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PEDAGOGY FOR BUDDHIST-DERIVED MEDITATION IN SECULAR SETTINGS: AN EXERCISE IN INCULTURATION

a dissertation

by

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Pedagogy For Buddhist-Derived Meditation In Secular Settings; An Exercise In Inculturation

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ABSTRACT

The premise of this dissertation is that Buddhism must inculturate to meet the context of contemporary North America. Given the widespread interest in the application of Buddhist-derived ideas and practices in a host of secular settings, the capacity for teachers to engage with new ideas and disciplines will be crucial to the tradition's continued relevance. Because there is a high demand for and interest in Buddhist-derived programming in secular spaces, the number of individuals and organizations striving to meet this demand is mushrooming. This trend, coupled with a dearth of professional training programs and accreditation processes means that not only are there an eclectic array of approaches being used to teach meditation, but there is also minimal discourse engaging the crucial question of what constitutes *effective* pedagogy or *adequate* training processes for teachers.

Chapter 1 establishes the need for the inculturation of Buddhism. This imperative for adaptation raises fundamental questions regarding how to best evaluate the authenticity of changes to traditional teaching methods. In Chapters

2 and 3, the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means is explored with an eye toward distilling guiding principles for analyzing this process of adaptation of teachings to meet a variety of cultural and personal perspectives. Drawing from Mahayana and pre-Mahayana sutras, traditions of commentary, and contemporary hermeneutics, a set of priorities based on the perspective of the Buddhist tradition is proposed. In Chapter 4, it is established that finding points of relevance to particular cultural concerns such as physical and mental health issues has been a vital component of existing efforts toward secularized meditation programs to date. This chapter concludes by drawing out of such present practices additional guiding principles to advance the process of pedagogical inculturation.

Despite the widespread interest in applying meditation to a variety of settings, the pedagogy and philosophy of education behind the various approaches remains largely under-theorized. To fill this need, Chapter 5 establishes a set of guiding principles for pedagogical adaptation, drawing from the tradition's own self-understanding as well as from the insights of Western education as discussed in the prior 4 chapters. Finally, Chapter 6 offers an example of inculturated pedagogy at work. In this culminating chapter, I consider an upcoming course I will teach at the women's inpatient PTSD unit of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Menlo Park, California to further distill the philosophy of education developed in this dissertation.

CONTENTS

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In loving memory of my father
Andrew B Weiss, MD
who taught compassion by example

Climb high, Climb far
Your Goal the Sky, Your Aim the Star

INTRODUCTION

1. Issue/Problem to be Investigated

The aim of this dissertation is to explore some of the issues involved in the Buddhist process of inculturation into the contemporary North American milieu. The dissertation will focus on pedagogy for bringing Buddhist-derived practices into secular settings. This conversation is relevant for students of engaged Buddhism who are interested in bringing meditation into the public sphere.[1] [2] It is also relevant to individuals and groups who are not explicitly coming from a Buddhist background but who are interested in applying Buddhist-derived meditation practices in secular settings such as schools, healthcare contexts, the military, and businesses. While meditation itself is increasingly studied from the perspective of a variety of disciplines ranging from neuroscience to psychology, the actual processes of teaching meditation remains under-theorized—both in the academy and in broader discourse. In this dissertation, I will focus on the

[1] Engaged Buddhism has been defined in a variety of ways but the gist of it always returns to the application of Buddhist principles beyond the practice of meditation on the cushion to the sphere of social issues. Early in the movement, King and Queen defined engaged Buddhism as "Buddhist liberation movements." In their perspective, engaged Buddhism relies on "new readings of ancient texts" that seek to bring Buddhist texts, philosophy and practices more squarely into dialogue with social and political issues than has historically been the case. (*Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* Edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King.) Queen has argued that Engaged Buddhism represents a new fourth vehicle of Buddhism in the current period (on a par with "Hinayana," "Mahayana," and "Vajrayana."). Makransky has noted that viewing Engaged Buddhism as a whole new vehicle of Buddhism may be pushing the point too far. He and others argue that Engaged Buddhism can be better viewed as a contemporary expression of the ancient Mahayana doctrine of compassionate skillful means, which has a modern focus on social sufferings and their causes. .

[2] Students of engaged Buddhism should be understood broadly. In this category I will address Buddhists who are interested in social engagement. But I also will also include people who are practitioners of other religions who turn to the resources of Buddhism to support their own faith and service as well as learners who are not Buddhist or affiliated with any religious tradition but find the practices taught in engaged Buddhist contexts to be supportive of their work, personal growth, and social relationships.

questions surrounding the effective adaptation of traditional Buddhist teaching processes for secular contexts in contemporary North America.

Practitioners of Buddhist meditation in contemporary Western Buddhist communities are accustomed to pedagogy that merges traditional teaching practices with contemporary pedagogical elements such as group discussion and opportunities to raise questions. Buddhist communities vary in their leanings toward either more traditional Asian-Buddhist or inculturated teaching processes. It is possible to find retreat centers where teachers communicate in the same ways that they were trained decades ago in Asian countries, including reliance on traditional languages, means of interpretation, and teaching methods.[3] Conversely, there are also many examples of teachers using nontraditional methods of teaching Buddhism in our time and place.

One Zen teacher offers retreats on urban streets, giving students the opportunity to live like a homeless person and see how their understanding of wisdom and insight is influenced by this experience. A Tibetan Buddhist Lama offers teachings and leads rituals online via livestream to students spread across the United States and beyond. A Geshe (scholar-practitioner) in the Tibetan tradition conducts research on the efficacy of meditation using FMRI machines and teaches healthcare professionals by drawing on this research as well as on adaptations of traditional compassion practices. Within the Buddhist community, an array of philosophies of education and a range of learning cultures are found.

[3] Although, as we know from the tradition of hermeneutics, which I will delve into further in Chapter 2, even when teachings are couched in the most traditional trappings, contemporary students inevitably interpret messages in distinctive ways due to their own cultural and intellectual formation.

However, the rationale for the variance has not been described nor have means for evaluating the efficacy of the various approaches to pedagogy been established.

Consideration of the pedagogy of Buddhist meditative practices is relevant beyond the confines of explicitly Buddhist communities. It is increasingly the case that meditation is taught in interreligious and secular spaces, with practitioners who do not define themselves as explicitly Buddhist. As Buddhist-derived meditation is increasingly integrated into learning communities ranging from school children to adult professionals, it is even more essential to consider issues related to pedagogy. In this dissertation, I will argue that the means of communicating Buddhist-derived practices outside of the context of Buddhist communities requires input from both Buddhist pedagogical principles and also from contemporary theories of learning.

The pedagogical and theological issues involved in adaptation are at this point only beginning to be understood in the context of secularized Buddhist meditation. As there is a dearth of Buddhists trained academically at the interface of religion and education, there has not been systematic work done on the fundamental theological issues at stake in the process of adapting teaching methods from Western culture to Buddhism and from Buddhism to secular and interfaith contexts. Engaging the issue of how to recognize and propagate effective pedagogies will require discussion of the fundamental goals of Buddhist education as well as establishment of criteria for evaluation.

This dissertation will contribute to the conversation among Buddhist educators by highlighting relevant resources from the Western and Buddhist traditions and proposing a philosophy of education for teaching in secular contexts. This contribution will support the ongoing process of pedagogical inculturation and foster mutual enrichment of these traditions. This conversation is relevant not only to Buddhist educators, but also more broadly to contemplative educators who are interested in the larger project of bringing meditative processes into a wide array of learning environments and developmental contexts.

2. Background of the Problem to be Investigated

One of the most significant theological principles in Mahayana Buddhism is the notion of *upaya* or skillful means.[4] I use the term "skillful means" here to refer to the process by which the dharma is adapted to meet the specific needs of students in order to facilitate their embodied realization of wisdom and compassion. The doctrine of skillful means provides the warrant for adapting teaching content and methods to meet the capacities and proclivities of students across cultures and time. Implicit in the consideration of how Buddhist teaching can be skillfully inculturated is the underlying tension between the principles of adaptation and authenticity. From a Buddhist perspective, the capacity to embody skillful means is rooted in the depth of spiritual maturity of the teacher.

[4] The doctrine of skillful means and its application in the area of pedagogy will be explored in much greater detail in Chapter 2.

However, the doctrine of skillful means is not only relevant on the personal level as a guiding principle in the communication between teacher and student; it also functions on a collective level. Skillful means contains within it the implication that the assets of any culture or group (including non-Buddhists) can be engaged by Buddhist teachings. In other words, the concerns and capacities of the people encountering Buddhist teachings engender new expressions of the dharma. They also influence the content and means of learning. The doctrine of skillful means actually demands that the resources of the culture be appropriated and harnessed for the process of learning, both on individual and collective levels. Through this expression of skillful means, in the act of engaging the particularities of a culture, Buddhist teachings not only address existing concerns, but can also eventually transform values.

In this dissertation I will argue that learner-centered pedagogies in the tradition of Dewey should be increasingly drawn on by the Buddhist traditions as they inculturate into North American contexts. I will also suggest that feminist pedagogies can play a vital role in the process of inculturation. Conversely, there are resources from the Buddhist tradition that should be retained for the effective communication of Buddhist spiritual wisdom and practice. An example of such a resource is the use of epistemologies rooted in the practice of meditation.

Chapter 1 establishes the need for the inculturation of Buddhism. This imperative for adaptation raises fundamental questions regarding how to best evaluate the authenticity of changes to traditional teaching methods. In Chapters 2 and 3, the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means is explored with an eye toward

distilling guiding principles for analyzing this process of adaptation of teachings to meet a variety of cultural and personal perspectives. Drawing from Mahayana and pre-Mahayana sutras, traditions of commentary, and contemporary hermeneutics, a set of priorities based on the perspective of the Buddhist tradition is proposed. In Chapter 4, it is asserted that finding points of relevance to particular cultural concerns such as physical and mental health issues has been a vital component of existing efforts toward secularized meditation programs to date. This chapter concludes by drawing out of such present practices additional guiding principles to advance the process of pedagogical inculturation.

Despite the widespread interest in applying meditation to a variety of settings, the pedagogy and philosophy of education behind the various approaches remains largely under-theorized. To fill this need, Chapter 5 establishes a set of guiding principles for pedagogical adaptation, drawing from the tradition's own self-understanding as well as from the insights of Western education as discussed in the prior 4 chapters. Finally, Chapter 6 offers an example of an inculturated pedagogy at work. In this culminating chapter, the features of a compassion class I will teach at the inpatient PTSD unit of the Menlo Park Department of Veterans Affairs will be discussed in terms of its basis in the philosophy of education developed in this dissertation.

CHAPTER I

THE NEED FOR AN ARTICULATED PEDAGOGY FOR BUDDHIST-DERIVED PRACTICES IN SECULAR SETTINGS

Introduction

Chapter 1 outlines prominent features of the contemporary North American cultural context, especially elements that influence how Buddhism can be effectively taught in secular settings. I will discuss salient features of the Western environment that may challenge and enhance traditional Buddhist pedagogy as the two intersect in secular spaces. Examples of such issues include the implications of religious pluralism, the widespread "spiritual but not religious" philosophy, sensitivity to gender equality, and a prevalent distrust of hierarchy.

Moreover, philosophical incongruities between Western and Buddhist thinking pose pedagogical challenges for the conversation between Buddhist-derived practices and Western audiences. An example of a philosophical discrepancy can be found in Charles Taylor's "buffered self," which challenges Buddhist education at the most fundamental level. This chapter will present several other philosophical notions embedded in Western perspectives that are potentiall at odds with Buddhist education such as the notion of self-esteem as a core process. In essence, Chapter 1 contextualizes the need for theorization of

pedagogy that will be relevant to the presentation of Buddhist-derived meditation outside of explicitly Buddhist or even religious contexts.

1. Salient Characteristics of Western Culture

1.A. Religiously Diverse

That our culture is religiously diverse has an impact on all aspects of life, including the process of teaching Buddhist meditation in secular settings. When a teacher enters a secular space and speaks about concepts related to meditative practices or moral values, she is necessarily engaging multiple religious perspectives as part of the conversation. Having the knowledge that an interreligious exchange is implicitly underway is an important first step. Moreover, teachers need to be educated about the diversity of perspectives they may encounter in order to teach effectively.

North America is pluralist in the sense that there are a tremendous variety of religions that are practiced. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman refers to the fact that in America "there are between 300,000 and 400,000 local congregations belonging to literally hundreds of different religious denominations and traditions."[5] In terms of membership, Christianity is by far the most prevalent religion in this country. According to the Pew Forum, the most current national demographics indicate that 26.3% of Americans identify themselves as Evangelical Protestants and another 23.9% self identify as Catholic; making

[5] See Chapter 1 in Nancy T. Ammerman, *Everyday Religion* (New York: Oxford, 2007).

these the first and second most prevalent religions in practice. On the other end of the spectrum, Buddhists account for .7% of the population.[67]

Simply establishing the number of adherents, however, does not in and of itself capture the influence that a particular religion has on a culture nor can it speak to the religiosity of a given culture in various spheres of activity. Clearly, there is a great deal of interest in the Muslim faith, given its prominent political significance in our time and place, but the actual percentage of Muslims in this country is only .6 percent.[8] Buddhism has also made a great impact on our culture despite its relatively small number of adherents. Notions of mindfulness and the value of meditation has permeated all other American religions, not to mention secular life.

There are many different potential attitudes toward the reality of religious pluralism. One common perspective is the desire to remain isolated from foreign religious ideas. Another is the recognition of the need for tolerance of other perspectives for the sake of social harmony. A third is a willingness of religious people to actually learn from other religious traditions. And a fourth stance is the willingness to take up practices and ideas from a foreign tradition.[910] Within any

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[6] *Church Statistics and Religious Affiliations - U.S. Religious Landscape Study - Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, (2010, accessed 10th May 2011); available from http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations.html. In summary, this Pew Forum article states that the current American demographics for religious affiliation are the following; 26.3% of American adults are Evangelical Protestant, 23.9% are Catholic, 18.1% are Mainline Protestant, 16.1% are unaffiliated, 6.9% belong to historically black churches, 1.7% are Mormon, 1.7% are Jewish, .7% are Jehovah's Witness, .7% are Buddhist (1/3 of these are Mahayana, 1/3 Therevada, and 1/3 nonspecified), .6% are Muslim, .6% are Orthodox, and .4% are Hindu.

[7] Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" has Become the Word's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001).

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, (New York: Crossroad Publications, 2008), 3.

of these various categories of fear, cautious tolerance, or a wholehearted embracing of other traditions there are important questions that must be addressed regarding the implications of diversity for lived religious life on both personal and communal levels.

Nancy Ammerman speaks to the impact that religious pluralism has on religious practitioners. She suggests that one implication of pluralism is the knowledge that "there are always multiple discourses and memories and histories—sacred and secular—available to be deployed in any given situation."[11] This in turn influences religious identity because it highlights that each religion is one among many and also that there are other potentially meaningful religious choices that could be made. Given this enhanced awareness of other religious and secular options, religious diversity can be understood to influence the process of religious learning in significant ways. In any given conversation about the relevance of theology or spiritual practice to life, participants in this dialogue know on some level that there are other alternative philosophies and practices that engage the same issues they are considering.

The cross fertilization of religious practices is another particularly significant feature of religious pluralism, at least for those who are open to learning practices from other traditions. For example, if a Christian has a daily yoga practice that she experiences as an important part of her lived faith, this will inform her relationship with other Christian practices. It may also change how she interprets her own tradition's claims of uniqueness. Knitter speaks about his

[10] Ibid. Within the category of those who are open to the possibility of learning from other religions there are various perspectives on the appropriateness of blending religious traditions.
[11] Ammerman, *Everyday Religion* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 7.

discomfort with “the problems of a preferential intervention” as a dynamic that has emerged out of his exposure to other religions. He questions a literal or exclusive interpretation of the uniqueness of Jesus, which he describes as the premise “this miracle of God becoming human happens not only at a particular time within a particular people; it also happens, Christians insist, only once. Only in Jesus, nowhere else.”[12] In other words, it is because of his great respect for other traditions, and in particular his Buddhist practice, that the theological claim of uniqueness of Jesus becomes problematic for Knitter, at least when interpreted in exclusivist ways.

This is an example of how the experience of religious diversity is not necessarily a comfortable or easy process—precisely because it shakes up boundaries and instigates questioning. Francis Clooney similarly emphasizes the discomfort that can arise with respect to one’s own religious community after one has been exposed to the profundity of other traditions, especially if that exposure has been spiritually or intellectually transformative.[13] The discomfort that Clooney describes relates to the estrangement that can occur when individuals step outside of the shared experience of a faith community. Once they move beyond their home religious tradition they can find themselves navigating interstitial spaces, which are not endorsed or readily understood by members of *either* their home tradition *or* practitioners of the second religion that their process is informed by.

[12] Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian,* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 26.
[13] Francis X. Clooney, S.J., *Comparative Theology; Deep Learning Across Religious Borders,* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 15

Religious diversity, despite the challenges that it raises, can prompt processes of spiritual questioning that can be fruitful for individuals and communities. Educators who are prepared to recognize the contributions that perspectives and practices from other religious traditions can make are better poised to facilitate learning in religiously pluralist contexts and to prepare learners to navigate the demands of a pluralistic world. This is closely connected to the "dialogue of daily life," which is the premise that to be good neighbors and citizens in our contemporary world requires a capacity to navigate religious (not to mention other types of pluralism) in informal relationships and spaces such as neighborhoods, workplaces, schools etc.[14]

The dialogue of daily life implies that no matter if we are a Buddhist, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, or Hindu, we are compelled to act outside of homogenous religious spheres. In the shared public spheres, people benefit from formation that expresses that there is value to be found in encounters with people and traditions different from their own. Within the context of faith communities, the enumeration of theologies that are compatible with the successful navigation of the complexity of a religiously pluralist context become imperative. In teaching meditation in secular rather than explicitly religious settings, awareness of the value of diversity and skills/tools for negotiating and learning across difference are imperative for creating meaningful and relevant learning experiences within the context of religious pluralism.

[14] Donald W. Mitchell, *Building Bridges: Interreligious Dialogue on the Path to World Peace* (New York: New City Press, 2004), 25.

1.B Secular

In 2010, seven in ten Americans said religion is losing its influence on American public life—one of the highest rates of response in Gallup's fifty-three-year long history of asking this question. But this perception does not necessarily indicate a decrease in "the overall presence and influence of religious and spiritual factors in individual lives or in society as a whole."[15] How is it possible, that even as more people than ever before assert that religion is losing its influence on our culture, that American society is actually *not* less religious? These two ideas seem to contradict one another.

Nancy Ammerman argues that the positions are actually not mutually exclusive. She suggests,

> We [the contributors to the volume] do not assume that 'religious' and 'secular' are zero-sum realities tightly bounded against each other. We leave open the possibility that the boundaries between them are permeable.[16]

In other words, she believes contemporary Americans *are* strongly influenced by religion; yet simultaneously experience boundaries between the secular nature of public life and the religious influence on personal and private beliefs.

