish and maintain eye contact were met with silliness and giggles from nearly all of the children in my classroom. However, surprising me pleasantly, children quickly became solemn and focused on their partner’s eyes. Responding to this, I made my best attempts to guide them deeper and deeper into the realm of quiet, receptive openness. When ample time had passed, we broke the silence and finished up with our creative expression projects.

Once children’s creative expression projects were completed, two watercolor paintings in particular caught my eye. The first depicted one child – a fifth grader – and his partner standing together, with arrows circling around and in between them (see Figures 14 & 15). It was obvious that something I could not define was coming *from* the child’s partner and *into* his body. The painting portrayed its artist radiating with red streams of light. When I asked the child to comment on the significance of his painting, he sighed as if he wasn’t quite sure what to say. Hesitantly, he commented: “It’s like I knew him [his partner] better than before. I could feel his energy in my body. I felt a connection, like I could understand his emotions.” In addition to this comment that I promptly recorded in my notes, the child included the following caption in his picture: “I felt a connection like his emotions were in my heart. There was someone other than me. I felt better than one person could. I felt his energy in me.”



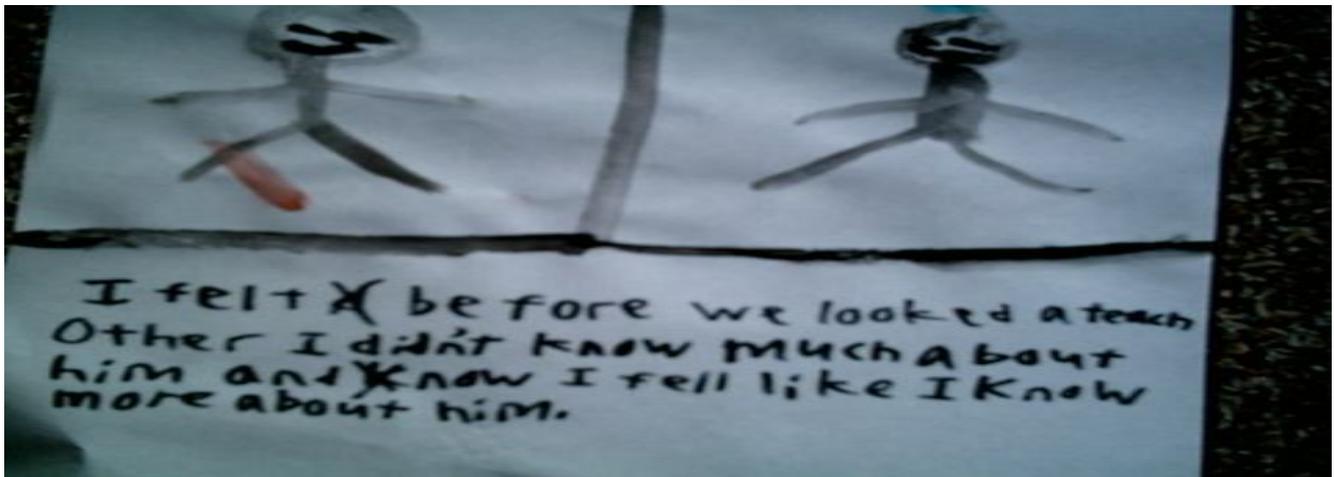
14. Connection



15. Energy

The second drawing came from a pair of children who sat in a separate corner of the classroom, far away from the first pair. These children – one in third grade and the other in fourth – each produced similar paintings. What struck me as most relevant was a comment written by one child, describing her picture of two stick figures staring at one another: “I felt before we looked at each other [that] I didn’t know much about him. And now I feel like I know more about him.”

At the end of this particular day with my children, I was left feeling elated, energized, and fulfilled. I felt confident that many children had glimpsed their own I/Thou relationships (Buber, 1947), and had demonstrated this in their artwork. My negative assumptions about this exercise had been extinguished. I feel that, by fostering a conducive environment all week long, this final session of compassion work was transformative and profound for all of us.



16. Realization

Curriculum Assessment

Of course, not every aspect of my curriculum engagement with children proceeded ideally. Earlier in this reflection, I mentioned undergoing my own Phoenix Process that challenged me to grow beyond my naivety and restructure my expectations. In addition to this, I encountered a few aspects of this first on-site experience that simply did not work. The present section will briefly address each curriculum activity, providing suggestions for improvement based on my personal experience. There are only a few instances in which I was not able to identify any substantial problems or roadblocks, and for these activities, I will simply comment on my positive experiences. It should be noted, however, that each activity across this curriculum is based entirely upon the subjective experiences of the instructor and students. Every time they are carried out will be a new experience for all, with unique challenges, rewards, and transformations.