A 2010 Gallup poll supports Ammerman's suggestion that we do, in fact, live in a highly religious context but that religiosity has come to take particular forms of influence in public spheres. This Gallup poll indicates that Americans'

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[15] *Near-Record High See Religion Losing Influence in America*, (2010, accessed 10th May, 2011); available from http://www.gallup.com/poll/145409/Near-Record-High-Religion-Losing-Influence-America.aspx.

[16] See Nancy Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious* Lives, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9.

views about the influence of religion in their own lives have been considerably more stable over the past six or seven decades than their views about the influence of religion on American society.[17] Church and synagogue membership, however, have drifted downward. The current 61% of Americans who report belonging to a church or synagogue is as low as has been measured by Gallup since the 1930s.[18] Thus we see that there is a high rate of what is frequently referred to as "believing without belonging."

Given all this, it is fair to suggest that we are in a religiously pluralist environment in which there is widespread perception that the public sphere is secular. However, it is not necessarily the case that people believe that religion does not belong in or have implications for the public sphere. In fact, the prevalence of faith-based social service agencies suggests that there is widespread influence of religious values in social spheres. For teachers of Buddhist-derived meditation working in secular contexts it is essential to recognize that faith perspectives influence behavior in the public sphere even if they are not explicitly articulated. Teachers of Buddhist-derived practices who seek to have positive influence in secular contexts must have the capacity to recognize and negotiate the complexity of the relationship between religiosity and secularity.

[17] *Near-Record High See Religion Losing Influence in America*, (2010, accessed 10th May, 2011); available from http://www.gallup.com/poll/145409/Near-Record-High-Religion-Losing-Influence-America.aspx.
[18] Ibid.

1.B.1 The Dalai Lama's approach to secularism

The first major influence on the inculturation of Buddhism into secular contexts is the particular philosophical interpretation of secularity drawn on by Buddhist educators. No figure is as influential in the process of inculturation of Tibetan Buddhism, as the Dalai Lama, who has been the voice of Tibetan Buddhism around the world for decades.

The Dalai Lama has emphasized secular ethics in his public discourse for some years now. He asserts that without prioritizing basic human values like compassion, we will be unable as a society to function in a healthy way. He frequently articulates his concern about the implications of our culture's unbalanced emphasis on money and competition, on collective and individual welfare.[19] He views secular ethics as a vital corrective to the competitive individualism of the consumerist capitalist culture. The following passage gives a sense of what the Dalai Lama means by the term 'secular ethics'.

> How [do we] bring awareness of these inner values [like compassion] to the society? Our ultimate aim should not be to bring spirituality or religion to the community. Our aim is to really find a way of bringing basic transformation within the society [and to] create a society where there is a deeper appreciation and discourse on these basic values such as compassion and so on.

The Dalai Lama goes on to claim that there should not only be more discourse about these basic values like compassion but that values should impact real behavior in the world. He says, "we [need] secular ethics to be made

[19] Dalai Lama, *HH Dalai Lama on Secular Ethics and Contemplative Education* (April, 2009), available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODm2Yj793Kc (accessed December 1, 2011).

part and parcel of the real world so that it has a real effect."[20] The premise in this argument is that bringing spirituality and religion into the community will not be as effective as turning public discourse and education toward core Buddhist (and according to the Dalai Lama core human) values like compassion, sympathetic joy (taking pleasure in the success and happiness of others), gratitude, and love.

The Dalai Lama is concerned that people "pay lip service to moral ideas," rather than making real efforts to apply ethics to daily interpersonal interactions.[21] He speaks about the tendency to create a dichotomy between the behavior of those who are ethical leaders or who perform heroic activities and their own potential as ordinary people. The Dalai Lama would prefer for everyone not simply to value the idea of ethics but to actually engage in the *practice* of ethics in personal and communal life, especially when they are confronted with challenging situations.

The Dalai Lama's concern for ethics does not discount the myriad of ways that people do practice interpersonal kindness and compassion. But he is concerned about the lack of incentives for ethical behavior when there are counter-incentives toward in-group preference and personal financial well-being at the expense of others. He speaks about the particular challenges to ethical behavior when one person's interest is pitted against another's, especially in the context of a global economy. This desire fuels the premise that there is a need for methods to train in these moral capacities in secular contexts. This notion of training in moral behavior is pronounced in Buddhist and other religious contexts,

[20] Ibid.
[21] Dalai Lama, *HH Dalai Lama on Secular Ethics and Contemplative Education* (April, 2009), available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODm2Yj793Kc (accessed December 1, 2011).

but the Dalai Lama would like to create opportunities for this kind of training in public secular spaces. The role of academic centers in this process, he argues, will be essential in terms of providing not only research but also more fundamental credibility to the undertaking.

In his *Ethics for a New Millennium*, the Dalai Lama speaks about a universal aspect of each person. When the Dalai Lama uses the term "universal" in this context, he means that it is applicable to all humans regardless of their religious or cultural context.[22] This is an interpretation of a traditional Buddhist principle that, despite the particularities of individual experience, there are underlying commonalities of human anthropology that are true for everyone. For example, that all beings want to be happy and be free from suffering is often cited as an example of a universal human dynamic.[23] People might approach the effort toward happiness in any number of ways, but all can converge on the intention itself.

The Dalai Lama acknowledges that individuals and collectives behave in ways that are harmful toward others. Such behavior is based on the false premise that harming another person will make oneself or ones group happier or better off materially. He points out that harming others for ones own gain will not lead to anything more than "temporary satisfaction."[24] When confronted with persons who harm others, either intentionally or inadvertently, the Dalai Lama emphasizes a response that challenges the harmful behavior, while upholding

[22] Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead, 1999), 162. The Tibetan term translated as universal here is *chi sem*.
[23] Ibid., 4.
[24] Ibid., 90.

the basic humanity of the other person. He suggests that compassion is the best response to violence, harm, and malice because the person harming others will inevitably meet suffering. Rather than retaliating against a person or group who have hurt others, he advises responding with compassion. This compassion can be generated by recollecting that "in harming us [or others] ultimately they lose their peace of mind, their inner balance, and thereby their happiness."[25] Therefore, compassion is the more appropriate response toward someone who behaves in unethical ways. This compassion is rooted in the understanding that the perpetrator will ultimately meet with suffering even if they appear to be benefitting from their behavior in the short run. Moreover, compassion does not mean that a person will not be stopped from harming again. It does imply that the attitude with which they are met is one grounded in care and recognition of common humanity rather than anger and a desire for retribution.

Related to this conversation about ethics and universality, the Dalai Lama also speaks extensively about the notion of universal responsibility. He emphasizes that in today's global society there is a greater extent of interconnection than was true of more isolated primitive cultural periods.

> Today's reality is so complex and, on the material level at least, so clearly interconnected that a different outlook is needed. Modern economics is a case in point. A stock market crash on one side of the globe can have a direct effect on the economies on the other—and the very size of our population means that we cannot any longer afford to ignore others' interests. Indeed, we find that these are so often intertwined that serving our own interests benefits others, even though this may not be our explicit intention. For example, when two families share a single water source, ensuring that it is not polluted benefits both.[26]

[25] Ibid., 107.
[26] Ibid., 4.

Above the Dalai Lama asserts that because of the extent of our interconnectedness in today's global world our actions impact people that we may never meet. He argues that there is a responsibility we have toward these people, however distant they may seem from us. He distinguishes this responsibility, engendered by our interdependence, from guilt or self-flagellation. He suggests that we as individuals need not feel individually "directly responsible" for the poverty of someone on the other side of the world.[27] Universal responsibility "is not an admission of guilt but, again, a reorientation of our heart and mind away from self and toward others."[28] But universal responsibility does imply that we need to create economic systems that are just and to use our power responsibly. This distinction between guilt and universal responsibility is an area that is conceptually ambiguous for many westerners but is essential in not only public discourse but also personal ethical behavior.[29]

The concepts of universality, universal responsibility, and secularity as understood by the Dalai Lama are all closely related. The Dalai Lama's interest is in making the conversation about moral and ethical issues relevant to as wide a population as possible. He seems to take the stance that involving science in this discourse is supportive in that science is credible and furthermore can shed new light on how individuals and collectives behave in our cultural context. Conversely, he seeks to minimize the role of religiosity in the academic centers

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Some of the Stanford Compassion Training teachers, such as Margaret Cullen, have noted that the Buddhist concept of near enemies is a helpful one in introducing compassion and distinguishing it from pity or shame.

that support the understanding and development of ethical principles. In some respects, he sees religion as a threat to the task of bolstering the credibility of moral education as a secular humanist endeavor.

The Dalai Lama's stance on moral education in secular settings influences the work of Buddhist education in part because of his role as spokesperson for Tibetan Buddhism. His perspective on ethical matters is also widely influential because he himself is seen as a symbol of compassion and forbearance in his response to the Chinese government's treatment of Tibet. He has become a leading spokesperson for the movement for secular education of moral values in ways that are accessible across religions. His ideas about compassion and universal humanity illustrate how Tibetan Buddhism is being adapted to meet secular contexts in ways that have broad social impact.

1.B.2 McMahan on secularism

In *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, David McMahan argues that there has been a reinterpretation of Buddhism that has emerged in the last century.[30] His work neither supports nor decries the new form of Buddhism but rather situates it historically. In the following passage McMahan summarizes his views

[30] Thupten Jinpa pointed me to this particular text and suggested that it is highly relevant to my work in considering effective pedagogy for Buddhist-derived practices in secular contexts. I was also intrigued that Jinpa himself finds this book provocative, given his familiarity with the Dalai Lama's vision and his own central role in the popularization of Buddhist practices in Western contexts.

about contemporary forms of Buddhism with regard to the process of secularization and inculturation.[31]

> Most non–Asian Americans tend to see Buddhism as a religion whose most important elements are meditation, rigorous philosophical analysis, and an ethic of compassion combined with a highly empirical psychological science that encourages reliance on individual experience. It discourages blindly following authority and dogma; has little place for superstition, magic, image worship, and gods; and is largely compatible with the findings of modern science and liberal democratic values.[32]

In other words, according to McMahan, Buddhism in the West emphasizes the empirical nature of the tradition and downplays elements that are associated with faith, bias, and religion. McMahan situates this movement in the modern historical context of "popular and semischolarly authors" such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Chogyam Trungpa, and the Dalai Lama, among others.[33] He suggests that these teachers have gained notoriety in Western contexts because of their emphasis on the practical, logical, and psychological elements of Buddhism and downplayed the mythical, ritual, and superstitious components. The presentation of Buddhism in the modern era, by these popular teachers, he suggests has been "Westernized, demythologized, rationalized, Romanticized, Protestantized, or psychologized [sic]."[34] When he uses the term "Protestantized [sic]" here, he refers to the emphasis on personal practice, and on the personal interpretations of texts. Yet McMahan points out,

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[31] See Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). Flanagan argues that it is essential to triage traditional Buddhism and leave behind the illogical, superstitious elements and retain only the logical aspects of the tradition in the modern context.
[32] Ibid.
[33] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 8.
[34] Ibid.

> Little has been done to illuminate the specific modern ideological forces, textual sources, social and cultural practices, overt philosophies, and tacit assumptions that have been involved in these ongoing processes.[35]

His work is based on the presumption that laying out the philosophical underpinnings of the new version of Buddhism will provide much needed context for analysis.

This dominant portrayal of modern Buddhism, according to McMahan, is both new and not new. He suggests that this contemporary form of Buddhism, "is neither unambiguously "there" in ancient Buddhist texts and lived traditions nor merely a fantasy of an educated elite population in the West—an image with no corresponding object."[36] He argues instead that it is a historically situated, contextualized example of inculturation.

> It is, rather, an actual new form of Buddhism that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform that has been taking place not only in the West but also in Asian countries for over a century. This new form of Buddhism has been fashioned by modernizing Asian Buddhists and western enthusiasts deeply engaged in creating Buddhist responses to the dominant problems and questions of modernity, such as epistemic uncertainty, religious pluralism, the threat of nihilism, conflicts between science and religion, war, and environmental destruction.[37]

This new form of Buddhism is a production of the new cultural context. He sees the trend as global rather than simply Western, and points to the close relationship between different cultures enabled by technology and social networks. In McMahan's presentation, the new forms of Buddhism are responsive to the needs and interests of the people it engages. In this case, the needs are to respond to problems like religious pluralism, the tenuous

[35] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 8.
[36] Ibid., 5.
[37] Ibid.

relationship between science and religion, and the need for fresh approaches to social issues. The adaptations to the forms of Buddhism arise out of the necessity for the religion to find ways to respond to pressing social issues and philosophical/religious orientations of students.

McMahan sees the contemporary adaptations to traditional forms of Buddhism as having created a new type of Buddhism. He notes that there is a connection between this new Buddhism and older forms of Buddhism. But he does not view the contemporary processes of inculturation as one example among many. In other words, he chooses to present the contemporary Buddhism as different in kind from older forms of Buddhism.

It is important to remember that it is also possible to contextualize the contemporary inculturation of Buddhism as *another* example of a long trend. This alternative approach would situate the contemporary issues of inculturation as an example of how Buddhism spreads to new contexts and engages new interests and concerns. The presentation of the doctrine of skillful means in the early Buddhist canon and the early Mahayana sutras in Chapters 2 and 3 provide further context for this alternative framework.

Framing the discourse on contemporary adaptations as inherently different in kind from earlier textual (and historical) conversations is problematic. It is problematic in the sense that McMahan and others like him who argue that Western Buddhism is different in kind from earlier Buddhism are implicitly indicating that there has been a break or rupture between contemporary Buddhism and it's long lineage. Along with this narrative of a break with the

tradition's long history comes presumptions of a loss of legitimacy, a lack of roots, and an invitation to distrust the efficacy of the particular adaptations to practice and theory that have emerged. On the other hand, bracketing the question of whether the adaptations are in line with the tradition (or not) until criteria for such evaluation have been asserted would be a more promising methodological approach. When authors and thinkers such as McMahan imply that the theories and practices used in secular settings are not in keeping with the tradition, people who are interested in learning these new approaches are ostracized from the communities of practice that could otherwise support their learning.[38]

1.C Postmodern

One of the most central tenets of postmodern thinking is the rejection of the meta-narrative, meaning that postmodern thinkers do not subscribe to the notion that there is a single, true, vantage point from which it is possible to understand all history and every culture. In place of the metanarrative, postmodern thinkers assert the significance of valuing the particular. The particular here means that all epistemologies are understood to emerge from specific contexts and cannot be readily generalized from. In this way, the

[38] It is, in part for this reason, that I am interested in the potential of teaching courses at Stanford explicitly tying in the Compassion Training Course in with the Buddhist tradition that has influenced it. In the context of this course, the learners will also be invited into a process of exploring the relevant practices and philosophies emerging from other religious traditions.

postmodern perspective negates the assertion of any perspective, whatever it might be, as universally applicable.[39]

As discussed in the prior sections, in the contemporary American context, we find ourselves amidst a range of religious and philosophical positions. Yet given this postmodern suspicion of the meta-narrative, there is suspicion for the very idea that there is any one truth that can organize all of reality. This creates a potentially significant gulf between religious and post-modern worldviews. It also presents challenges (or opportunities from another perspective) for religious educators who express their faith by communicating through universals. For many believers and scholars, this challenge has produced creative, new expressions of faith that are articulated by means of personal, embodied experiences. Postmodern presumptions are deeply relevant to communication within religious communities, while simultaneously influencing processes of interreligious dialogue and interfaith learning. In the interfaith context, the postmodern perspective comes to play in the tensions around the prospect of engaging those outside of one's own faith community in a way that has both integrity to one's own religious convictions and also acknowledgement or better yet interest in and respect for the position of the other.

I would argue that this particular tension often drives naïvely pluralistic perspectives. Here I mean pluralism in the way it is used in theology of religions i.e. as the belief that all religions are equal and that all religions express the same ultimate truth in differing ways. The implicit position that underrides such a

[39] See Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 12.

naïve pluralism is the premise that all religions are equally successful or unsuccessful in their capacity to refer to or access ultimate reality.[40] [41] This dynamic creates an issue in the context of pedagogy for meditation teachers working in secular contexts in that learners are often reluctant to suspend their ideas about the limitations of any philosophical perspective or practice long enough to engage with it and learn about it experientially. For example, when teaching meditation, it is common to find that people will defer to or trust in their initial impression of a practice, because their perspective is just as truthful as any other. They therefor may well not be willing to exert a good-faith effort to trying the practice out because there is no real reason to move beyond one's own particular and limited, yet completely legitimate point of view.

1.D Consumer Oriented

Consumer culture is a process that is enacted by individuals in their daily decisions.[42] Consumption-thinking influences more than the processes of purchasing, it is associated with constructs of commodification that are internalized in individuals and communities. Commodification influences the way that we relate to all types of information including spiritual doctrines and practices. Cetina argues that knowledge is effectively destroyed through

[40] See Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,* (New York: Crossroad Publications, 2008), 3.
[41] See Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 2.
[42] See Karin Knorr Cetina's, "The Epistemics of Information; A Consumption Model." *Journal of Consumer Culture* Volume 10 (2): 171-204.

commodification “by absorbing knowledge into other objects, revising it without end, or disseminating it until it loses value.”[43] In a consumption culture such as ours we can see how information from the various religious traditions becomes cross-fertilized and consumed. If an idea is well received in the popular media it will be engaged across the boundaries of tradition. Moreover, commodification is a pedagogical issue in that it impacts the way learners respond to new ideas and their expectations about the learning process.

In Barbara Eisenreich’s popular book *Nickel and Dimed*, she postulates that our consumer culture not only drives behavior but is also founded on a set of assumptions about people and the world. In her personal experiment of attempting to survive on minimum wage jobs, she notes that there is truly no way to replicate the long-term impact that living below the poverty line has on a person in her short-term experiment. The cumulative impact of poverty cannot be replicated, and the privilege that her race, education, and facility with English language confer on her cannot be set aside. But her experiment exposes what “the best-case scenario [looks like]: a person with every advantage that ethnicity and education, health and motivation can confer attempting, in a time of exuberant prosperity, to survive the economy’s lower depths.”[44] She notes time and again, in her account of her social experiment, the impact that factors ranging from nutrition to invisibility have on her sense of her own worth and on her social relationships.

[43] Ibid., 171.
[44] See Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed,* (New York: Picador, 2002), 10.

Robert Reich, on the other hand, demonstrates how the middle class has been excluded from the gains associated with economic growth. He attributes the current economic issues faced by America on the concentration of wealth in the hands of a limited number of elite. Reich argues that the economic crisis will not be restored through realignment of global trade distribution issues. He defines the focal point as the imperative "to rebalance the American economy so that its benefits are shared more widely in America, as they were decades ago."[45] Reich points out that *beliefs* about income distribution impact the material social reality for millions of people. The normalization of the *idea* that the disproportionate affluence of a small group is socially acceptable creates collective institutions that tolerate radical inequality of not only material resources but also access to education, healthcare, and other vital social goods. One could argue that the shift to the use of meditation in healthcare settings, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, is correlated to the lack of access that most consumers have to the more expensive forms of healthcare that have traditionally been brokered.

In the spiritual arena this can mean that the practices, which engendered specific insights, have a propensity to become lost to the collective memory but the content of realization, especially when it is expressed in appealing ways, is proliferated. Not only does it become difficult to discern where particular insights have come from and how to recreate them in one's own experience but it also becomes difficult to discern which sources are part of wisdom traditions and which are not. For example, Colleen Griffith has commented in her teaching,

[45] See Robert Reich, *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 4.

when the wisdom of the various traditions are all jumbled together on a shelf in a bookstore it can become difficult to know what is what or to retain a sense of the preciousness of these traditions. In other words, the ease with which texts and practices can be obtained and purchased can in some ways undermine recognition of their individual value.

Also, the leanings of our consumer culture cause us to make a fundamental mistake about how we can go about growing our connection with wisdom. We are in the habit, through our consumer culture, of believing that when there is something that interests us we can make a connection to it by purchasing something (a book, a cd, a course to learn about it). We believe that our capacity to own information is correlated to our capacity to become a part of a living tradition. We may think that owning and even reading books indicates that we have forged a relationship to their contents. But this is not necessarily the case, especially if the content we seek to connect with is a preconceptual or embodied wisdom. Chogyam Trungpa, one of the first Tibetan Buddhist teachers to spend a great deal of time in America, emphasized the point that our spiritual lives are not divorced from our consumption-thinking. He warned against the ubiquitous nature of "spiritual materialism" and emphasized the importance of spiritual community, practices, and connections with teachers as means to discern our way through the myriad of entanglements that arise from clinging to the forms associated with religious practices.[46]

[46] Chogyam Trungpa, *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1973), 4.

1.E Distrusting of Authority (and Leaders)

Mistrust for authority abounds for leaders in a variety of contexts. Religious leaders, political leaders, business leaders are all held with great suspicion by the contemporary media. In religious contexts, this mistrust for leaders is closely associated with the fear that spiritual leaders are using their position for financial gain or other forms of power. Kramer suggests that suspicion of an authority figure can be triggered by previous experiences of being violated by another leader in any number of ways.[47] The combined fascination with and fear of leaders is tied in with dissonance with the notion of relinquishing personal autonomy and freedom.

There is substantial evidence that trust in both public and private institutions has been declining for several decades.[48] For example, 75% of Americans said they trusted the federal government in 1964 but only 25% expressed comparable levels of trust in 1997. Similarly, trust in universities has fallen from 61% to 30%, medical institutions from 73% to 29%, and journalism from 29% to 14%.[49] Major private companies fare no better; trust in them has fallen from 55% to 21% over this same period."[50] A variety of studies indicate that "unmet or violated expectancies" are the root of this decline in trust.[51] Mistrust for the authority vested in religious leaders and religious institutions may also stem from the perceived dissonance between the postmodern emphasis on the

[47] Roderick M. Kramer, "Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions." *Annual Review of Psychology* Volume 50: 569-598, 1999.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 588-589.
[51] Ibid., 589.

multiplicity of truths and primacy of personal freedom with the perception of a requirement to cede personal authority to the demands of a religious leader or organization.

Familiarity with the types of concerns that learners might experience with regard to giving up their own personal agency and freedom may permit meditation teachers working in secular contexts to couch the practices they teach in terms that will be more accessible and less triggering. For example, teaching methods rooted in inquiry and discussion rather than lecturing may be more palatable given this kind of sensitivity. Moreover, explicitly acknowledging the power dynamics inherent in any teacher/learner relationship and maintaining ethical codes of conduct can also serve to assuage dynamics of suspicion. Teachers could be well served to learn from feminist and other emancipatory pedaogies about the value of acknowledging, engaging, and refashioning classroom power dynamics. In this way, tensions over authority between individuals, teachers, and traditions can be harnessed as a crucible for learning and recognized as an opportunity for growth and insight rather than as a source of alienation.

2. Common Religious Attitudes in Modern American Society

2.A The "Spiritual But Not Religious" Movement

According to Robert Fuller, the spiritual but not religious phenomenona is correlated to the secularization of public life and to postmodern presumptions. The postmodern rejection of the metanarrative has caused people to question any philosophy (including religions) that asserts unilateral ownership of truth. Spirituality in modern time is increasingly understood as a private affair having to do with personal growth whereas religious organizations are seen as public institutions wrought with difficulty. Fuller claims that approximately 40 percent of Americans are not affiliated with religious institutions. He asserts, "Despite their unchurched status, however, most nonetheless claim to be strongly religious or spiritual on a personal level."[52] For many Americans, the connection between personal belief and institutional affiliation has become severed or at least weakened.

Moreover, as discussed in the prior section, the suspicion toward leaders of institutions, has also helped to intensify the mistrust of institutionalized expressions of religion. However, this mistrust of religious leaders and of religious organizations, has not eclipsed concern with religious matters. According to Fuller, half of the unchurched describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' and one in five Americans claim to be spiritual but not religious.

[52] Robert Fuller, *Spiritual But Not Religious*; *Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

Spiritual practices may be positively regarded and valued in light of the personal benefits associated with their implementation. As far as the demographics of those who claim spiritual but not religious status, Fuller argues that "they are more likely than other Americans who have a college education to belong to a white-collar profession, to be liberal in their political views, to have parents who attended church less frequently, and to be more independent in the sense of having weaker social relationships"[53]

Regarding the distinction between religiosity and spirituality, Jennifer Lindholm and Helen Astin argue that religion is seen as "organized, social, and traditional, whereas spirituality is conceived as personal, transcendent, and characterized by qualities of relatedness."[54] In their research, they ask whether there is a difference between the pedagogy of teachers who define themselves as spiritual from those who do not claim to be spiritual? More specifically, they inquire whether a teacher who is spiritually orientated is more likely to use student-centered pedagogy?

The particular interest in the use of student-centered pedagogy is based on it's value due to "assoc[iation] with higher grade attainment, enhanced intellectual curiosity, and the development of superior creativity, drive, and leadership skills relative to those traits found in students whose instructors employ more traditional pedagogical methods, such as lecturing."[55] The most

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[53] Robert Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious,* (2001, accessed 1st February, 2010); available from http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/Books/2002/07/Spiritual-But-Not-Religious.aspx#ixzz1ASpI7Ju2.

[54] See Jennifer Lindholm and Helen Astin, "Spirituality and Pedagogy: Faculty's Spirituality and Use of Student-Centered Approaches to Undergraduate Teaching," *The Review of Higher Education*, 31, no. 2 (2007), 185-207.

[55] Ibid., 187.

significant finding in the study is that teachers who are rated as high in their spirituality score rankings use disproportionately greater levels of cooperative learning techniques in the classroom than their lower scoring counterparts. This difference was relatively more significant within the discipline of English than in the disciplines of physical science, business, or math. Lindholm and Astin conclude that teaching methods are driven by the personal values held by teachers and that faculty members who define themselves as spiritual are more likely to use student-centered teaching methods.

The "Spiritual But Not Religious" website defines itself as a community of people "who are exploring a spiritual journey outside of a single organized religion."[56] While SBNR.org defines itself as a community, it is clear that it does not "promote a specific spiritual philosophy or theology."[57]

When people approach religiously derived practices from a spiritual but not religious perspective the question is raised whether they are less likely to stick with a practice when it gets too challenging or uncomfortable, or when it does not resonate with their current understanding of the world. This is a significant concern because spiritual practices often require a discipline of working with them long enough to see their impact. Buddhist perspectives, especially in the Vajrayana tradition where the role of the teacher is emphasized, would be wary of a spiritual path that is driven by the untrustworthy whims of ego-clinging. Another limitation to the spiritual but not religious perspective is that there is no authority other than oneself, which undermines not only teacher

[56] *Spirituality | Spiritual But Not Religious | SBNR | Spiritual Life & Meaning*. Web. 10 May 2011. <http://sbnr.org/>.
[57] How this plays out pedagogically is another question and one that I will return to in Chapter 3.

student relationships but also mentoring relationships or even the need for spiritual community. In other words, the spiritual but not religious perspective absolutizes "the self" and individual preferences rather than the transcendent.

In this way, the spiritual but not religious movement challenges religious traditions that see the value of adhering to a specific path and community over time.[58] But it does not serve religious educators to simply denounce spiritual but not religious perspectives. The more practical response to the prevalence of spiritual but not religious philosophies is to consider how to best engage their adherents and to understand their underlying motivations and concerns. This may involve making new kinds of pedagogical adaptations that serve to address the needs of those browsing in the spiritual milieu as well as those already committed to a religious tradition.

There is a range of resources in the various schools of Buddhism that can support this need to effectively support spiritual but not religious seekers. There are a multitude of examples of the Buddha and other teachers skillfully engaging seekers without requiring them to be committed to Buddhist practices or philosophies. Many such examples can be found in the sutras attributed to the Buddha.[59] SBNR learners can benefit from similar invitations as will be explored

[58] See Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith,* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 1-24. In Chapter 1 of this book, Borg claims that many people who have left institutional religion and hold a spiritual but not religious perspective are unaware that there are multiple formulations of Christianity. He points out that because people are not aware that there are a multiplicity of ways that religion can be formulated they view religious traditions as rigid. Many of the spiritual but not religious adherents, he argues, operate based on faith conceptions from their childhood religious education experiences. They are unaware that more complex, nuanced interpretations of Christianity and its relationship to other traditions even exist.

[59] Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Majjhima Nikaya; The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Translation edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Sommerville: Wisdom, 1995). In the Sutras, there are many examples of the Buddha teaching Brahmans without requiring them to convert. Sutra 12, 23, and

in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. It is important to recognize, however, that courses bringing Buddhist-derived meditation to secular contexts may be particularly attractive to people with SBNR belief systems because they offer spiritual tools in an environment that does not require religious affiliation. This may be a challenge for some teachers who themselves come from a strong faith background, and are not comfortable articulating spiritual practices or engaging in conversations pertaining to meaning structures without implicitly or explicitly presuming that belief is a necessary prerequisite for engagement. But other teachers who recognize that there is an opportunity in secular spaces to enter people into practices, to engage with people who might otherwise not be comfortable entering more overtly religious contexts, can find such learning spaces rich with potential. Facility with nonjudgmental attitudes, care with pedagogical practices (including skill in negotiating power dynamics between teacher and learners), and the capacity for the purposeful use of language all become essential tools in such an environment.

2.B Multiple Religious Participation

Catherine Cornille's *Many Mansions* explores implications of multiple religious belonging and is an important resource for religious educators working in pluralistic contexts where multiple religious belonging is a common

30 of the Middle Length Discourses are examples of this dynamic of the Buddha teaching these Brahmans through the language and cosmology of their own religious tradition. His method of teaching, in these examples, relies on communicating with these individuals in the terms that they understand and according to the points of relevance that the learners are concerned with.

occurrence. Cornille outlines the various types of multiple religious participation that can be found in our contemporary North American context. The first type is new age syncretism “in which the individual chooses beliefs and practices from various religious traditions based on his or her own taste and judgment."[60] This kind of dynamic actually signals "complete absence of religious belonging" rather than multiple belonging.[61] The second type is multiple belonging in which the individual is primarily rooted in one tradition but is actively engaged in dialogue. In this expression of multiple belonging the religion of origin remains normative.

Dupuis engages this second type of multiple belonging in his chapter of Cornille’s text. He suggests that when religions interact, even in order to learn from one another, a primary religious identity will remain operative for participants.[62] A person who is rooted in her faith but possesses the characteristics of humility, empathy etc. can certainly learn from and even participate in the activities of another religious tradition without having to abandon her own. Participating in more than one religious tradition is an increasingly common occurrence in our religiously pluralist contemporary context. According to Cornille, the third type of multiple belonging, which is full multiple belonging is more rare than the prior two modes of engagement across traditions.

The contemporary Western experience of participating in multiple religious traditions is distinct from the historical Asian relationship with multiple belonging.

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[60] Catherine Cornille *Many Mansions; Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.
[61] Ibid., 3.
[62] Ibid., 66.

Multiple religious belonging, according to Phan, "is a misnomer, in Asia, where religions are considered not as mutually exclusive religious organizations but as having specialized functions."[63] Cornille echoes this sentiment when she frames the question, "one may wonder whether Western religiosity is not merely becoming more "Oriental" in nature."[64] However, it is widely noted that the types of religious claims that monotheistic religions require of people makes it difficult to take up two such traditions at one time.

Clooney raises the issue of multiple religious belonging in terms of the question of how formation in multiple religions influences our religious identities. He suggests that after undergoing the process of interfaith learning people may no longer fit into their original communities with ease. He concedes, “comparative theological study… may even precipitate the formation of secondary communities to which many of us will belong in part.”[65]

Knitter’s book *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* exemplifies how his own experience of moving outside of his home tradition, Roman Catholicism, fundamentally challenged his religious identity and relationship to his home religious community. Knitter entertains the question whether his relationship to Buddhism is analogous to a marital affair and if so whether his Buddhist practice could be understood as a form of promiscuity. He raises the question of whether he is a Buddhist Christian or a Christian Buddhist. His conclusion is that he is a hybrid in terms of his religious affiliation but decides that his core identity is Christian. That said, he suggests that Buddhism has greatly influenced his

[63] Ibid., 62.
[64] Ibid., 2.
[65] Ibid., 153.

interpretation of the constitutive Christian practices and beliefs when he acknowledges that his "relationship with Christ has not only been profoundly influenced, enhanced, and preserved through my relationship with Buddha."[66] However, the criteria Knitter uses in his book of self-reported analysis of one's own core identity may not be the best or only barometer of primary religious affiliation. It may not sufficiently engage the issue of how a person is perceived by the community or the meaning of the radical reinterpretation of doctrine that can happen when one is formed by multiple traditions, especially with regard to the resulting isolation of that individual from shared beliefs and practices.

While Knitter's experience of multiple belonging is rare, the dynamic he describes of learning from engaging with another tradition is broadly relevant to our cultural milieu. In contemporary Western culture, the acknowledgement of the health benefits of Buddhist-derived meditation and the prevalence of Buddhist meditation in secular spaces such as healthcare has brought many people into conversation with Buddhist philosophy and practice. Knitter's description of how engaging in Buddhist practice has helped inform his life as a Christian can serve as a model for how others might take their exploration across religious boundaries as an opportunity to engage with their home tradition or philosophy more deeply. I would argue that the widespread interest in his book is related to the fact that people resonate with his method of engaging with interfaith practice even if they are not going to replicate his outcome of actually *belonging* to multiple traditions.

[66] Paul Knitter *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (Oxford: One World, 2009), 434.

3. Philosophical Incongruities

3.A Taylor and the Buddhist Sense of Self

Charles Taylor describes the distancing we contemporary humans feel from our own embodied experience.[67] One aspect of Taylor's "buffered self" is the mind/body split. He suggests that our sense of distance from our experience is related to our understanding of how the mind and body function. The body is seen as distinct from the mind and there emerges "the relegation of the physical to being 'just' a contingent cause of the psychic."[68] This is different in kind from the pre-modern experience of the relationship between mind and body, which Taylor argues is more unified than our modern experience.

Taylor uses the term "buffered" to describe the distance or gap between our contemporary understanding of the relationship between bodily and mental experience.[69] Not only is there a gap in this buffered sense of self but there is a priority placed on the conceptual description of an experience over the somatic experience itself.[70] Taylor suggests, with regard to the phenomenon of depression, that the modern person has access to a variety of explanatory devices that contextualize her experience of depression in terms of concepts describing the underlying dynamics, such as information pertaining to etiology,

[67] The implication of the relationship between body and mind is a fundamental concern for postmodern feminists. The perspective of feminist pedagogy will be explored in Chapter 4.
[68] Charles Taylor *A Secular Age* (New York: Random House, 2007), 37.
[69] It is significant to note that Taylor's recognition of the mind-body split echoes the feminist philosophical and pedagogical emphasis on this same point. As I will further discuss in Chapter 4, feminist pedagogies emphasize the role of the body in learning as a corrective to the mind-body split so prevalent in our culture. Feminist methods also would critique Taylor here by pointing out the gendered nature of teaching methods and philosophies of education.
[70] Ibid., 37.

methods for treatment etc. Despite the fact that these explanations are *about* physical dynamics such as hormonal imbalance and genetic makeup, the process of relating to the depression is primarily a cognitive one. Because this contemporary person has access to these various explanations for his feeling of depression, he thereby use this information to support the tendency to "take a distance from this [embodied] feeling [of depression], which is ipso facto declared not justified."[71] In other words, in this experience of a buffered self, theoretical analysis is not only the primary means of engaging with the world but also functions to obscure the immediacy of somatic experience. Thus the contemporary person is charcterized by her proclivity to rely on conceptuality as fundamental to her experience, over and above other possible epistemologies (especially somatically derived ones).

Taylor's description of the contemporary psyche as "buffered" has consequences for the learning process. This buffer is a protection from the immediacy of experience and allows for the fact that "this self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meaning of things for it."[72] Taylor argues that the buffered sense of self is indicative of a perceived boundary between self and other, which is much less fluid than the boundary that existed in prior ages. Taylor suggests that there is not only a buffer between self and others but also between the self and the physical world. This contemporary buffer does not only signify a difference in belief structure, according to Taylor. Rather, the buffer refers to an experience of separation that underscores every aspect

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 38.

contemporary experience. This buffer undermines the teaching of interdependence because the experience of the buffered individual is oriented toward her own cognitive patterns rather than the relational elements of her experience.

This buffered experience also undermines the capacity for receptivity, [73] which is understood as a core element of practice in the traditions that emphasize guru yoga. Ideas like "self-control", "self-protection", self-sufficiency, and the capacity to disengage all emerge from this notion of the buffered self.[74] The buffered self is not only discrete from other humans, animals, and the physical environment but is also primarily limited to engaging with everyone and everything through the lens of utility. This perspective emphasizes a relationship with other people and things that are characterized by the ongoing evaluation of their relevance to operationalizing ones own perceived needs or wishes.

Taylor speaks to how the possibility of belief in God is undermined in this framework of the buffered self. The porous self, which is unified in its sense of mind and body, did not have the option to disengage from the existence of God, spirits etc. For the modern student, the mind is primary and trumps the experience of either the personal physical or external world. Taylor describes this perspective as one in which the individual faces the world from the perspective of the belief that "my ultimate purposes and meanings are those which arise within

[73] See Patrul Rinpoche *Words of My Perfect Teacher* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 10-12. In this section, Patrul Rinpoche clarifies how various negative attitudes of learners such as being like an upturned cup, a cup with a hole in it, or a cup containing poison can interfere with the learning process. This perspective described by Taylor, of believing oneself to be separate from one's body or one's experience is a poisonous view that tarnishes the capacity to relate to reality skillfully.
[74] Charles Taylor *The Secular Age*, 39.

me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them." [75] The contemporary notion of the "thick emotional boundary" or preoccupation with the content of one's emotional experience and its accompanying individualistic perspective and self-actualizing rhetoric is, from a Buddhist perspective, false and leads necessarily to suffering.[76]

From a Buddhist perspective, there is an ontological error in the notion of the "buffered self." Buddhist ideas from any of the various schools would emphasize that perceived separation between self and other is illusory rather than inherently existing. Moreover, Buddhist perspectives would express concern about the impact this idea of separation has on the learning process. This buffered self is distinctly different from Mahayana Buddhist perspectives that describe people as a composite of body, energy, and mind that are interconnected with one another and are contingent on other beings and the physical environment.