Before commenting on each exercise individually, I would like to mention the necessity of an appropriate classroom/meeting space. During my first day of on-site engagement with children, we met in a space that was not at all appropriate for the needs of this curriculum. Because I had not worked to secure a more private, quiet meeting space, I attempted the first two activities in the middle of my school's gymnasium. I expected – incorrectly – that I could facilitate a quiet and conducive environment regardless of our location. However, to my dismay, our space that day remained a very highly-trafficked area. Parents, who arrive regularly throughout the program to pick up their children, unknowingly intruded on our activities. Teachers who had been working late passed through the gymnasium on their way home. Each child in my group felt continuously disrupted, some expressing their displeasure that we weren't in a more secluded area. No doubt it was a frustrating day for all of us. The next day and for the rest of our time together, we met alone in a small classroom, away from the busy goings-on of an after school program. I had learned a valuable lesson that certainly improved the experience for all of us, and my wish is that future instructors will learn from my mistake.

The first curriculum activity, entitled “My Own Best Friend,” was one of the few activities that I felt proceeded without significant difficulty. Interestingly, this activity, though appearing first in the curriculum, was the *last* activity composed before on-site execution with children. It was created as a simple, introductory activity aimed at fostering the most basic of self-compassionate attitudes: *maitri*, or unconditional friendliness towards oneself (Chodron, 2003). I was surprised at the ease with which children expressed this willingness to treat themselves with friendliness and love, thereby supporting the claim set forth by various theorists (Kessler, 2000; Trungpa, 1991; Welwood, 2006) that children are more readily able to access compassionate thoughts than most adults. Children's final creative expression projects depicted an abundant willingness to extend *maitri* towards themselves.

“Out of the Ashes: My own Phoenix Process,” the next exercise in this curriculum, is a slightly different story. Perhaps due to this lesson's focus on troubling life circumstances, I found it difficult to carry out with the children in my class. Though the purpose of this exercise is for children to identify the *positive* transformations that occurred as a result of negative life events, it seemed as if many of them were not used to addressing painful, difficult, or trying situations in their lives.

Many children attempted to shift the focus of this activity to “happy” circumstances that simply made them “feel good.” It should be noted that a handful of children *were*, in fact, willing to explore a difficult or painful scenario, and that these children seemed to benefit more from this activity than others.

My conclusion is that this activity may be too sophisticated to appear only second in the progression of activities in this curriculum. Though it remains second in the present project due to its focus on self-compassionate attitudes, two suggestions may be made for future instructors. First, instructors may choose to retain its position as activity number two by simplifying some internal elements. A measure of creativity is in order if this is the chosen option; instructors should endeavor to determine what can be done to involve children more effectively in this material. Secondly, perhaps a simpler option, instructors may choose to place this exercise “as-is” *later* in the curriculum as a whole. No matter what decision is made, future instructors should be prepared to offer additional guidance to those children who have difficulties identifying the transformations that occurred for them as a result of negative life experiences.

The third activity, “Mistakes and Forgiveness,” produced perhaps the most poignant material of all the exercises in this curriculum. With the intention of enhancing children’s ability to offer compassion to themselves, this activity first prompts them to identify a past mistake, error, or transgression for which they desire forgiveness. However, because of this, an array of difficult feelings may be aroused during this exercise. As explored previously, the children in my class expressed many troubling emotions during this exercise, such as “I hated myself” and “I wanted to die.” Future instructors should be vigilant of their children’s emotional states when carrying out this activity, as it often *does* evoke difficult feelings. All of this said, however, my personal experience is that the overall effectiveness of this activity was among the highest throughout the curriculum. Children’s final projects expressed a profound capacity for self-forgiveness and compassion.

The fourth activity in this curriculum is entitled “Different but the Same.” When engaging children in this activity, I found that it was extremely easy for them to follow. I had to offer very little guidance as children attempted to express the things that make human beings both different and similar. Also, as addressed in the previous section, this activity produced a great deal of support for its intended outcome: cultivating compassion by fostering an experiential knowledge of equality amongst all peoples. However, one particular group of children had difficulty understanding that the task of identifying differences and similarities applied to *all of humanity*. Instead, they set out to identify what made them different from each other and what they *personally* shared in common. Though this was perfectly acceptable and the children enjoyed creating their project, future instructors should be prepared to express the intended purpose of this activity with increased clarity. Instructors should never feel hesitant about repeating themselves.