The notion of being "buffered" pertains to identifying with a sense of self that "can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it." [77] This perspective, from a Buddhist point of view, makes persons out of touch with reality (the reality of inter-connection), while *simultaneously* preventing them from entering into the practices that could reveal the inter-connected nature of reality. Therefore, the position is not only problematic philosophically, but it also is

[75] Ibid., 38.
[76] Ibid., 38.
[77] Ibid. Again, Taylor's notion of "a buffered self" aligns with the traditional defects of being a poisoned cup described in Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher.* Due to this poisonous perspective that the content of what one thinks is necessarily trustworthy, students are unable to engage ideas and practices that would benefit them by challenging some of their assumptions or ways of thinking.

problematic in that it learners identified with this outlook are not open to learning or changing. It is common in the classroom to see people who have spent several hours reading about a practice and, based on this limited exposure, to denounce it with no other evidence besides the first ideas they have of it. The implicit condescension toward religion and strong belief in one's own limited perspective as the ultimate authority, must be engaged by contemporary religious (and secular) educators.

There are a variety of pedagogical implications of the strong belief in the preeminence of that which occurs in one's own mind (Taylor's "buffered self").[78] This is especially true in the case of teaching practices derived from Tibetan Buddhism, which comes out of what Taylor would call a pre-modern experience of a unified body/mind and a porous self. The reinterpretation of these Tibetan derived practices for learners operating with a buffered perspective requires careful consideration. One fundamental area of interest, from the perspective of contemporary educators teaching meditation, pertains to the most effective way to heal the buffered experience and help learners return to the immediacy of physical, emotional, and mental experience.[79] With this concern in mind, it is easy to understand why many teachers particularly emphasize the role of the body in teaching meditation in Western contexts.

[78] Ibid., 38.
[79] The disciplines of Buddhist Studies, Feminist Studies, Education, and Neuroscience all engage the relationship between body and mind. This relationship is essential not only in the process of constructing knowledge but also in the context of pedagogy. More detailed focus will be given to this topic in Chapters 3 and 4.

3.B Problematics of Self-Esteem

Nathaniel Branden's influential work *The Psychology of Self-Esteem* (1969), suggested that self-esteem was the most critical factor influencing success for children, and sparked a widespread movement of self-esteem parenting and educating. However, after reviewing thirty years of self-esteem literature and research on its efficacy, it is becoming clear that the science behind the self-esteem movement was actually weak. Contemporary researchers like Carol Dweck are finding that the attempt to build self-esteem in children and young adults actually undermines their capacity for success.[80] Focusing on self-esteem emphasizes the imperative for successful performance in a way that has been found to undermine the willingness of children to experiment or risk failure and thereby limits their capacity to learn.[81]

Self-esteem has been superceded by self-efficacy as a construct that can support effective learning, behavioral change, and leadership. Self-efficacy "refers to believing in one's sense of agency. It goes beyond believing in ability, isolating and identifying the critical belief that one's ability can actually produce specific and desired results in particular contexts (Bandura, 1997)."[82] But the cultural impact of these decades of emphasizing the need for engendering self-esteem in youth cannot be shifted overnight. Finding alternatives for the patterns

[80]Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman *Nurtureshock* (New York: Hatchette Book Group, 2009), 18-19.
[81] See Sloma-Williams, L., McDade, S. A., Richman, R. C., & Morahan, P. S. "The Role of Self-efficacy in Developing Women Leaders," in *Women in Academic Leadership: Professional Strategies, Personal Choices*, eds. Dean, D. R., Bracken, S. J., & Allen, J. K. (Eds.) (Sterling: Stylus, 2009), 50-73.
[82] Ibid.

of parenting that have become ingrained in our culture over the past thirty years will take some work even if the scientific support for the shift is in place. Some have suggested that shifting the nature of praise to an emphasis on praising specific aspects of performance is indicated. Others suggest that praise should be restricted to praising children and adolescents for engaging in hard work and engaging challenges.

Buddhist Abidharma philosophy would suggest wariness toward formation that is rooted in self-esteem. Self-esteem is taught through the use of praise and praise is understood as one of the worldly dharmas, which are patterns of thinking that cause suffering.[83] Praise is connected with its oposite- blame, and both of these concerns are associated with being caught in the cycle of samsara. This is the case because the desire to solicit praise and to avoid blame can endlessly occupy the psyche but can never engender awakening to that which lies beyond social conditioning and reactivity on its own terms. The appetite for praise is insatiable and pervasive and a value system that empahsizes praise and avoids blame conditions young people so deeply that they cannot become free of its pull without a paradigm shift.[84]

In addition to a Buddhist-inspired critique of education styles that are based on engendering self-esteem there are many alternative paradigms that Buddhist Mahayana practices can bring to the table. One such alternative is replacing self-esteem and praise with an emphasis on compassion and self-compassion (or loving kindness for self and others). Instead of teaching children

[83] Dudjom Rinpoche *Wisdom Nectar* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 404.
[84] Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo *Into the Heart of Life* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2011), 49.

to believe in a problematic and false notion of a "self," which undermines their capacity to experiment, risk failure, and grow through experience, parents and teachers could teach children to be intimately aware of their own inner workings and the challenges they face. From this emotional intelligence regarding their own experience, an empathetic bridge can be built between one's own desires and struggles and the desires and struggles of others. As will be further explored in Chapter 4, feminist pedagogy (as well as other emancipatory pedagogies) are key resources for both the process and theory of creating such a bridge and encouraging self-efficacy.

4. Prominent Pedagogical Issues

4.A The Preference for Participatory Pedagogies and Learner Centered Education

What is participatory pedagogy? It emerged in our culture under the rubric of John Dewey (1859-1952) and continues to influence how we think about effective education both for children and adults today. Participatory or learner centered education, refers to learning processes in which the learner has an active role in the educational experience. The aim of participatory education is to "further the natural growth of the developing human organism."[85] Children and adults, from this perspective, are understood as inclined to naturally grow when supported with nourishing encounters with other persons and their environment

[85] Michael Schiro *Curriculum Theory: Conflicting Visions and Enduring Concerns* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 184.

and when actively engaged in the teaching/learning dynamic. Their development occurs in stages and each stage should be met with activities that stimulate interest and prompt growth or further development. Humans are seen as "meaning-making organisms" that create meaning-knowledge for themselves as a result of interacting with their environment.[86] The active agency of learners in the teaching/learning dynamic is a key feature of this philosophy.

In learner-centered ideology, learning is seen as a natural process that happens when people are making sense out of their encounters with the social and physical world. The desire and ability to learn are both innate and are considered to be reflective of their inner nature. Learning is understood to proceed from concrete to abstract, from experience to knowledge. Concepts that are based on direct experience are considered the most valuable and education is comprised of many small explorations that lead to increased capacities for abstraction and understanding over time.[87] In this philosophy, a central point is that students are invited to think for themselves, to arrive at their own personal judgments, understandings, and decisions. But the teacher plays an essential role in facilitating the experiences on offer in the classroom and also the interpretation of experience. In this way the teacher profoundly shapes the student's learning.

Teachers prepare the spaces in which learning occurs and structure the set of possible encounters students can have to make their experience diverse and rich. Teachers are seen as diagnosticians, preparers of the environment,

[86] Ibid., 158.
[87] Dewey's understanding of the role of experience in education will be described in further detail in Chapter 4.

and facilitators of learning who determine how the environment should be best structured and how to support the most fruitful encounters between students and the environment. Teachers work by “promoting various activities, making suggestions, changes, extensions or redirections of students’ activity”.[88] Teachers need to be generalists across the areas of the classroom. The teacher is understood as a facilitator in this pedagogy. But the teacher is also seen as having authority in the sense that they have knowledge and methods to support the learning process. Dewey does not presume that all experience is educative and it is here, in supporting the translation of experience into learning that the teacher is vital.

Dewey emphasizes that learning is an active process rather than a passive absorption of information.[89] Part of the process of making education meaningful is closely connecting the processes of school with home life and daily experience.[90] For Dewey, learning is an embodied relationship that ties together activity with reflection and draws on the body as well as the intellect.[91] This connects closely with Dewey's concern for the intimate connection between "theory and praxis."[92] Theory must be tested before it is lived knowledge.

Knowledge is closely linked with personal meaning in the learner-centered pedagogy. The meaning making process is an important step on the road to developing real knowledge, in Dewey’s system. Interactions with the environment

[88] Ibid., 121.
[89] See John Dewey *On Education* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, 1959), 51-66.
[90] Ibid., 78-97.
[91] Ibid., 82.
[92] Ibid., 84.

and people are the basis for the student's internal structure of meaning. Knowledge is constructed and reconstructed as learners accommodate new experiences and test their operative theoretical frameworks over time. Learner centered approaches to pedagogy emphasize the role of asking questions, sharing ideas, and generally dialoging with content and with others as elements of an effective learning environment.

Preference for participatory pedagogies is supported through learning research. Long lectures are not effective as a way to share information, even if that were the only goal of education. The postmodern perspective makes people believe that knowledge is contextual and that their experience of the knowledge is relevant. Learners are used to and value bringing experience into conversation with material in particular ways. Learners want to ask questions, share ideas, and dialogue with content and other people. Learners aspire to see for themselves and personally appropriate bodies of knowledge and traditions of wisdom. People raised on a Dewey-influenced education will need something similar in the context of Buddhist education. They will be better able to engage with Buddhist principles and practices if they have the opportunity to explore their significance in the context of their own lived experience.

4.B The Desire for a Pedagogy of Praxis

Social reconstructionist pedagogy is also participatory but the emphasis here is on social analysis and engagement rather than on personal meaning

making. The social reconstruction perspective is pervasive across disciplines, at least as an ideal, in American institutions of higher learning. Graduate schools of business, economics, law, political science, and theology to name a few all suggest that their work and learning is relevant to social issues, as part of their fundamental purpose. Reading the mission statements of any number of graduate training programs will almost certainly reflect the premise that the learning they engender is deeply relevant to contemporary social issues.[93]

The Social Reconstructionist (SR) philosophy seeks to educate in a manner that allows people to shape their world so that members of society can enjoy "maximum satisfaction of their material, social, cultural, and spiritual needs".[94] This process begins with evaluation of current social systems, and then moves to envisioning a better world, and lastly to seeking methods of social transformation. Experience is one important element of knowledge as are the social meaning making structures that organize experience. Knowledge is understood as socially constructed and contextual and social analysis is a key tool in this approach to education. SR emphasizes the subjective nature of knowledge and the social meanings people create out of experience. It emphasizes that learning has to be relevant to relationships.

People are seen as both products of their individual and cultural contexts and as potential creators of just societies. They are shaped by their contexts but can also learn to reshape them through the process of education. The SR philosophy portrays learning as a process of making social meaning out of

[93] This point was made in a lecture in Michael Schiro's *Curriculum Theory* course.
[94] Schiro, *Curriculum Theory: Conflicting Visions and Enduring Concerns,* 157.

experience. Teaching in this paradigm is primarily associated with the act of empowering students "to learn how to reconstruct society."[95] Group discussion and social analysis are used to help students recognize their current systems of meaning, the social origins of these perceptions, and generate informed responses to social systems by creating new, shared systems of meaning making. The SR approach to education could be particularly informative for Buddhist education in the context of engaged Buddhism. The SR philosophy could inform how Buddhist practice and thought are brought into conversation with pressing, contemporary social issues.

4.C Aims/Processes of Buddhist Education in Broad Strokes

In short, the fundamental aim of Mahayan Buddhist education is enlightenment or the experiential recognition of wisdom (insight into the lack of inherent separation between self and others) and compassion (the wish to alleviate suffering). The goal of Buddhist pedagogy is to support pracitioners on the path toward enlightenment, primarily through spiritual practice and philosophical study. There are many ways to describe this path of spiritual growth, such as an accumulation of merit or ascending the various bhumis over lifetimes. The eightfold path as attributed to the historical Buddha is one such

[95] Ibid.,163.

system. But there are a diversity of practices and schemas to describe practices that have developed in various historical contexts.[96]

From a nondual Zen or Dzogchen perspective, the goal of Buddhist education is to recognize and become acclimated to the innate Buddha nature that is obscured by habits of perception, action, and reaction.[97] This nondual point of view emphasizes that there is no separation between who we are on the most basic level and our enlightened natures. Because there is not a goal that exists outside of recognition of what is already the case, the soteriology emphasizes insight rather than cultivation. A more relative point of view on Buddhist education focuses on the stages of learning as they unfold over time.

Despite the seeming paradox of the relative and absolute perspectives, they are actually complementary points of view. The relative perspective of the need to progress or deepen speaks to the reality of how people experience themselves and their lives. Most people occupy the world from a dualistic perspective (dualism here indicates the experience of existing in a way that is inherently distinct from others) and thereby experience various forms of suffering. For this reason, there are systems of practice and thought that help get us from this suffering reality toward one that is characterized by greater freedom. But the ultimate point-of-view is essential in that it reminds pracitioners and teachers that

[96] There are also diverging understandings of what enlightenment means in various lineages of Buddhism. Earlier postponement notions of enlightenment became replaced by a nonabiding notion of enlightenment. See John Makransky *Buddhahood Embodied* (New York: State University of New York, 1983), 337.

[97] See Garab Dorje *The Golden Letters* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996). In this commentary on Garab Dorje's three vital points commentary is given on the process of awakening in terms of the process of first having glimpse of nondual reality, second maturing this glimpse and getting used to it until third, this perspective has become stabilized or thoroughly integrated into one's experience.

there is a reality that is more fundamental than our day to day perspective or habitual misapprehension of ourself and others. We can recognize the truth in this both conceptually and experientially and be greatly supported by this recognition. As educators, this point should inspire humility and even reverence for learners as the newest, most prickly student is by nature no different from the most venerated of masters. The nondual perspective can also serve to remind educators of the need for flexibility and adaptability to meet the particular capacities and proclivities of the learners they accompany. Both of these perspectives are relevant to the conversation about bringing Buddhist-derived meditation into secular spaces. An ultimate perspective will focus on the inherent capacity of learners, whereas a relative perspective will ground the conversation in the particularities of learning dynamics in individuals and communities. Given that the culture of learning in contemporary American culture is influenced by Dewey and the SR philosophy, effective pedagogy will draw on these frameworks.

Conclusion

This chapter explored a sampling of defining features of the context of the contemporary North American culture, such as pluralism, secularism, a consumerist bent, and a mistrust of leaders. Chapter 1 broadly enumerated examples of philosophical incongruities between Western attitudes and Buddhist perspectives and how these incongruities influence effective pedagogy in secular spaces. Chapters 2 and 3 will explore what Buddhist sources, especially with

respect to the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means, have to say about the inculturation of Buddhist pedagogy.

CHAPTER II

THE DOCTRINE OF SKILLFUL MEANS IN EARLY BUDDHISM AND ITS ROLE AS A WARRANT FOR INCULTURATION

Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 consider, from a Buddhist perspective, why it is necessary to modify traditional teaching methods to meet new cultural contexts. As discussed in the first chapter, the emphasis in this discussion is on the intersection between Tibetan Buddhism and interfaith/secular contexts in contemporary North America. In this second chapter, the warrants for adaptation from within the early Buddhist tradition especially focusing on the doctrine of skillful means will be explored. I will seek to define the doctrine of skillful means by exploring the *Majjhima Nikaya* (The Middle Length Discourses of the Pali Canon). Chapter three examines how the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, and the writing of contemporary Buddhist studies scholars frame the topic of the doctrine of skillful means. Together, Chapters 2 and 3 will frame the hermeneutical issues and criteria involved in discerning whether pedagogical adaptation can be deemed authentic and in keeping with the traditional perspectives of Buddhism as well as being appropriately inculturated for education in the contemporary Western context.

1. Drawing from the Tradition; Defining Skillful Means

In the contemporary American milieu, Buddhism has adapted to address new surroundings beyond what was addressed in Asian contexts. Today, meditation has an influence on a host of fields including medicine and modalities of healing, neuroscience, psychotherapy, education, and physics to mention only a few. This process of adaptation, however, is not at all new. The unfolding of western dharma is consistent with how Buddhism has moved into new cultures throughout its history. The term inculturation has been used in a variety of religious traditions to describe the process of how religions (not only Buddhist) become "native" within new socio-historical contexts. Inculturation refers to the process by which doctrine, practice, and symbols adapt to fit into the new cultural milieu and produce a distinctive expression of the particular religious tradition.[1]

In terms of thinking about the Buddhist process of inculturation, it is important to keep in mind that western understandings of history and cosmology are vastly different from traditional Asian Buddhist perspectives. In America and other contemporary western settings, Buddhism is put into conversation with feminism, ecology, democratic ideals, progressive teaching methods, as well as racial, ethnic and religious pluralism. Contemporary North American students live in a modernized, secularized, capitalist, consumerist culture inscribed by technology, participative pedagogy, and scientific understandings that influence their experience of Buddhist teachings and practices. Therefore, different presentations of traditional materials are needed in order for them to function in

[1] Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry : The Way of Shared Praxis,* (San Francisco: Harper Press, 1991).

their intended ways and produce intended results. This process requires ongoing communication and clarification regarding the dialectical relationship between tradition and culture, so as to facilitate a process of inculturation that maintains essential components of the tradition, while supporting skillful adaptations of the traditional aspects that must be changed to function successfully in the new cultural context.

As inculturation is not a new phenomenon within Buddhism, we can turn to sources from the tradition to learn how similar issues have been addressed in the past. Traditionally, stories in the *Pali* scriptural canon describe a myriad of examples of how the Buddha and other teachers embodied the principle of skillful means by engaging the needs of students in terms that were relevant to their own mentalities, contexts and interests. If students were theists, the Buddha addressed them in those terms.[2] When students were illiterate, the Buddha advised them in concrete terms that they could understand.[3] If students were lay people, the Buddha taught them practices that were relevant to their contexts. In other words much emphasis is given on the power of the Buddha in terms of his ability to adapt his pedagogy for the needs of the students and in so doing to help them along the path of freedom. In the following sections we will turn more closely to traditional texts to explore how the *Theravada* tradition presents the doctrine of skillful means.

[2] Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Majjhima Nikaya; The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Translation edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Sommerville: Wisdom, 1995).
[3] Makransky, John, *Awakening Through Love* (Sommerville: Wisdom, 2007), 215.

1.A Doctrinal Definitions Drawing from the *Majjhima Nikaya*

The *Majjhima Nikaya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha) provides a textual basis for an exploration of the meaning of the doctrine of skillful means (upāya) as it was expressed in the earliest Buddhist teachings. Insight into traditional pedagogical practices and philosophy of education can also be drawn out of a close reading of this canonic text.[4] The *Majjhima Nikaya* contains 152 sutras and is literally translated as "the Middle Collection" or the middle-length discourses of the Pali Canon that are attributed to the Buddha.[5]

The concept of skillful means in these middle-length sutras centers on the activity of the Buddha. In its most essential form, it could be argued that the Buddha is skillful in his capacity to transmit the knowledge that expresses and leads to freedom from suffering (i.e., the four noble truths). Sutra 141 illustrates that in the Buddhist context, knowledge is more than simply information. As Bhikku Bodhi states, "The Dhamma is not a body of immutable dogmas or a system of speculative thought. It is essentially a means, a raft for crossing over from the 'near shore' of ignorance, craving and suffering to the 'far shore' of transcendental peace and freedom."[6] Key to this understanding of the dharma is the premise that dharma is not merely the content of the tradition alone. In this way, dharma is closely equated with the *process* of coming to knowledge, the *practices* that bring a person to this experience of knowing, and also the content in the teachings that facilitate experiential learning.

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[4] Bechert, Heinz, *When Did The Buddha Live? The Controversy of the Dating of the Historical Buddha* (Delhi: Sir Satgum, 1995), 86. The tradition dates the Pali Canon to the first century BCE.
[5] Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 19.
[6] Ibid., 25.

The term dharma came under redefinition in the time of the Buddha.[7] The earlier Hindu meaning of dharma was understood as "cosmic order" and was closely tied to notions of caste, social structure, and ritual. In the Buddha's teaching the concept of dharma was appropriated from the earlier Hindu understandings, but was used in a different way. It still retained the meaning "cosmic order" but this became closely tied with the system of teachings of the Buddha and the practices that lead to its realization. This new definition no longer emphasized the significance of participating in socially acceptable ways within the caste-based social structures of Indian society, but rather prioritized practices of virtue and insight understood to lead to a personal liberation that would beneficially influence others. Due to the change in the term dharma, there were changes in the premise of what constituted effective transmission of the dharma.

In Sutra 141, when the Buddha expresses what the bhikkhus (monks) should seek from Sariputta, one of the Buddha's main disciples who is renowned for his wisdom, he presents a thumbnail sketch of the various aspects of a teacher who is able to exercise skillful means in relation to students. The Buddha explains that Sariputta "is able to announce, teach, describe, establish, reveal, expound, and exhibit the Four Noble Truths."[8] These qualities of a skillful teacher also illuminate the nature of the curriculum to be learned by the student. The Four Noble Truths here are more than just information, but are actually meant as a referent to the entirety of the Buddhist path. That the dharma is not merely conceptual knowledge is expressed in both the Bhikkhu Bodhi and

[7] Makransky opening lecture for Sacred Buddhist Texts 1.20.09.
[8] Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 1097.

Makransky citations in the paragraph above. If the dharma were only intellectual knowledge, then Sariputta would have been considered a skillful teacher if he was merely able to "announce, teach, describe, and expound" on the Noble Truths. However, it is because the dharma includes spiritual practices and direct experience, that an excellent teacher also needs to be able to "reveal and exhibit" the Noble Truths. The terms "reveal and exhibit" in this context refer to the process of transmission and revelation of embodied wisdom and it is these capacities that distinguish Sariputta as an excellent teacher.

Sariputta is praised by the Buddha as having the qualities of a good teacher because he is able to *communicate* this experience of the Noble Truths to his students. Communicating the dharma includes helping students to experience the Noble Truths for themselves. This experiential component goes beyond intellectual understanding both on the part of the teacher and the student. Sariputta is able to reveal or transmit the experience of the Noble Truths because he himself embodies or "exhibits" understanding of their realization. The implication here is that if he merely knew about the Noble Truths intellectually he would not be in a position to be an effective dharma teacher. The teacher's capacity to transmit dharma is contingent on his own realization and depth of practice. This is a key issue for religious education, as it indicates that the transmission of Buddhism, at least in part, requires a teacher who has experienced the fruition of the path. It is key therefore to note; someone who has simply studied about the relevant concepts but does not embody them cannot teach dharma effectively.

In examining the doctrine of skillful means in this sutra there are many levels we must consider.[9] First, it is important to recognize that the Buddha explicitly authorizes the teaching by the Arhat Sariputta[10] in this sutra and pronounces him capable of skillfully transmitting the dharma. This literary device of the Buddha authorizing the teachings of one of his disciples is not unusual and is used in each sutra where someone other than the Buddha teaches.[11] What is interesting here is the particularity with which the Buddha speaks about what two of his teaching Arhats, Sariputta and Moggallana,[12] have to offer the students.

Experiential knowledge of dharma itself is dynamic and can be presented effectively in various ways by different teachers who themselves have differing strengths in their capacity to engage the various needs of students. There is a distinction made between the two Arhats in terms of their specialization in teaching. "Sariputta is like a mother; Moggallana is like a nurse. Sariputta trains others for the fruit of stream-entry,[13] Moggallana for the supreme goal."[14] Stream-enterers are on the first level of those who comprise the Arya (noble) sangha (religious community). The next levels of the Arya sangha are the Once-returner,

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[9] Harvey, Peter, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39. An Arhat is "one who fully experiences Nirvana during life, and who destroys the causes of *any* more rebirths."

[10] Conze,Edward, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1997), 93. The word Arhat, according to the Therevadin School, is derived from "the two words 'Ari,' which means 'enemy,' and 'han,' which means 'to kill,' so that an Arhat would be 'A slayer of the foe,' the foe being the passions.

[11] Davidson, Ronals, "Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism" in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* ed. by Robert Buswell (Hawaii; University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

[12] Ray, Reginald, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 153. The Arhat Moggallana is known for his supernatural powers.

[13] Harvey, Peter, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 39. According to Harvey, "The Stream-enterer is one who gains a first glimpse of *Nirvana* (enlightenment)…"

[14] Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 1097.

Non-returner, and Arhat.[15] The phrase "the supreme goal" above indicates one who has attained enlightenment or Arhatship. There is also a distinction drawn in this passage between the Shravaka Arhats and the Buddha himself, who is also an Arhat but distinct in the depth of his realization and in that his own awakening did not result from having received teachings from another person.[16] [17] [18] The various types and depths of realization raise the issue of a differential and gradated process of appropriation of the dharma (spiritual teachings). In other words, realization of practitioners is a process that deepens over time.[19] Stream-

[15] Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 39. A once-returner "is one whose remaining lives will include only one in the 'sense-desire-realm', as a human or god in a lower heaven. This is a higher level of realization than a stream-enterer. A Non-returner "will not be reborn again in the desire-realm, but will be reborn in one or more of the 'pure abodes'." The Non-returner will no longer return to cyclic existence, in other words. The Arhat will no longer be reborn at all, and "At death, he or she passess into final Nirvana, beyond all time, space, conditions and dukkha (suffering)."

[16] Ibid., 438. Shravaka Arhats are "those who follow the Buddha's teachings so as to be able to become Arhats."

[17] Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 29. "In the early Buddhist texts, the Buddha is himself said to be an *Arahat*, and to be in most respects like other *Arahats.* Any *Arahat's* experience of *Nibbana* is the same; however, a perfect (samyak-sambuddha) Buddha is seen as having more extensive knowledge than other *Arahats*. For example, he can remember as far back into previous lives as he wants, while other *Arahats* have limitations on such a power, or may not even have developed it." A samyak-sambuddha *Arahat* such as the Buddha, "is seen as one who can come to know anything he pleases about the past and present, and can make many valid predictions about the future, such as how a person will be reborn if they have acted in a certain way. What he teaches is just a small portion of his huge knowledge, for he only teaches what is both true and spiritually useful." The Buddha, in other words, has distinctive capacities that bolster his ability to teach and exhibit skillful means with respect to the spiritual development of students. The second element that is unique for a samyak-sambuddha *Arahat* or Buddha "is that a Buddha is someone who, by his own efforts, rediscovers the Path after it has been lost to human society. Having discovered it for himself, he skillfully [sic] makes it known to others so that they can fully practise [sic] it for themselves and so become *Arahats*."

[18] See Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism* (Paris: Peeters Press, 1958), 26. Lamotte echoes these two distinctions between the Buddha and other Arhats. First, the Buddha's knowledge is vaster and second, the Buddha did not rely on the teaching of dharma from another person but rather was the one who first proclaimed the dharma himself, in the Discourse of Varanasi.

[19] Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, 94. This process is more complicated than a linear trajectory to a single realization. Arhats are understood to have "shed all attachment to I and mine" whereas the realization of a Buddha is much vaster and includes more capacities than are demonstrated by Arhats. In the Early Buddhist formulation, the goal for practitioners is to attain the state of Arhatship. In later Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva ideal is upheld as the goal for disciples.

entry occurs before Arhatship and shravaka Arhatship is distinct in depth and kind from Buddhahood. Implied in the Buddha's discussion of their distinctive teaching abilities and the deepening of students as they practice the dharma, is the notion that the knowledge valued by the Buddha and which leads to the progressive stages of the path can be cultivated through relationship with a teacher. The Buddha asserts, "Sariputta, bhikkhus, is able to announce, teach, describe, establish, reveal, expound, and exhibit the Four Noble Truths."[20] He says this by way of communicating that Sariputta can 'exhibit' or reveal the path to freedom to his students.

This premise is substantiated after the Buddha departs for his home and leaves Sariputta to teach the monks. Sariputta begins his teaching by referring back to the Buddha's first discourse. "At Benares, friends, in the Deer Park at Isipatana the Tathagata, accomplished and fully enlightened, set rolling the matchless Wheel of the Dhamma… and exhibiting of the Four Noble Truths. Of what four?"[21] In this statement, Sariputta extolls the Buddha and also engages the monks, asking them to recall and then express the fundamental Buddhist teaching in their own words. The monks reply by elucidating the Four Noble Truths "the noble truth of suffering… of the noble truth of the origin of suffering… of the noble truth of the cessation of suffering… of the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering [the eightfold path]."[22]

[20] Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 1097.
[21] Ibid., 1098.
[22] Ibid.

Sariputta probes what the meaning of these Four Noble Truths are when he asks "And what, friends, is the noble truth of suffering?"[23] Then Sariputtra proceeds to question into each of the explanations the monks offer, asking them to state "what, friends, is birth?" or "what, friends, is ageing?" and so on. He questions the monks about 'death,' 'sorrow,' 'pain,' 'grief' 'mindfulness,' and 'concentration.' In this way, Sariputta invites the monks to share their operative understandings of a range of concepts that the Buddha has presented in his exposition of the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha, having endorsed Sariputta as a teacher who evokes stream-entry in his students, implies that the teaching method that Sariputta uses is worth noticing. Sariputta's teaching method can be described as dynamic in the sense that he invites participation from his students. His teaching also encourages the students to reflect on what they hear from their teachers and to integrate it into their experience through their capacity to articulate increasingly subtle layers of the meaning of teachings.

The Buddha also indicates that there are various types of students who learn differently from one another. When he addresses a group of Brahmins in Sutra 41 he describes the "three kinds of bodily conduct not in accordance with the Dhamma" as killing, stealing, and engaging in sexual misconduct. Here, sexual misconduct is defined as "intercourse with women who are protected by their mother, father, mother and father, brother, sister, or relatives, who have a husband, who are protected by law, and even with those who are garlanded in token of bethrothal."[24] However, the Buddha's approach to ethical activity is

[23] Ibid.
[24] Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 380.

markedly different when he engages a group of monastics. In Sutra 2, the Buddha asserts “a bhikkhu (monk), reflecting wisely, does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensual desire; he abandons it, removes it, does away with it, and annihilates it.”[25] He goes on to emphasize that mindfulness is developed “by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment.” In other words, the context of the lay practitioners demands a different framework for spiritual practice than does the context of the monastics. The ethical approach taken with lay people emphasizes the development of discernment in regards to behavior. The perspective taken with the monastics, on the other hand, emphasizes the development of discernment with regard to momentarily arising mental states (not just outward behavior).

This notion of multiplicity of paths is closely connected with the principle of skillful means. Skillful means includes within its fold the variance in the ways that a teacher engages the individual needs of students to bring them along on the path to freedom. One element that is implicit in this sutra is the pertinence of what would today be called learner-centered approaches to Buddhist pedagogy and more specifically to the notion of skillful means. Since the emphasis is on experiential learning, Buddhist pedagogy necessarily engages the learner.

In Sutra 6, The Buddha emphasizes that all the aims of the path can only be attained when the precepts are enacted. If the monk desires virtue, positive social relationships with his community, and a greater capacity to help others effectively, he should undertake the precepts wholeheartedly. If a monk aspires to “become a conqueror of fear and dread”, progress in the the four jnanas

[25] Ibid., 95.

(levels of meditative absorption), and attain the ultimate goal of nirvana, all of this can be only occur if he engages in the precepts.[26] Bhikkhu Bodhi clarifies that the precepts, in this context, include "the entire threefold training" of discipline, concentration, and wisdom.[27] The point here is that if a disciple pursues the behaviors delineated by the Buddha in the eight-fold path, then he will experience the fruit of wisdom and its multitude of manifestations in all areas of life.

This process does not look the same for all monks, however. The deepening of practice occurs when a monk adheres to his commitments, deepens in the practice of meditation, and has increased insight into the nature of self. Students engage in the eightfold path in a variety of ways, by learning from a teacher, from experience, and from meditation practices.

Success in each of these areas is enhanced when the student is a dynamic, participative learner. In Sutra 141, we see Sariputta ask the monks questions about the exchange they had with the Buddha. Sariputta asks them what the Four Noble Truths are, and then he asks them about suffering, birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. He tests their understanding of suffering in its various manifestations and how it relates to attachment. He asks them about the origin of suffering and what the cessation of suffering means and how it can be attained. He delves into each of the eight

[26] Ibid., 115. The sutra repeats the pattern of this stanza many times over, in elucidating the various goals of a spiritual seeker and how each is contingent on his steadfast ability to "fulfill the precepts."
The path to enlightenment is based on the actions of the practitioner, specifically his capacity to uphold the precepts. "If a bhikkhu should wish: 'May I become a conqueror of discontent and delight, and may discontent not conquer me; may I abide transcending discontent whenever it arises,' let him fulfill the precepts…"
[27] Ibid., 117.

elements of the Path ("right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration").[28] This quality of dynamism in the learning process is modeled by the exchanges between Sariputta and the bhikkhus. Experiential learning, as can be seen in this example, is not foreign to Buddhist pedagogy.

It is important to note that this emphasis on the need for individualized teaching does not mean that there are no patterns among students and common issues to be addressed between people that could also be noticed and applied. In Sutra 141, the students are tested in their knowledge as a group. There are dynamics of reciprocal learning in which the students learn from one another as well as from the teacher. This can be seen in the social nature of the teachings given by the Buddha earlier in the sutra and also by Sariputta's group teaching later in the sutra. Students do not just engage the Buddha or other teachers in isolation but also often learn in groups. Skillful means, therefor, occurs in the webs of communication between students as well as in the dynamics of learning that unfold between teacher and student. There is, however, an emphasis on the teacher's capacity to engage specific tendencies in learners' abilities and proclivities as well as to recognize the shared tendencies among students.[29]

Part of the notion of skillful means is the ability of the teacher to simultaneously support both the individual and the group. Fundamental to the notion of skillful means is the distinctiveness of each individual in their conditioning and in their path to freedom. The student is seen as an individual

[28] Ibid., 1100.
[29] Chogyam Trungpa, *The Collected Works of Chogyam Trungpa; Volume 7* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1980), 8.

and the path is tailored to meet her particular abilities and needs. For example, in Sutra 7 the brahmin Sundarika Bharadvaja asks the Buddha whether he bathes in the Bahuka River (a nearby holy river) or in other words subscribes to the common Hindu interpretation of the concept of purification. In response to this question, the Buddha asks what the benefit of this would be and then listens to the brahmin's description of the enormous merit that is derived from the practice of ritual bathing. In response, the Buddha tells this Brahmin that "A fool may there forever bathe yet will not purify dark deeds." By contrast, the Buddha emphasizes ethical action and explains "One fair in act, one pure in heart brings his virtue to perfection. It is here, brahmin, that you should bathe, to make yourself a refuge for all beings. And if you speak no falsehood nor work harm for living beings, nor take what is offered not, with faith and free from avarice, what need for you to go to Gaya? For any well will be your Gaya."[30]

This pattern of engagement is a common one in the Sutras. It is important to notice that this refrain in Buddhist pedagogy echoes the participatory pedagogy espoused by Dewey in the learner-centered approach to education. The Buddha frames his message in the particular language that the student speaks, meeting him in his own terms and more deeply in his operative worldview. In this specific case, the Buddha works with the brahmin's interest in purification but then redefines the meaning of purification. He takes the inquiry as an opportunity to introduce the student to a new worldview, one that was not part of his initial expression. This process is not different in kind from the emphasis on critical reflection in the SR philosophy discussed in Chapter 1. A specific ritual of

[30] Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 121.

purification is reconceived in broader terms. The Buddha demonstrates to the Brahmin how limited his own perspective on purification has been when he introduces him to the opportunities for a vaster vision of purification as a process reliant on ethical behavior and meditative introspection.

Several key points relevant to defining skillful means and effective pedagogy can be drawn from the Buddha's teaching in this sutra. First, it should not be overlooked that a teacher's capacity to provoke this kind of transformation in a student requires enormous skill. The student is not simply corrected by the Buddha, the process is much more profound than that. The student is entered into an alternative perspective beyond what he initially imagined by the Buddha's engagement with his deepest concerns. In other words, the student's own perspective is what the Buddha begins with, using that as the starting point to lead the student to wider implications implicit in his own starting perspective, thereby pointing him into disciplines of mental purification that lead toward liberation. By starting with the student's own perspective, each further step of the Buddha's teaching is experienced by the student as his own developing perspective, leading to his own experience of liberation. The Buddha is understood to be vast in his skill because he can engender a new perspective in the people he encounters.[31] Repeatedly, the Buddha transforms the ideas that a student comes with and uses them as an opportunity to provoke transformation.[32]The Buddha is depicted as especially skillful because his

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[32]Thera, Nyanaponika and Hecker, Hellmuth, *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works, Their Legacy,* (Somerville: Wisdom, 2003), 273. Kisagotami, the mother whose grief for her dead child was transformed into the cause of her awakening is a well-known example of the

teaching so profoundly meets the particular mentality of each person he engages, and in ways that point to liberation.[33]

This demonstrates a further point implicit in the doctrine of skillful means. Students are not interchangeable with one another because each has unique features, specific abilities, conditioned mentalities, and interests that must be engaged by the teacher, which follows from their karmic patterning. The student, therefore, must receive instruction according to her own particular needs and capacities. It is because of the variation between learners that there is a need for various curricula offered by the Buddha and the various teachers.

Students bear responsibility for engaging in the activities and practices that the teacher has recommended. Students are expected to be active learners once they have entered the path. A failure to do so is described as being like a patient who has been prescribed a medication but does not take it.[34] Such a student will not improve. However, as established in the prior sections, it is important to note that the student relies on support of the teacher, the teachings, and the community in this process. The learner is embedded in a learning community that is utterly indispensible to her ability to spiritually mature.

Buddha's skillful means. The Buddha gives this crazed woman the instruction to seek mustard seeds from the home of someone who has not been touched by the loss of a loved one. Through undertaking this exercise she comes to realize the universal aspect of her own experience of grief and its universal nature and subsequently attains realization.

[33] Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 29-30. Harvey describes the Buddha's teaching as adaptive 'to the mood and concerns of his hearers, responding to the questions and even the non-verbalized thoughts of his audience and taking cues from events." The Buddha's teaching "emphasized self-reliance and the experiential testing-out of all teachings, including his own."