I would like to personally assert that the fifth activity in this curriculum, “The Beggar at the Door,” served to open my heart perhaps even more than the hearts of my children. Having recently taken a *bodhisattva* vow at my home meditation center, the ideals of wholehearted, compassionate service promoted by this activity have been a part of my being for most of my life. It was profoundly moving for me to witness – as presented in the previous section – a small group of children expressing their intentions to give their love and service to the homeless. “The Beggar at the Door” is one of the few activities that presented little to no difficulties for the children in my class. I found that its simple, two-step execution was easy for children understand, and overall, most children were eager to identify and demonstrate their personal experiences of serving others.

The sixth activity, entitled “Make me an Instrument,” was one of the more well-received activities across this curriculum. Parents and children alike reported having positive experiences with this exercise, perhaps because it includes a take-home creative expression project as its final component. Indeed, many of the children in my class currently have *beautiful* creative expression projects hanging on their walls at home, reminding them of the ways that they can be of service to others each day of their lives.

This said, however, the execution of this exercise could use a touch of renovating. The present description of this activity begins by prompting the instructor to discuss with children the ways that they have been beneficial to others. In theory, this discussion is intended to center on altruistic actions such as giving to the less fortunate, going above and beyond to help one’s family, and other selfless demonstrations of servitude. However, I encountered much difficulty when attempting to help children identify these actions. Instead, many in my class were content with citing “helping around the house” or “telling mommy that I love her” as their altruistic behaviors.

Some of the children in my group even demonstrated *disinterest* in this activity, seeming less concerned with serving others and more interested in getting some reward in return for their actions. (One child proudly stated that his most selfless deed was vacuuming the carpet in his room, because afterwards, “Dad always gives me ten dollars.”) Because of children’s natural self-centeredness (Fadiman & Frager, 2002), I found that executing this activity was more challenging than I had predicted.

Future instructors should spend some time considering what might be done to motivate children, especially those uninterested in service, to identify the subtle ways in which they serve others each day. Perhaps the instructor may begin with some story that emphasizes the feelings of deep personal fulfillment that accompany wholehearted service. It is also possible that this activity could be adapted into a week-long service project, in which children endeavor as a group to offer some form of service to their community and then reflect upon their personal experiences. This long-term commitment to serving others may influence children more deeply than the shorter activity presented in the present curriculum.

The seventh activity in this curriculum, “Eye Contact, Heart Contact,” produced quite a bit of support for its intended outcome during my on-site engagement with children. By challenging children to maintain eye contact with each other for extended periods of time, this exercise is aimed at cultivating compassionate attitudes and empathetic resonance. And, as explored previously, many children’s reactions and creative expression projects point towards profound experiences of *bodhichitta* (Chodron, 2003; Trungpa, 1993) and Buber’s (1947) I/Thou relationship. I was pleasantly surprised at the effectiveness of such a simple exercise.

In fact, the fruition of this exercise was *so* pleasing and its methods *so* simple that I would like to offer the following suggestion: future instructors should consider opening *each session* with this activity, thereby further preparing the meeting space for openness, authenticity, and transformation. At the end of the period of curriculum engagement, the instructor may ask children to reflect on their daily periods of eye contact, either verbally or through artistic expression. In this way, “Eye Contact, Heart Contact” would transform from a singular curriculum activity into an ongoing project, challenging children to dive deeper and deeper into their experiences of open heart. I would strongly recommend that the instructor consider this option, recalling that there is no need for this curriculum to be solidified into any predetermined structure. Instead, why not allow for spontaneity, creativity, and playfulness?

The eighth and final exercise in the present curriculum, “In Their Shoes,” also yielded its share of support for its intended outcome. As the culminating activity in this curriculum, children are provided a final opportunity to work with their compassionate intentions for *others*. After engaging them in the guided visualization exercise included in this activity, many children produced pieces of artwork depicting an enhanced sensitivity to the suffering of others and a motivation to help those who are in need. One child, a fourth grader, expressed her intentions to thank her parents for all that they’ve done for her. “It must be so hard to be parents,” she said. “Now I can see what it’s like to be in their shoes.”