[34] See Dalai Lama, *The Heart of Compassion: A Practical Approach to a Meaningful Life*, (Wisconsin: Lotus Press, 2002), 9. The Dalai Lama offers one presentation of this oft-quoted statement here. "Buddha said, "You are your own master; things depend upon you. I am a teacher and, like a doctor, I can give you effective medicine, but you have to take it yourself…"

Conclusion

In this chapter it has been established that from the time of the earliest Buddhist teachings, there has been a strong emphasis on the need to respond to cultural dynamics. The emphasis in the earliest Buddhist teachings on the role of a practice-based or experientially oriented pedagogy has also been highlighted. A third emphasis in this chapter has been on the transformative nature of learning and in the impact that learning is meant to have on the perspective and behavior of the student. In the next chapter, I turn attention to the presentation of the doctrine of skillful means and the conceptions of effective pedagogy in the early Mahayana period. At the end of the third chapter I will propose a set of principles drawn out of the early and Mahayana presentations of the doctrine of skillful means that can inform the contemporary process of inculturating pedagogy.

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTRINE OF SKILLFUL MEANS IN MAHAYANA BUDDHISM AND ITS ROLE AS A WARRANT FOR INCULTURATION

1. Drawing from the Vimalakirti Sutra

The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, an early Mahayana text, reveals additional elements to our consideration of both the doctrine of skillful means as it pertains to principles of the process of inculturating pedagogy. The *Vimalakirti Sutra*[1] is thought to have emerged in India sometime between the first century B.C. and first century A.D.[2] Robert Thurman suggests that the *Vimalakirti Sutra* is notable among *Mahayana* sutras because of "its utility for study as containing a quintessence of Mahayana doctrines."[3] At the core of the sutra is the premise that Vimalakirti is a paradigm of skillful means, or as Thurman suggests, Vimalakirti is "a person who represents the consummate embodiment of skill in liberative technique."[4]

One of the ways that Vimalakirti repeatedly communicates with disciples is through the use of paradox.

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[1] Thurman, Robert, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), ix.
[2] Ibid., ix. The sutra was then translated into Chinese seven times as well as into a number of other languages including Sanskrit, Khotanese, Sogdian, and Uighur. The translation into Tibetan occurred two times and the more authoritative of these is thought to have happened in the ninth century by the translator Chos Nid Tshul Khrims. It is this Tibetan translation that Robert Thurman translates into English and will be the basis for the following conversation on the sutra.
[3] Ibid., ix.
[4] Ibid., 6.

> The main technique Vimalakirti uses that is of interest here-dichotomy-is found in his discourse, which relates to another alternative title of the Scripture 'reconciliation of dichotomies.' This is in keeping with the traditional method of the Middle Way masters, who had great skill in pitting polar opposites against each other to eliminate the fixedness of each and to free the mind of the student who applied himself to the polarities to open into a middle ground of reality beyond concepts.[5]

Thurman emphasizes that this use of paradox is meant to evoke an experience in the hearer that goes beyond an intellectual appreciation. The purpose of this paradoxical language is to communicate an epistemology beyond duality (duality is understood here to mean the perception of a separation between self and other). Duality in the *Vimalakirti Sutra* is not only referring to reified constructs of subject/object. In early Mahayana sutras such as the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, duality can also refer to the dualistic nature of conceptualization and language—constructing and reifying things within dichotomies: in and out, up and down, this and that, friend and enemy, etc. In the *Prajna Paramita Sutras* and in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, which is related to them, duality connotes seeing things as separate from thusness (tathata), thusness being like undivided space.[6] For madhyamakas, typically, duality means seeing things as separate from thusness, as if not empty.[7] [8] Vimalakirti repeatedly uses language and logic to

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[5] Ibid., 6.

[6] *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom* translated and edited by Edward Conze (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1979), 635-636. In Chapter 80, the Buddha tells Subhuti, "Just because there is no one who is defiled or purified, so there is no defilement or purification. And why? It is because they have stood in I-making and Mine-making that beings are defiled or purified. But since one who sees true reality is neither defiled nor purified there is (in fact) no defilement or purification." Duality is the process of I-making and mine-making, whereas nonduality, as described in Chapter 81, is the recognition that the world is actually "inexpressible, incommunicable, quite beyond the paths of language, speech, and sound." This 'inexpressible' nature of nonduality is the quality of tathata (thusness).

[7] These points were clarified by John Makransky in a prior round of revisions of this chapter.

[8] Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 77. Williams summarizes Nagarjuna on nonduality in the following selection. "While emptiness in itself, directly cognized in

push people beyond their limited understandings of the world. Hence, they feel uncomfortable around him and many are hesitant to go visit him until the Buddha pushes them to do so.[9]

This kind of paradoxical communication is illustrative of the new, particular emphasis in Mahayana philosophy on an understanding of enlightenment that stays involved with the world and with the experience of other suffering beings. This is distinct from the pre-Mahayana understanding of enlightenment that is rooted in the desire to leave *samsara* behind as was expressed in the notion of *parinirvana*. Parinirvana is understood in this context as the total transcendence of the world, which is associated with the attainment of shravaka Arhatship.[10]

In Mahayana Buddhism, this attainment of *parinirvana* is distinguished from the bodhisattva vow which expresses the intention to continue taking rebirth in samsara for beings until Buddhahood is attained (rather than seeking a quick end to rebirth). "From the perspective of *bodhicitta*, the raison d'etre of the path is for oneself to be liberated into a scope of activity on behalf of beings so vast and of such profundity as to be inconceivable even to the Arhats…"[11] The distinction here is that pre-Mahayana scholastic Buddhism recognized Arhatship or *parinirvana* as the goal for practitioners whereas Mahayana Buddhism's goal is

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a nondual meditative absorption, is beyond language, as Candrakirti says, 'not conditioned by others, quiescent, accessible to saints only by direct intuition, beyond all verbal differentiations', still, it is nothing more than the mere absence of inherently or intrinsically real existence." This phrase "it [the nondual experience] is nothing more than the mere absence of inherently or intrinsically real existence," suggests that the dualistic perspective *is* the mistaken belief that things inherently exist.

[9] Ibid., 6.

[10] See Makransky, John, *Buddhahood Embodied*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 11. "Final nirvana *(parinirvana*), then, the final attainment of the unconditioned upon physical death, involved the complete cessation of all conditioned states of mind and body, the cessation of all participation in this world…"

[11] Ibid., 327.

of ""nonabiding nirvana" *(apratisthita nirvana)*, [which is] a nirvana that remains ever active in the world."[12] There was the acknowledgment of the possibility of a vaster goal than Buddha-hood in the pre-Mahayana worldview, but this goal was not one available to the disciples at large. Mahayana Buddhism, however, emphasized the path of the Buddha himself as the model for practitioners, and presented the bodhisattva path traversed by the Buddha himself as the goal for disciples. The Mahayana period took the example of the Buddha, including his many lives replete with altruistic behavior and a deepening of profound wisdom as the model for Buddhist soteriology.[13] [14] This in turn feeds into a further nuance of non-duality, the Mahayana formulation of wisdom (of emptiness/thusness) and compassion (for beings) as non-dual.[15]

[12] Ibid.
[13] Williams, Paul, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge: 2009), 32.
[14] McMahan, David, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 28. In the early Mahayana period there was a shift in understandings of soteriology as well as fruition. According to McMahan this could be understood as a "reformulation of the distinction between conditioned and unconditioned dharmas. In the Abhidharma, the overarching division in the taxonomy of the dharmas is that between conditioned dharmas that make up the various entities and events in the lifeworld and unconditioned dharmas, which constitute freedom from entrapment in the falsely constructed lifeworld. The claim of the Perfection of Wisdom texts that all dharmas are boundless is in essence a reconfiguration of this distinction: all dharmas lack inherent existence or essential nature; therefore, what is important is apprehending this true nature of all dharmas (that is, their having no essential nature!), whether conditioned or unconditioned. All dharmas in their true nature, even those classified as conditioned, are unconditioned and boundless, and the apprehension of this is what is important." The unconditioned dharma that represents freedom is nirvana. The term 'emptiness', as it is used here means empty of or lacking inherent existence.
[15] Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 199. Compassion and wisdom are intimately connected in the Mahayana formulation. Williams comments "it is only said to be [ultimate] *bodhicitta* if the compassion is embedded in an awareness of emptiness. Thus *bodhicitta* is said to have the nature of emptiness and compassion." In Mahayana Buddhism, the connection between wisdom and compassion is understood to be the reason why bodhisattvas are reborn in samsara for the benefit of other beings that are suffering rather than leaving samsara behind at the time of their death as in the notion of parinirvana.

Vimalakirti demonstrates what it means to embody an active enlightenment. He repeatedly pushes others beyond their quiescent practice that is narrower in scope.

> They [mahasiddhas] recommend their full cultivation of great love and great compassion while maintaining total awareness of the total absence of any such thing as a living being, a suffering being, a being in bondage. In short, they [realized bodhisattvas/mahasiddhas] show the way to the full nonduality of wisdom and great compassion, the latter being expressed as skill in liberative technique-the integrated approach acknowledged by all the masters as the essence of the Mahayana."[16]

Thus, Thurman points out that a key element of skillful means is that skillful teachers such as Vimalakirti frequently offer a challenging or illogical perspective. It is important to keep in mind that expressions that appear illogical *appear* illogical to the point of view of someone who is not abiding in nonduality.

This point is illustrated in Vimalakirti's comment to Moggallana (who was discussed earlier in this Chapter in reference to Sutra 141) in the city of Vaisali, where Moggallana was engaged in teaching dharma to a group of lay people. Vimalakirti points out that Moggallana's method was lacking because he was presenting dharma in a dualistic manner. Dualism, in this context, is used in the sense of grasping to all things as separate from thusness/ emptiness.[17] Subject-object reification, in turns follows from this misperception. The passage begins with Moggallana expressing to the Buddha why he is hesitant to go see

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[16] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 6.

[17] See Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 52. "The Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, as with most Mahayana sutras, do not indulge in elaborate philosophical arguments… The scriptures make assertions, which indicate the true way of things and behavior in the light of that truth. Assertions of the Prajnaparamita are made from the perspective of perfect wisdom, that is, they occur from the position of a Buddha's perception wherein absolutely nothing has any independent final ultimate existence… By switching between these two levels, ultimate and conventional, it is possible to generate apparent paradoxes for pedagogic effect…"

Vimalakirti and ask after his health, as the Buddha has suggested. Moggallana explains,

> Why? I remember one day when I was teaching the Dharma to the householders in a square in the great city of Vaisali, and the Licchavi Vimalakirti came along to see me and said to me, 'Reverend Maudgalyana, that is not the way to teach the Dharma to the householders in their white clothes. The Dharma must be taught according to reality.[18]

The assertion that "The Dharma must be taught according to reality" refers to Vimalakirti's critique of Moggallana's dualistic approach and preference for an approach that reflects the true nature of ultimate reality. Vimalakirti further chides Moggallana by reminding him that dharma should never be construed as "an object, because it is free of words and letters; it is inexpressible, and it transcends all movements of mind… It is without the concept of "mine," because it is free of all process."[19] Next Vimalakirti asserts that the dharma is "without coming or going because it never stands still… It abides without movement or activity." From a logical point of view, something that never stands still or is always moving by definition is coming or going. From Vimalakirti's non-dual perspective, nothing can be found that is separate from undivided, unmoving thusness thus the notion of a thing called movement is nonsensical.[20]

In other words, dharma is beyond concept and cannot be reduced to formulaic expressions.[21] As seen in the example above, it is essential to keep in mind that the learning process is extremely challenging and often uncomfortable.

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[18] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 25.
[19] Ibid,, 25.
[20] Ibid., 130. In this note, Thurman points out that nonduality (advayatva) is the Middle Path or "freedom from the extremes of being and nothingness."
[21] See Kalupahana, David, *Mulamadhyamakakarika of Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way,* (New Delhi: State University of New York, 1986), Chapter 2. In this chapter, Nagarjuna's critique of the concept of movement is further explored.

Moggallana is uncomfortable because his explanation of dharma according to a gradual or relative perspective was critiqued from Vimalakirti's nondual exposition. He was embarrassed in front of his students by Vimalakirti's exposure of his reliance on reified frames of reference. Another example of this principle can be seen in the following passage.

Vimalakirti tells Moggallana that while teaching the dharma it is imperative to maintain awareness of one's use of language with special attention not to fall into a dualistic presentation of the dharma that reifies the role of a teacher or student. Moreover, he warns Moggallana to keep a close watch on his own self-concept as a teacher.

> How could there be a teaching in regard to such a Dharma? Reverend Mahamaudgalyayana, even the expression "to teach the Dharma" is presumptuous, and those who listen to it listen to presumption. Reverend Maudgalyayana, where there are no presumptuous words, there is no teacher of the Dharma, no one to listen, and no one to understand. It is as if an illusory person were to teach the Dharma to illusory people. Therefore, you should teach the Dharma by keeping your mind on this.[22]

Here, Vimalakirti critiques Moggallana for teaching dharma in a way that does not communicate the underlying, ineffable nature of dharma. He explains how a proper presentation of dharma would look in the following selection.

> The Dharma is peace and pacification, because it is free from desire. It does not become an object, because it is free of words and letters; it is inexpressible, and it transcends all movement of mind.[23]

Dharma, according to Vimalakirti, should express the nondual nature of the world by communicating its emptiness or thusness. Teachings, which contribute to a reified perspective about anything, even about the process of learning dharma,

[22] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 25.
[23] Ibid.

are problematic. Vimalakirti points out that dharma not only describes peace but it actually *is* peace in that it evokes clearer understanding in the minds of learners.

Following on this critique, Moggallana admits to the Buddha his reluctance to seek out Vimalakirti and inquire about his illness. He justifies this reluctance by saying, "Lord [Buddha] when Vimalakirti had discoursed thus, eight hundred householders in the crowd conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, and I myself was speechless. Therefore, Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to this good man to inquire about his illness."[24]

Vimalakirti's challenge to Moggallana was effective as demonstrated by the impact it had on the audience. Vimalakirti is noted to have prompted an experience of enlightenment in a vast crowd of lay people by uttering this challenging statement. He also made an impact on the target of the critique, Moggallana, rendering him speechless. However, the effectiveness of the exchange in producing its intended result did not diminish the discomfort that Moggallana felt in recollecting the exchange. Looking beyond Moggallana's own discomfort with the exchange the reader can learn from Vimalakirti significant attributes of the doctrine of skillful means.

It is clear that effective communication between a teacher and student, in combination with practice, can serve to reframe the path of a practitioner by expanding a narrow sense of self and a limited experience of meditation. When this experience of wisdom arises for a practitioner, compassion will spontaneously arise for other beings that are caught in dualistic perspectives and

[24] Ibid., 26.

thereby experience great suffering. Therefor, we can distill two indicators that a student is progressing in her learning process. The first indicator is that the individual is more spacious in terms of her outlook. The second indicator is that the student will have more compassion for the suffering of others. Another key principle to highlight here regarding skillful means in action is that an effective teacher will often need to challenge students in order to help them grow.

1.A. What is the Connection Between Wisdom and Love?

Thus far I have established that the doctrine of skillful means can be understood by examining how teachers are presented in Buddhist scriptures such as the Pali canon and the early Mahayana text, *the Vimalakirti Sutra*. I have asserted that one theme in these texts is the premise that a teacher's capacity to embody skillful means is contingent on that teacher's own embodied realization of wisdom. I have also suggested that a core motivation of skillful teachers is love and compassion for suffering students. However, it has not yet been made explicitly clear how the relationship *between* wisdom and love is understood. In this next section I will explicitly engage this question of what connects wisdom and love and why both of these qualities are imperative for effective pedagogy.

Early in Chapter 7, in Vimalakirti's encounter with Manjushri (the bodhisattva known for his great wisdom), an overview of the connection between wisdom and love is articulated. In this exchange, the two probe the nature of the relationship between love and wisdom. Manjushri asks Vimalakirti "how does he

[a bodhisattva who realizes ultimate selflessness] generate the great love toward them [other beings]?" Vimalakirti responds that a bodhisattva who has realized ultimate selflessness automatically has a need to share their understanding with others. Vimalakirti offers an example of how this bodhisattva intention manifests; "'Just as I have realized the dharma, so should I teach it to living beings.' Thereby, he generates the love that is truly a refuge for all living beings; the love that is peaceful because free of grasping; the love that is not feverish, because free of passions; the love that accords with reality because it is equanimous [sic] in all three times; the love that is without conflict because free of the violence of the passions; the love that is nondual because it is involved neither with the external nor with the internal; the love that is imperturbable because totally ultimate."[25]

Vimalakirti affirms the core tenant of Mahayana philosophy, the inseparability of wisdom and compassion, when he asserts that insight into emptiness is precisely the motivation for teaching other beings who are caught in the suffering that stems from their ignorance of emptiness. Emptiness (*sunyata*), here, can be understood in several ways. From the Madhyamaka point of view, emptiness refers to a lack of inherent existence or to the insight that "no such self-existent substance exists." Nagarjuna, a key Madyamaka thinker, described emptiness primarily as insight into the principle of conditioned arising.[26] Emptiness can also be described in terms of thusness as in this passage below.

> The ultimate truth, then is that reality is inconceivable and inexpressible; 'When the domain of thought ceases, that which can be stated ceases'

[25] Ibid., 56-57.
[26] Harvey, *Introduction to Indian Buddhism*, 99.

> (Mk. Ch. 18, v. 7). The Perfection of Wisdom literature contains an elusive series of subtle allusions to that which lies beyond words. An indicator which it uses for this is the notion of tathata: 'thusness' or 'suchness'. The thusness of something, equivalent to its emptiness, is its very as-it-is-ness, what it is such as it is, withough conceptually adding anything to it or taking anything away from it: it is simply 'thus'.[27]

Here, emptiness is understood as the direct experience of a thing without accompanying, generally unconscious, conceptual overlay.

Moreover, Vimalakirti asserts that great love (meaning love that is inseparable from wisdom) is more powerful than love that is mixed with ignorance, attachment, and aversion. Great love, according to Vimalakirti, is "free of passions" and "imperturbable" as it is not rooted in self-clinging.[28] Great love is "unbreakable like a diamond," or unconditional in that it is offered freely regardless of the particularities of the recipient or context. Vimalakirti describes a bodhisattva's great love in this following selection.

> Thereby, he [the bodhisattva] generates the love that is firm, its high resolve unbreakable, like a diamond; the love that is pure, purified in its intrinsic nature; the love that is even, its aspirations being equal; the saint's love that has eliminated its enemy; the bodhisattva's love that continuously develops living beings; the Tathagata's love that understands reality; the Buddha's love that causes living beings to awaken from their sleep...[29]

The bodhisattva's great love is 'firm' and cannot be shaken by the actions of the recipient. The love is 'pure' in that it is an expression of wisdom into the empty nature of oneself and of the recipient. It is 'even' or impartial toward all beings, without preferring some to others. The saint or arhat's love has

[27] Ibid., 104.
[28] Ibid., 57.
[29] Ibid., 57.