However, this activity was not without its challenges. The younger groups of children (kindergarteners and first graders) in my class had more difficulties than I had predicted with this exercise. These children seemed so uninterested in the guided visualization that accompanies this activity that I was forced to discontinue it for that day and, in order to hold their attention, introduce a less complex exercise. “In Their Shoes” followed later with only the older groups of children participating. Future instructors should consider altering this activity, perhaps adding song, dance, or ritual so that it may be made more accessible to younger children. As it appears in the present project, however, this exercise remains best suited for older groups.

Reactions of Children and Families

As a final facet of my on-site curriculum engagement with children, I spent one day speaking with willing parents and children, asking them to comment on their experiences with these activities. In the present section, I will recount a small number of stories that I recorded from these conversations. It should be noted that, though there was no criticism or displeasure with this project beyond that which has already been mentioned, the examples in this section will be limited to only those that struck me as most relevant or appropriate.

The after school program in which I chose to conduct these curriculum activities offers service to a diverse range of families. The children in the program, then, represent an array of races, religions, familial settings, and socioeconomic statuses.

(Further study, of course, may explore the effects of this curriculum on children from various backgrounds such as these.) My first story comes from the reaction of a Japanese father and his daughter, both of whom seemed to enjoy this work immensely.

The child's father, having lived in the United States for less than a decade, expressed great pleasure in this Curriculum in Compassion. He disclosed to me that, in *this* country, he had never seen work with children conducted in the present context. At home in Japan, however, the teachings of what he termed "morality and spiritual education" are present in every schoolhouse. He stated that the curriculum presented in this project felt "more like home." He left that day repeating the words "valuable, valuable, valuable program," referring to the week that I spent engaging children in these compassion-centered activities. His daughter, a second-grader with dark, gleaming eyes and an ever-present smile, seemed to be one of the quieter children in my classroom. When she left with her father that day, she waved and said: "Thank you, Mister Brandon! I love you!"

One family's reaction to this curriculum was positively overwhelming to me. So overwhelming, in fact, that I have hesitated greatly in mentioning it as part of this project. Completely by chance, the entire family of one of the children in my class entered the program on the day that I was collecting reactions. The child's mother, father, and two older siblings were all present, and each had their own comments to make about this work. His mother graciously responded to my inquiry for comments: "We have not had the same child coming home in the evenings. He has never been this quiet or this content." An older brother made certain that I wrote down his comment in my notepad. He stated: "My brother has been having a very hard time adjusting to school this year, but since last week, he hasn't cried in the mornings at all." "He *has* changed," said the child's father stoically. "Don't you have more activities that you can give us?" This family vehemently requested that I provide them a copy of this project upon its completion.

One particular family that participated in these activities has a very tender place in my heart. Comprised only of a single mother and her third-grade daughter, one could safely say that this small family is on the lower end of the economic spectrum. In addition to this, the child's father has recently died, taken away just one year ago in a tragic airline accident. It is certainly not an easy time for this family. Aware of their situation well before the first day of curriculum engagement, I counseled this child's mother extensively. I warned that these activities may not *all* be appropriate for her daughter, who has dealt with far too much for her brief nine years. However, the mother persisted that she trusted me unconditionally and wished for her daughter to participate in all of the curriculum activities.

During curriculum engagement with my group of children, I kept this child always in the corner of my eye. I constantly attempted to be sensitive to potentially-upsetting emotions or circumstances. Much to my surprise, this child demonstrated the most bravery of *any* of the children in my class. She was constantly willing to delve deeper into her experience and was always eager to express herself fully during creative expression projects. And, though I was not aware of it at the time, but her home life was also being affected by her experiences each afternoon with these activities.

When I questioned the mother about her child's overall experience with these activities, her eyes welled with tears. "She gives me the full report each afternoon," said the mother of her young child, "and relates your activities to her father's death every day." For a moment, I grew very concerned that this had occurred in a negative manner, and that my curriculum had challenged a child to deal with her father's death before she was ready. However, the mother soon put my fears to rest. "She talks about forgiving the people who made the mistakes that took her father away," continued this mother, "and I have never seen her so happy to talk about his death. It's like *now* is the time for her to come to terms with it." And then, while drying her tears, the mother laughed. "I'm sure we'll both be dealing with it for years, but this has really helped her get started."

To conclude this section, I would offer a final story that comes *not* from my day spent conversing with children and parents, but from my on-site experience with these curriculum activities. At the end of my last day as instructor of this Curriculum in Compassion, I was approached by the mother of one of the children in my class. I was packing my materials to head home when she entered the classroom space that I'd been utilizing. It was obvious that she wanted to have a conversation before I left for the day. Her child, now in the fifth grade, has been in my program since Kindergarten. And, since I have only been with the program since 2005, I am still a relatively new face to this family, just the final person to care for their child before she moves on to middle school next fall.