'eliminated its enemy' of the three poisons of attachment, aversion, and ignorance. The bodhisattva's love 'continuously develops living beings,' which refers to the natural emergence of skillful means from this love. The 'Tathagata's love that understands reality' refers to the bodhisattva's realization of the wisdom of the Buddha, which is emptiness. That the bodhisattva's love 'causes living beings to awaken from their sleep' again refers to the spontaneous skillful means or benefit toward other beings that arises out of this love empowered with insight into emptiness.

Another quality attributed to this great love is that it "protects both self and other."[30] Great love is a refuge because it is offered unconditionally regardless of changeable causes and conditions. In addition, Vimalakirti stresses that great love is "never exhausted because it acknowledges voidness (emptiness) and selflessness."[31] Great love is considered to be 'great' because it is rooted in insight into emptiness, which is known as wisdom. This formulation of the relationship between love and wisdom is fundamental to the Mahayana redefinition of enlightenment. Love is understood as the relative aspect of bodhicitta whereas wisdom is the ultimate aspect of bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others, which is the defining feature of the bodhisattva path of Mahayana Buddhism.[32] This notion of great love as a

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche spoke about the connection between relative and absolute bodhicitta at the Medicine and Compassion Conference at Harvard Medical School on July 8, 2007. He asked, "How do we get from here to boundless loving kindness and compassion? We start by aiming loving kindness toward someone with some effort, we try, with effort—and then the effort becomes unneeded at some point and it becomes effortless. When we are deliberately trying to be compassionate it is never going to be 100% clean. But when compassion is effortless, at that moment it is totally boundless. We need to discover spontaneous, effortless compassion; this is

protection correlates to the new articulation of refuge in Mahayana contexts as refuge not only in wisdom but also in the union of wisdom and compassion. Without love, there is not a basis for the care or protection of other beings, from a Buddhist point of view. Makransky elucidates this point, in this following statement, “If love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity are lacking, the fundamental power of care for others well being, the essential will for good, is just not there.”[33] On the other hand, when these four boundless attitudes (love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) are empowered by wisdom, they become much more powerful in terms of their impact on the world.

This relationship between wisdom and the protection of the four boundless attitudes is rooted in the perspective that harm and the hatred it is evoked by require a fundamental misknowing of the nature of other people. Makransky clarifies this point in the following passage.

> The attitudes of prejudice, hatred, and violence are radically cut off from the realities of persons, lost in projections of fear and malice, which in the absence of all-inclusive love and compassion, present the appearance of *being* objectively what persons are, what the world is.[34]

Wisdom regarding the emptiness of the constructs of the categories of friends, enemies, and strangers, Makransky explains, has implications for the real world behavior of people. When a bodhisattva approaches other beings from

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very difficult. For this we need to see that there is no real ego. What we call me, I, is not really there. But we need direct experience of this." He clarified in this passage that incomplete realization of wisdom is inevitably correlated to imperfect expressions of compassion. However, he also clarified that as one deepens in the practice of wisdom, spontaneous experiences of unconditional compassion will emerge. This is the case because as the insight into the illusory nature of ‘self’ increases the connection to and care for other beings becomes more prominent.

[33] See John Makransky ”No Real Protection without Authentic Love and Compassion.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 12 (2005), 28. He goes on to support this statement through the use of references drawn from the *Mahayana-sutra-alamkara*, a Mahayana Sutra.

[34] Ibid., 32.

a perspective of all-inclusive love, she will not be tempted to harm others out of the misapprehension of her own ideas about them as constituting the complete reality of what they actually are. Therefore, this bodhisattva is safer from the perspective of the people she encounters. A bodhisattva, therefor is more trustworthy or reliable than beings because she can be relied upon to treat others from a perspective rooted in love and of clarity.

Moreover, *the Vimalakirti Sutra* emphasizes another key *Mahayana* principle that connects to defining the doctrine of skillful means. The inseparability of *samsara* and *nirvana* emerges as a core theme in *Mahayana* philosophy and practice.[35] Makransky explains, "The nirvana realized by a Buddha is *not* separate from samsara. Prior to the rise of Mahayana, early Buddhist and Abhidharma traditions had assumed a dualistic understanding of samsara and nirvana." In early Buddhism, final nirvana or parinirvana was understood to indicate "the complete cessation of all conditioned states of mind and body, the cessation of all participation in this world…" This understanding changed in the later Mahayana traditions. The new understanding in Mahayana Buddhism is summarized as follows.

> For a Buddha (or enlightened being), samsara is *not* apart from nirvana: nirvana is *not* apart from samsara. With this, the prior dualistic understanding (that final attainment of the unconditioned entails abandonment of the conditioned world) was eradicated. Mahayana texts came to assert that a Buddha, upon fully attaining the unconditioned (nirvana), *never* abandons the conditioned world (samsara)."

Samsara and nirvana are understood to be inseparable. This is the case because in the Mahayana redefinition of enlightenment, the notion of the

[35] Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, 10-11.

inseparability of samsara and nirvana, known as *yuganaddha* ("bound to the same yoke" as in two horses or oxen bound to the same yoke) emerged.[36] In the Mahayana sutras, the inseparability of samsara and nirvana becomes the dominant perspective. Paul Williams clarifies that in the enlightened perspective samsara and nirvana are recognized to be inseparable. The conditioned mind is the basis for the experience of samsara, whereas the mind that abides in nonduality experiences nirvana. Nirvana (enlightenment) and samsara are not construed here as separate entities but rather as "two dimensions" of reality.

Williams explains, "The first is the basis for samsara, the round of deluded understanding and hence suffering that is the conceptualized nature. The second is the basis for nirvana, enlightenment, cognizing the true way of things that is the perfected nature. In its first dimension the dependent nature is, inasmuch as it is acting as the basis for samsara, tainted… In its second dimension, acting as the basis for the cognition that entails nirvana, it is pure."[37] In this definition it is clear that samsara (the cycle of conditioned existence) and nirvana (freedom or enlightenment) are seen as various possible perspectives or outlooks.

A perspective informed by wisdom into the nature of emptiness (ultimate truth or the lack of intrinsic existence of phenomena) recognizes all phenomena as nirvana. A dualistic perspective, on the other hand, sees the samsaric nature of the same world. Mahayana sutras emphasize that samsara and nirvana are not different places but are rather different vantage points on the world. Thus the task of the teacher is to reveal the nature of the world and has implications for

[36] Kvaerne, Per, "On the Concept of Sahaja in Indian Buddhist Tantric Literature," in *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, ed. Paul Williams (Routledge: New York, 2005), 196.
[37] Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: the Doctrinal Foundations*, 96.

understandings of skillful means. It is important to notice that this perspective is distinct from pre-Mahayana ideas about the role of the skillful teacher as primarily facilitating an escape from samsara into parinirvana. In other words, because realization of *nirvana* can be communicated in and through *samsara*, the Mahayana formulation of renunciation emphasizes the need for compassion for beings that are suffering in *samsara.*[38]

This notion of the inseparability of samsara and nirvana connects with the motif of buddha-fields seen throughout the *Vimalakirti Sutra* and other early Mahayana sutras. The first chapter of the Sutra opens with Ratnakara requesting the Buddha to "explain to them [the assembly of bodhisattvas] the bodhisattvas' purification of the buddha-field!"[39] In response, the Buddha explains that the positive qualities of buddha-fields emerge from the attributes of the minds of the bodhisattvas that reside in them. The buddha-fields are inherently pure but may not be recognized as such by other beings due to their own lack of wisdom. The Buddha explains, "The fact that some living beings do not behold the splendid display of virtues of the Buddha-field of the Tathagata is due to their own ignorance. It is not the fault of the Tathagata. Sariputra, the buddha-field of the Tathagata is pure, but you do not see it."[40] Moreover, the Buddha goes on to insist, "that you see such a a buddha-field as this as if it were so impure, Reverend Sariputra, is a sure sign that there are highs and lows in your mind and

[38] Williams, Paul and Tribe, Anthony *Buddhist thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 50-51. This is an inversion of the pre-Mahayana notion that "samsara is the conditioned," whereas nirvana "is where there are no conditioned things." Or in other words, "nirvana is the negation of samsara and all that cessation involves."
[39] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 15
[40] Ibid., 18.

that your positive thought in regard to the Buddha-gnosis is not pure either. Reverend Sariputra, those whose minds are impartial toward all living beings and whose positive thoughts toward the Buddha-gnosis are pure see this buddha-field as perfectly pure."[41] In other words seeing a buddha-field as pure or recognizing the nature of the world as nirvana rather than samsara is entirely contingent on the extent of wisdom of each individual.[42] The wise being recognizes the nature of the world as a buddha-field, whereas a being without stabilization of realization will regard the world as impure.[43] The Buddha also makes the point in the last line that a wise being is impartial toward other beings. The notion of impartiality or equanimity in the Mahayana context implies that the bodhisattva is impartial in their love, care, and desire for the well-being and freedom from suffering of other beings as described in the section on the inseparability of wisdom and love above.

Because of his experiential realization of this ontological relationship between *samsara* and *nirvana*, Vimalakirti is able to help other beings recognize the pure, nondual nature of experience. It is precisely because he recognizes the

[41] Ibid.
[42] McMahan, David, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 108. Another aspect of the visionary discourse on the buddha-fields, in early Mahayana sutras, according to McMahan indicates a reinterpretation of the meaning of holy places. Mahayana Buddhism shifted an emphasis on the Buddha teaching in this physical realm to a more cosmic notion "of a universal sacred space that was at once everywhere and yet nowhere in particular." The buddha-fields become omnipresent when they are linked to the underlying nature of reality, which becomes accessible to a practitioner who is sufficiently steeped in the realization of wisdom.
[43] Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 76-77. This notion of the purity of the buddha-field or the essentially pure nature of samsara does not imply that there is no need for equity or social justice. Rather, the perspective of the nirvanic nature of samsara is meant to indicate the ultimate point of view on samsara. As expressed in the doctrine of two truths, this ultimate point of view has to be held *along with* and never *instead of* the relative point of view. The relative perspective, is summarized by Williams as "the way the everyday world is." This relative point of view cannot be ignored and must be engaged by the bodhisattva with clarity and compassion.

emptiness of the source of suffering (self-clinging and dualistic perspectives) that he can not only have great compassion beings and their suffering, but he can also meet them where they are and help them find freedom. Vimalakirti enters the realms of bars, brothels, and casinos to teach the dharma; "he mixed in all crowds, yet was respected as foremost of all" as a result of his profound realization.[44] Vimalakirti's educative engagement in these varied settings indicates that learning is not limited to formal classroom contexts. This is a correlate with the contextual nature of learning processes as described by Dewey, which I will return to in Chapter 5.

Makransky describes the inseparability of *samsara* and *nirvana*:

> If nirvana is the nature of samsara in its emptiness, then clues to nirvana can be found in every part of samsara; many means are available to communicate dharma. Dharma is never completely confined by any single prior form; differing contexts, mentalities, languages, cultural assumptions require their own distinctive, even unexpected expressions. [45]

This selection points out that skillful means is the outflow of the recognition of samsara and nirvana as non-dual. Effective teaching requires the experiential realization of this principle.

Vimalakirti demonstrates a variety of key features of the doctrine of skillful means in his teaching. He expresses nondual reality in terms accessible to those he communicates with; often in the form of paradox or metaphoric language. The use of paradox points to a perspective beyond the logic of dualistic frameworks. He continually challenges the committed monastics to push them to deeper

[44] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 21.
[45] John Makransky, class handout for Theology 505 on Sept. 18, 2008.

levels of realization, by pointing out the deeper implications of the dharma they are practicing and teaching. Like a good athletic coach, Vimalakirti sees the potential in these monks, and challenges them to embody it. He challenges any patterns of intellectual reification that might stand in the way of such enlightened embodiment. He also emphasizes that samsara and nirvana are inseparable and that the extent of the practitioner's wisdom determines her capacity to recognize the nirvanic nature of experience, to recognize the implications of that for strengthening renunciation and loving compassion for others and to be empowered to teach in skillful ways as spontaneous compassionate expression of such wisdom. Lastly, Vimalakirti demonstrates that when a person has realized nonduality in his own experience he is able to effectively communicate this realization to others.

In summary, wisdom in *the Vimalakirti Sutra* is understood as the embodied recognition of the nirvanic nature of samsara. This experience of wisdom is understood to be *spontaneously accompanied* by compassion for other beings that are not aware of this reality. In other words, compassion organically emerges from wisdom and is also described as inseparable from it. The relationship between wisdom and compassion has practical implications in terms of pedagogy. Skillful teachers are motivated by an intrinsic care for students. Their teaching is targeted, first and foremost, at helping students experience more freedom and less suffering. Any content or method is understood to be at the service of this fundamental goal.

1.B The Goddess as an Example of Responsive Pedagogy

Turning to the well-known section of the Vimalakirti sutra involving the Goddess gives us further material to understand the shifts in the notion of skillful means that are emphasized in the early Mahayana period. This Chapter begins with Manjushri asking Vimalakirti "Good sir, how should a bodhisattva regard all living beings?" Vimalakirti replies, "a bodhisattva should regard all living beings as a wise man regards the reflection of the moon in water or as magicians regard men created by magic." After Vimalakirti further elaborates on this statement, Manjushri inquires how this perspective on beings connects to the notion of great love toward beings.

Amidst the conversation between Manjushri and Vimalakirti on love, compassion, equanimity, and the bodhisattva's imperative to "live for the liberation of all living beings" a Goddess (a celestial being) who resides in Vimalakirti's home appears.[46] Inspired by her joy about the dharma elucidated in the home, she showers the group of gathered bodhisattvas with "heavenly flowers."[47] "When the flowers fell on the bodies of the bodhisattvas, they fell off on the floor, but when they fell on the bodies of the great disciples, they stuck to them and did not fall. The great disciples shook the flowers and even tried to use their magical powers, but still the flowers would not shake off."[48]

In this exchange, the Goddess demonstrates that the Arhats are clinging to their conceptual projections in the form of propriety. When the Goddess sprinkles the entire group with flowers the Arhats are distressed that the flowers

[46] Ibid., 58.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

cannot be shaken off whereas the petals do not stick to the bodhisattvas. The Goddess chides the most prestigious of all the Arhats, Sariputra, who she addresses as the "foremost of the wise." She tells him that there is nothing wrong with the flowers, but rather the problem is with his own mind that exhibits "both constructual [sic] thought and discrimination."[49] Monastics in the shravaka tradition (shravaka literally means "hearers" as in those who follow the teachings heard by the Buddha)[50] have precepts to avoid wearing adornments such as flower garlands, to enact their renunciation of worldly attachments. In her comments, the goddess illustrates a more subtle level of attachment that needs to be engaged, attachment to the concretized conception of flowers or to dualistic notions of good and bad, pure and impure. The Goddess claims that these dualistic conceptual overlays are what are actually improper and not the flower petals. She asserts that the shravakas' concepts cause the stickiness– not the flowers themselves.

The goddess's ensuing exchange with Sariputra begins with Sariputra asking her how long she has been in the house. She replies that she has been in the house for as long as he himself has been enlightened. "Sariputra said, 'Then, have you been in this house for quite some time?' The goddess said, 'Has the elder been in liberation for quite some time?' At that, the elder Sariputra fell

[49] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 59.
[50] McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism,* 87. "The sravakas (literally, "hearers") claimed to have directly heard and reported the words of the Buddha when he taught in India, and elaborate institutional efforts were employed by the Sangha to keep these words alive. The source of authority for the early teachings was the fact that they were heard from the self-authenticating presence of the Buddha."

silent. The goddess continued, “Elder, you are ‘foremost of the wise!’ Why do you not speak? Now, when it is your turn, you do not answer the question.”[51]

> *Sariputra:* Since liberation is inexpressible, goddess, I do not know what to say.
> *Goddess:* All the syllables pronounced by the elder have the nature of liberation. Why? Liberation is neither internal nor external, nor can it be apprehended apart from them. Likewise, syllables are neither internal nor external, nor can they be apprehended anywhere else. Therefore, reverend Sariputra, do not point to liberation by abandoning speech! Why? The holy liberation is the equality of all things!
> *Sariputra:* Goddess, is not liberation the freedom from desire, hatred, and folly?
> *Goddess:* ‘Liberation is freedom from desire, hatred, and folly’- that is the teaching for the excessively proud. But those free of pride are taught that the very nature of desire, hatred, and folly is itself liberation.
> *Sariputra:* Excellent! Excellent, goddess! Pray what have you attained, what have you realized, that you have such eloquence?”[52]

In this section, Sariputra asks “is not liberation the freedom from desire, hatred, and folly?” In other words, with this question, Sariputra identifies liberation with the cessation of conditioned phenomena and implicitly defines nirvana as a leaving behind of samsara. This is based on a duality between nirvana (the unconditioned) and samsara (the conditioned which must be abandoned to realize nirvana). The goddess, on the other hand, asserts, “the very nature of desire, hatred, and folly is itself liberation.” In this way, she identifies liberation as the nirvanic nature *of* samsara. She identifies liberation as the unconditioned nature of conditioned phenomena, i.e. their emptiness of reified existence. For her, then, liberation is discovered through greater intimacy with the very nature of ordinary things; not by trying to be freed from ordinary things. In this way, Sariputra’s perspective represents that of pre-Mahayana

[51] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 59.
[52] Ibid., 60.

scholasticism, whereas the Goddess's represents the Mahayana doctrine of the inseparability of samsara and nirvana, as discussed in the pages above.[53]

In the passage above, the Goddess exhibits multiple elements of the doctrine of skillful means. First, her capacity to produce these flowers is understood to indicate her powerful realization. Magical capacities such as these are a common way of indicating the force of a person's practice in that they are no longer constrained by ordinary mental or physical limitations. The capacity to perform magic is closely connected with the ability to operate outside the physical and conceptual constraints that bind ignorant beings. Realized beings are able to perform miracles, read the minds of other beings, and proclaim dharma that is perfectly attuned to the needs of their students. The Goddess's method of engaging ideas she seeks to challenge is not simply to talk about them. Rather she provokes Sariputra to express his biases and then she engages with them by inquiring into their basis. A skillful teacher, as demonstrated by the goddess, does not merely debate things abstractly but rather invites the learner into examination of ones own premises and their underriding values.

The Goddess and Sariputra have an exchange about the flowers that she produced and rained on the collection assembled at Vimalakirti's house. She asks Sariputra, "Why do you shake these flowers [to remove them from your body]?"

[53] The distinction between the two vehicles of Buddhism is foregrounded in this exchange between Sariputra and the Goddess. This is a motif seen throughout the sutra that highlights how the Mahayana perspective relates to but moves beyond the pre-Mahayana worldview.

Sariputra answers her, “Goddess, these flowers are not proper for religious persons and so we are trying to shake them off.” Sariputra is trying to abide by the monastic code against adornment. The goddess responds, “Do not say that, reverend Sariputra. Why? These flowers are proper indeed! Why? Such flowers have neither constructual thought nor discrimination. But the elder Sariputra has both constructual thought and discrimination.” She points out here that the flowers are empty of inherent meaning and are not in and of themselves either proper or improper. She suggests that Sariputra himself, who assigns this meaning to the flowers, and mistakenly articulates the sentiment that the flowers themselves possess moral propriety, lacks the propriety of clear seeing or clear speaking.