This mother is a favorite amongst the parents that I serve. She is a woman who can only be described as jolly and lighthearted, and can often be found joking with me in the midst of the most difficult of days in my after school program. She walked up to me with a feigned look of sternness and anger on her face, and obviously teasing, said: "I want to know why I have a different child coming home with me this week!" I replied that I wasn't quite sure what she meant, and prepared myself to explain in detail the curriculum activities for which she had signed her permission just days previously.

Laughing, she recounted for me the past few evenings at home, stating that her child had come home quietly contemplative, cheerful, and more interested in helping with family duties. "The strangest thing," continued this mother, "is how she started talking to her younger brother. Just last night, when I realized that I hadn't heard either of them in an hour or more, I found them in his room just staring into each other's eyes." At this point, I smiled happily and explained my curriculum activity "Eye Contact, Heart Contact" to her. She told me that, when she questioned her daughter about what she had been doing so quietly with her brother, the child replied: "Oh mom, I just wanted to *bewith him* for a while."

Conclusion

This project began at the Omega Institute in the fall of 2006. With the bright greens of summer long gone, the New York mountains had transitioned into a rainbow of warm autumn hues. Not surprisingly, the air at Omega was dense with transformations of a different kind. It was my second global seminar with ITP, and I had returned to Omega to celebrate my passage from Certificate student to Masters student. Reflecting upon this all-too-brief time in my life, I find it best described as a "homecoming." It was a time of rekindling warm friendships, forging profound new ones, and quietly journeying inward amidst the backdrop of the breathtaking Omega campus. For the first few days of my retreat, however, I toddled around the Institute with a busy mind and a less-than-panoramic focus. The insurmountable task of composing a fifty-page final project was looming ominously over my head, and I was already struggling with sorting out the countless notions that bombarded me each day. It is so interesting to me that, despite such confusion, I can pinpoint the exact moment when I shed my ego's list of "shoulds" and allowed the inner wisdom of my heart to speak at last.

Conversation at the dinner table in Omega's dining hall is not unlike the conversation normally found amongst Omega participants: open, authentic, sometimes quite slow and deliberate, and always kind. I found myself expressing my frustrations to a teacher and dear friend, who did not hesitate an instant to interrupt my ego's process. "Brandon," she said, holding a hand up to halt my pontificating, "why don't you just start where you are?"

Needless to say, I was quiet for the rest of dinner. For many days after as well, I sat with this teacher's advice, noticing frequently that the turbulence in my mind had been all but silenced. Why the sudden change? Why such peacefulness in place of unrest? It was not until my sixteen-hour drive home, a contemplative, positively *blessed* time for me, that an answer came at last. What I had been needing was a push, an incentive to press on, a gentle shove away from my ego's perpetuating chatter. What I needed was to surrender my growing list of self-expectations and open my heart to far greater possibilities. And so, armed with this understanding, I began to ponder if this project could find a home with the children and families in my after school program...

One year later, here I am. Composing the final words of a project that has challenged me to grow and transform in ways that I could have never imagined during those beautiful autumn days at the Omega Institute. I have grown academically, developing a set of solid scholarly muscles that I am certain will serve me in the future. I have grown interpersonally, forging meaningful relationships with others and developing more effective teaching skills as the pioneer of the material presented here. I have grown in Spirit, as this project has prompted me to "walk my talk," practicing a deeper, more heartfelt compassion than I have ever known. Most importantly by far, however, this project has given me the opportunity to act from the very core of my heart: to serve others is and *always has been* the highest aspiration behind the work presented here. I have been blessed by this project, as it has allowed me to reach out and touch the lives of others. And this, in turn, has touched *me*. It would be an understatement to say that this project has changed my life.

My greatest hope is that this work will continue on as a living manifestation of compassion, love, and service. May this project inspire the hands of future teachers, may it open the hearts of future groups of children, and may it improve the lives of future families as it grows, changes, and adapts to the needs of all.

May this work be a tiny step along my personal path as a *bodhisattva*, granting a profound and lasting liberation from suffering to those who read its pages and utilize its activities.

May all Beings be free from suffering and the root of suffering.

References

- Barks, C. & Green, M. (2000). *The illuminated prayer: The five-times prayer of the Sufis*. New York: Ballantine Wellspring.
- Biffle, C. (2000). *A guided tour of five works by Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Allegory of the Cave*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Buber, M. (1947). *Tales of the Hasidim*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Chodron, P. (2005). *No time to lose: A timely guide to the way of the bodhisattva*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Chodron, P. (2003). *Start where you are: A guide to compassionate living*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Chodron, P. (2001). *The places that scare you: A guide to fearlessness in difficult times*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Collins, J. (Ed.). (1912). *Pope's Essay on Criticism*. New York: MacMillan and Co.
- Crowe, J. (2006). *The jeweler's directory of gemstones: A complete guide to appraising and using precious stones from cut and color to shape and settings*. Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books.
- Egan, E. (1999). *At prayer with Mother Theresa*. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications.
- Epstein, M. (1995). *Thoughts without a thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist perspective*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Fadiman, J., & Frager, R. (Eds.). (1997). *Essential Sufism*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Fadiman, J. & Frager, R. (2002). *Personality and personal growth* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gates, G. (2005). *Awakening to school community: Buddhist philosophy for educational reform*. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 39(2), 149-173.
- H.H. Dalai Lama. (2001). *An open heart: Practicing compassion in everyday life*. Boston: Back Bay Books.
- Hopkins, J. (2001). *Cultivating compassion: A Buddhist perspective*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Judy, D. (2003). *Rediscovering Christ, the healer*. In Mijares, S. (Ed.), *Modern psychology and ancient wisdom: Psychological healing practices from the world's religious traditions*. (pp. 45-72). New York: The Haworth Integrative Healing Press.
- Kessler, R. (2000). *The soul of education: Helping students find connection, compassion, and character at school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Kramer, S. (2003). *Jewish Spiritual Pathways for Growth and Healing*. In Mijares, S. (Ed.), *Modern psychology and ancient wisdom: Psychological healing practices from the world's religious traditions*. (pp. 99-122). New York: The Haworth Integrative Healing Press.
- Ladner, L. (2004). *The lost art of compassion: Discovering the practice of happiness in the meeting of Buddhism and psychology*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Lesser, E. (2004). *Broken open: How difficult times can help us grow*. New York: Villard Books.
- Mayer, J. (2003). *Something's missing. On Heavier things* [CD]. New York: Sony.
- McLeod, K. (Trans.). (1987). *The great path of awakening: The classic guide to using the Mahayana Buddhist slogans to tame the mind and awaken the heart*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Moore, T. (2004). *Dark nights of the soul*. New York: Gotham Books.
- Nouwen, H., McNeill, D., & Morrison, D. (1982). *Compassion: A reflection on the Christian life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Rahula, W. (1959). *What the Buddha taught*. New York: Grove Press.
- Shah, I. (1967). *Tales of the dervishes: Teaching stories of the Sufi masters over the past thousand years*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Snelling, J. (1991). *The Buddhist handbook: A complete guide to Buddhist schools, teaching, practice, and history*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, Intl.
- Trungpa, C. (1984). *Shambhala: The sacred path of the warrior*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Trungpa, C. (1991). *The heart of the Buddha*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Trungpa, C. (1993). *Training the mind and cultivating loving-kindness*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

- Vascak, C. (1999). *Composing compassion: Developing care communities via engagements in the visual arts*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1999). UMI No. 9953425.
- Walsh, R., & Vaughan, F. (Eds.). (1995). *Gifts from a course in miracles*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Wegela, K. (2003). *Nurturing the seeds of sanity: A Buddhist approach to psychotherapy*. In Mijares, S. (Ed.), *Modern psychology and ancient wisdom: Psychological healing practices from the world's religious traditions*. (pp. 17-42). New York: The Haworth Integrative Healing Press.
- Welwood, J. (1984). *Principles of inner work: Psychological and spiritual*. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 16(1), 63-73.
- Welwood, J. (2000). *Towards a psychology of awakening: Buddhism, psychotherapy, and the path of personal and spiritual transformation*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Welwood, J. (2006). *Perfect love, imperfect relationships: Healing the wound of the heart*. Boston: Trumpeter Books.
- Wilber, K. (1980). *The pre/trans fallacy*. In Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. (Eds.). (1993). *Paths beyond ego: The transpersonal vision*. (pp. 124-129). Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc.
- Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology: Consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Woof, P. (Ed.). (1991). *The Grasmere journals*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Zaehner, R.C. (Ed.). (1997). *Encyclopedia of the world's religions*. New York: Helicon Publishing, Ltd.