The goddess goes on to suggest, “impropriety for one who has renounced the world for the discipline of the rightly taught Dharma consists of constructual thought and discrimination, yet the elders are full of such thoughts.” Here she points out that for a monk, following the intention of the teachings of the dharma, should be the paramount concern, over and above any kind of rule in the precepts. She says, “One who is without such [discriminating] thoughts is always proper.” The flowers, she goes on to explain, “stick to the bodies of those who have eliminated their instincts for the passions (aversion, attraction, and ignorance) and do not stick to the bodies of those who have eliminated their instincts.” In this exchange, the goddess demonstrates that even a great and devoted practitioner like Sariputra can mistake the rules and content of dharma for the main point, which is the thorough integration of dharma into ones

perspective. She particularly emphasizes the danger of discrimination as a shortcoming that can cause a practitioner to confuse conceptual relationships within elements of the dharma with this more subtle integration of the principles of dharma in one's outlook and actions.

Following on this exchange, Sariputra asks the goddess how long she has been living at Vimalakirti's house. She replies, "I have been here as long as the elder has been in liberation." To this, Sariputra inquires, "Then, have you been in this house for quite some time?" The goddess retorts, "Has the elder been in liberation for quite some time?" Following on this, "the elder Sariputra fell silent." When the goddess asks him "Why do you not speak?" Sariputra replies, "Since liberation is inexpressible, goddess, I do not know what to say." The goddess quibbles with this definition with her retort "All the syllables pronounced by the elder have the nature of liberation." The goddess, in her assertion that Sariputra's words contain the 'nature of liberation' draws on a definition of emptiness, which emphasizes the thusness of all things. From this perspective, their words and form express emptiness just as readily as silence or the lack of any assertion. She affirms this message with her statement that "the holy liberation is the equality of all things!"[54] This fundamental equality of all things is closely connected with the notion of not only thusness but also of the inseparability of samsara and nirvana, discussed above.

The Goddess further elucidates elements of the doctrine of skillful means with regard to her ideas about how to choose among the various Buddhist teachings when working with students. When Sariputra asks the Goddess which

[54] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 58-59.

vehicle she follows the Goddess answers by claiming affiliation with the various vehicles. She clarifies, "I belong to the disciple-vehicle when I teach it to those who need it. I belong to the solitary-vehicle when I teach the twelve links of dependent origination to those who need them."[55] She always is informed by the perspective of the great vehicle and a consciousness of her students no matter what is the content of her teachings. In other words her teaching draws from the various schools of Buddhism and her decision about what to teach is contingent on the patterning and needs of the students.[56] This relates to the point that "when a Buddha or bodhisattva communicates dharma, the message is formed as much by its receiver as by its sender. So all teaching of dharma, to be effective, requires skillful means[57] to conform the message[58] to the mentality of the

[55] Ibid., 60.
[56] See Evelyn Underhill's *Concerning the Inner Life*, (New York: E. P. Dutton 1926). Evelyn Underhill emphasizes that the effective spiritual director is knowledgeable about a large variety of practices, which she can draw from, based on the needs of the person she is accompanying. The Goddess similarly is aware of the entirety of the Buddhist teachings not just her own preferred set. She can therefore effectively meet the needs of those she engages.
[57] John Makransky, class handout for Theology 505 on Sept. 18, 2008.
[58] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 52-53.
Another example of how teachings are targeted to the specific needs of students can be found in the following passage on page 53. "Furthermore, reverend Sariputra, there are beings who become disciplined after an immense period of evolution, and there are also those who are disciplined after a short period of evolution. The bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation, for the sake of disciplining those living beings who are disciplined through an immeasurable period of evolution, can make the passing of a week seem like the passing of an aeon, and he can make the passing of an aeon seem like the passing of a week…"

The point in this passage is that there are different trajectories to enlightenment. The great bodhisattva can actually influence their students' perception of the passing of time in order to support their spiritual unfolding. In other words, the great bodhisattva knows what is needed by her students and is able to manifest it even if it defies the ordinary unfolding of relative reality.

It is significant to note that preceding this statement, Vimalakirti has just revealed to the bodhisattvas a cosmic visionary portrayal of the bodhisattva's capacities in which the great bodhisattva is proclaimed to be able to "pour into a single pore of his skin all the waters of the four great oceans, without injuring the water-animals such as fish, tortoises, crocodiles, frogs and other creatures [such as magical beings from other realms]… And the whole operation is visible without any injury or disturbance to any of those living beings." Again, we see in this example, the

receiver, in such a way as to direct the receiver's attention to the very nature of things beyond thought. That's why the 'means,' to be 'skillful' in this deep way, have to be an expression of wisdom beyond thought."[59]

Choosing to teach from among the various vehicles, the Goddess points out, should not be about which sect the teacher most identifies with as his/her own preference. Rather the choice among the various ways of expressing dharma should arise as an expression of skillful means. This skillful means emerges from the needs and specific mental/karmic patternings of the student. The Goddess indicates that no matter which teaching tools she employs, she will "never abandon the great compassion."[60] In other words, her own view is in accord with the *Mahayana* even if she employs pre-Mahayana approaches. She clarifies that this is the case because "all need that teaching [of great compassion] to attain ultimate liberation."[61] Eventually all the Buddhist schools lead to the *Mahayana* path if they are to successfully reach the goal of ultimate

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enormous realization of the highly skilled teacher by means of the juxtaposition of the capacity to engage in expert teaching with the capacity to perform miracles.

[59] Ibid., 31. Another example of Vimalakirti's extensive capacity to teach dharma can be found in the exchange between Upali and the Buddha. In this dialogue, Upali explains that he, like the other shravakas, is reluctant to visit Vimalakirti to inquire after his health. He reports a time when he was teaching two monks who had come to him to confess behavioral infractions. Vimalakirti appeared and critiqued Upali's approach to engaging these monks. Vimalakirti explains, "sin is not to be apprehended within, or without, or between the two. Why? The Buddha has said, "Living beings are afflicted by the passions of thought, and they are purified by the purification of thought." Thus Vimalakirti is saying that Upali's way of teaching has further supported the two monks' tendencies to reify their negativities as inherently sinful. But, according to Vimalakirti, there is no such thing as inherent sin, when negativity/sin is seen in its true nature of emptiness. For one who knows emptiness, even sin becomes the locus of liberation---sin recognized as empty. This is more useful for the students because at the end of the exchange their minds are uplifted to the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, rather than being supported in further grasping and reification of their sins. Vimalakirti rebukes Upali for his unskillful approach with the following comment. "'Reverend Upali, do not aggravate further the sins of these two monks. Without perplexing them relieve their remorse." The priority to Vimalakirti, or to any skillful teacher, is to reduce confusion and support insight into the nature of reality.

[60] Ibid., 60.

[61] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 60.

liberation, according to the Goddess. The path must incorporate not only wisdom but also unconditional compassion to be complete. However, at any given point along the way, it may be appropriate to engage a student with teachings or practices from the various vehicles. The larger point is that the power of creative responsiveness that manifests as skillful means to give teachings of any vehicle in accord with the specific mentalities and needs of persons is itself the unity of wisdom and compassion that is attained only on the bodhisattva path. This emphasis on creative responsiveness is fundamentally an embodied experience as will be explored in the next section.

1.C The Body as an Instrument of Skillful Means

The doctrine of skillful means, as we have seen thus far, is enumerated in the dynamics of learning as they unfold between teacher and student. The body is a vital instrument in the learning process. Clarifying Mahayana understandings of the body and the role of embodiment in effective pedagogy, by looking at the example of Vimalakirti, is the primary purpose of this section.

Vimalakirti's exposition of his sickness sheds light on the early Mahayana understanding of the body and the relationship between embodiment and the doctrine of skillful means. Manjushri (the bodhisattva of wisdom) asks a series of questions about Vimalakirti's experience of his illness. Manjushri inquires whether the illness is increasing or decreasing, how long it will last, and what can be done about it. In response to these questions, Vimalakirti explains that his

"sickness comes from ignorance and the thirst for existence" and that it "will last as long as do the sicknesses of all living beings."[62]

His is an illness that relates intimately to the suffering of beings. Vimalakirti explains the origin of his illness by way of an analogy:

> For example, Manjushri, when the only son of a merchant is sick, both his parents will become sick on account of the sickness of their son. And the parents will suffer as long as that only son does not recover from his sickness. Just so, Manjushri, the bodhisattva loves all beings as if each were his only child. He becomes sick when they are sick and is cured when they are cured. You ask me, Manjushri, whence comes my sickness; the sicknesses of the bodhisattvas arise from great compassion.[63]

Just as parents of an only child would dote on that child endlessly until the child's health improved, that is the level of care that a bodhisattva feels for each living being, according to Vimalakirti. Because the bodhisattva has compassion for the myriad of ways that beings suffer due to their lack of wisdom, she experiences strong compassion for them. The bodhisattva's level of concern is great and is analogous to the intense concern that of a parent worried for the survival of an only child would feel. Vimalakirti affirms that if other beings were "free from sickness," than his own illness would be relieved. The origin of the illness, according to Vimalakirti is his experience of "great compassion," or compassion undivided from wisdom. His interconnection with the suffering of other beings is the primary cause of his illness. This exchange demonstrates that the physical experience of the great bodhisattva is intimately related to the mental and physical state of other beings. The bodhisattva's body is interconnected with other beings. The bodhisattva experiences other beings, with their suffering, *as*

[62] Ibid., 43.
[63] Ibid.

his greater self, given the undivided nature of reality as known in the experience of emptiness/thusness. Thus the bodhisattva uses embodiment as an opportunity to teach beings in terms that are relevant to both culture and conditioning.

Vimalakirti speaks about the nature of his sickness, when prompted by Manjushri. The sickness "is not physical, since the body is insubstantial in itself. It is not mental, since the nature of the mind is like an illusion."[64] The term 'insubstantial' here means that it is empty of inherent existence or endowed with the quality of thusness.

Later on in this same chapter, when Manjushri asks Vimalakirti how to "console another bodhisattva who is sick" more nuance is offered about the nature of embodiment on the path of spiritual awakening.

> He should tell him [the sick bodhisattva] that the body is impermanent, but should not exhort him to renunciation or disgust. He should tell him that the body is miserable, but should not encourage him to find solace in liberation; that the body is selfless, but that living beings should be developed; that the body is peaceful, but not to seek any ultimate calm… He should encourage his empathy for all living beings on account of his own sickness, his remembrance of suffering experienced from beginningless time, and his consciousness of working for the welfare of living beings. He should encourage him not to be distressed, but to manifest the roots of virtue, to maintain the primal purity and the lack of craving, and thus to always strive to become the king of healers, who can cure all sicknesses. Thus should a bodhisattva console a sick bodhisattva, in such a way as to make him happy.

This discourse articulated by Vimalakirti summarizes the Mahayana relationship to the body. As seen in the Middle Length Discourses described above, one of the pre-Mahayana assumptions is the emphasis on the imperative to renounce that which engenders clinging, in the sense of avoiding objects of attachment and ultimately aiming to be freed from having to experience them. Vimalakirti,

[64] Ibid., 44.

however, advises that the body should be contemplated as impermanent but without an emphasis on "renunciation or disgust." The bodhisattva, he teaches, should contemplate the suffering of the body but not with the goal of establishing mental quiescence or "ultimate calm."[65] Rather than seeking to avoid the suffering experienced in the body, Vimalakirti argues, the opposite perspective should be engendered. Vimalakirti suggests that a bodhisattva should encourage his sick compatriot to use the illness as an opportunity to learn about the nature of his own suffering and how it connects to the suffering of other beings.

Vimalakirti advises that the bodhisattva should help his fellow sick bodhisattva to recognize the opportunity latent in his illness. He suggests, "he [the well bodhisattva] should encourage his [the sick bodhisattva's] empathy for all living beings on account of his own sickness, his remembrance of suffering experienced from beginningless [sic] time, and his consciousness of working for the welfare of living beings."[66] In other words, the bodhisattva's own bodily suffering is regarded as a path to greater empathy for the experience of other beings. The empathy extends not only to beings alive at this time who are sick but also to all beings who have ever been sick or who will be sick ie. all beings period. Furthermore, not only should the bodhisattva's empathy grow, but his commitment to becoming enlightened so that he might alleviate the suffering of others should also grow. This commitment to enlightenment would grow because the bodhisattva recognizes his inseparability with the other beings who are also caught in suffering. The body becomes an opportunity for freedom from isolation

[65] Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti; A Mahayana Scripture*, 44.
[66] Ibid.

and self-clinging with this perspective. This is a new interpretation of earlier articulations about the role of the body that emphasized the need to renounce attachment to the body. The earlier focus on the body as a locus of impurities that requires transcendence was reworked in the early Mahayana notion of skillful means.[67] This attitude is in keeping with the later *Lojong* (mind-heart training) practices and with the core *Mahayana* value on using one's own suffering as a bridge to insight into and empathy for the suffering of other beings. The body of a great bodhisattva, in the Lojong tradition, is understood to be a means of transmitting dharma and helping beings.[68]

Vimalakirti himself uses his body as a point of connection with people from many walks of life, including those who are not self-identified as Buddhist or religious at all. The second chapter of the sutra titled "Inconceivable skill in liberative [sic] technique" begins with a detailed description of Vimalakirti's adaptability in terms of being able to engage a wide range of beings. "He wore the white clothes of the layman, yet lived impeccably like a religious devotee" or in other words he embodied the best of each path. His behavior was in accord

[67] Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya; The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 949-952. Sutra 119, for example explains that one method to develop mindfulness of the body entails systematic contemplation of the foulness of the various parts of the body. The meditator is instructed to consider the various impurities contained in the body, beneath the skin. Several sections later, the meditator is instructed to go to a charnel ground and meditate on a corpse there. The meditation on this "dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter" is intended to highlight to the meditator that their own body will eventually meet this same fate.

[68] Santideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life,* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), 34. The well known Shantideva prayer elucidates the way that a bodhisattva on the path trains to perceive her body as a tool for the betterment of others. It is understood that a great bodhisattva, like Vimalakirti would have utterly internalized this perspective.

"May I be the medicine and physician for the sick. May I be their nurse until their illness never recurs. With showers of food and drink may I overcome the afflictions of hunger and thirst. May I becomefood and drink during times of famine. May I be an inexhaustible treasury for the destitute… For the sake of accomplishing the welfare of all sentient beings, I freely give up my body, enjoyments, and all my virtues of the three times…"

with the deepest meaning of ethics (embodiment of nondual wisdom) but he did not need to maintain a monastic or cloistered existence. He is noted to spend time “at the fields of sports and in the casinos” or with people who broke the rules of ethics espoused by the pre-Mahayana traditions. He is a model for engaging with students in ways that are relevant to their own cultural contexts. In visiting such places, “his aim was always to mature those people who were attached to games and gambling.” He spent time in places where people partake in what would be understood as non-virtuous behavior while remaining steadfast in his own resolve to help other beings mature spiritually.

Vimalakirti is noted to have spent time in a variety of other unexpected places such as bars, brothels, and even with teachers of other religions. Not only did he spend time in settings that are notoriously challenging to maintain ethical behavior in these contexts he was actually able to connect with and help a variety of people. He “engaged in all sorts of business”, “he participated in government”, “he visited all the schools”, and was even “honored as the warrior among warriors because he cultivated endurance, determination, and fortitude.” He was “honored as the prince of princes because he reversed their attachment to royal pleasures and sovereign power” but he was also “compatible with ordinary people because he appreciated the excellence of ordinary merits.”[69] Vimalakirti could engage with any type of person in any context, and help them mature on the spiritual path. He was able to do this on the basis of his profound realization and his correspondingly vast skillful means.

[69] Ibid.

The purpose of this detailed enumeration of Vimalakirti's versatility demonstrates that he is so skillful that there is no being that he cannot inspire and help toward liberation. His unconventional approach to spiritual teaching, as evidenced by the time he spends in brothels, casinos, and bars is related to the notion that the great bodhisattva is willing to meet people where they are. Vimalakirti is unafraid to teach in contexts that do not conform to the expectations of his tradition. This shows that the great bodhisattva is not constrained by social expectations or even the dualistic idea of right and wrong. Vimalakirti's highest allegiance is to benefitting beings and he is willing to step outside of social expectations in order to do this out of compassion for beings. This makes Vimalakirti an important source for guidance in our current environment where much of skillful means pertains to the need for Buddhist educators to engage audiences who are from various religious backgrounds, are multiple belongers, or are secular humanists.

Vimalakirti demonstrates that a bodhisattva does not concern himself with the opinion of others. He is unafraid to deeply challenge the people he meets by pointing out the limitations of dualistic perspectives. A continual refrain throughout the sutra is the willingness of Vimalakirti to offer pointed criticism to benefit those who have the ears to hear it even if they do not enjoy the experience. He is clearly unconcerned about being liked, which is a driving motivator for most beings. His fearlessness is evidenced time and again in his interactions with the Buddhist sangha and is the reason for the reluctance of the disciples in Chapter 3 and the bodhisattvas in Chapter 4 to go visit him. In fact, a

large percentage of the sutra is devoted to enumerating the many ways that Vimalakirti has challenged other practitioners and teachers, pointing out ways, not yet conscious to them, that they have reified and grasped to frameworks of teacher-student-teaching that limit rather than open the possibility of much fuller learning. Time and again, the Buddha prompts the various monks and bodhisattvas to go check on Vimalakirti's health and is repeatedly met with the statement "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness." Each of these stories acknowledges the greatness of Vimalakirti's realization and capacity for expressing his wisdom while at the same time pointing out that it deeply unsettling to be around someone with so little regard for social nicety and who embodies such a single-pointed focus on truth and liberation.

Vimalakirti is understood by the tradition as an exemplar of effective teaching. His exposition of the empty nature of the physical body expresses a key principle of the doctrine of skillful means. As seen by Vimalakirti, great teachers use their own physicality as a means to communicate with students. Vimalakirti's tendency to frequent the locations that social outliers frequent, such as bars, brothels, etc. speaks to the fundamental willingness that a skillful teacher should have to reach out to students not only intellectually but with their physical presence. Moreover, Vimalakirti demonstrates that effective pedagogy includes a willingness to not only show up but also to challenge the core beliefs and socialized expectations of students that contribute to their suffering.

2. Contemporary Historical-Critical Definitions

Now we turn to the discourse in contemporary scholarly circles for insight into the meaning of the doctrine of skillful means and its implications for pedagogy. Scholars such as Matthew Kapstein repeatedly make the point that the process of adapting teachings or applying the doctrine of skillful means intersects with contemporary conversations regarding hermeneutics. Skillful means or *upaya* can be understood as a traditional term that captures much of what is now included under the rubric of hermeneutics.

> The contemporary approach to the doctrine of skillful means is closely related to the study of hermeneutics. Buddhism is hermeneutical in that it demands that we confront and come to understand the message of the *Sugata*; it is hermeneutical in that it requires a reinterpretation of the world within which we find ourselves and equally a redefinition of ourselves within that world; and it is hermeneutical in that it will not allow us to remain silent, but demands that we enunciate, that is, interpret for others, the message and the reality with which we have struggled.[70]

Kapstein orients us to the communicative and interpretive nature of the Buddhist path in the passage above. He first speaks of a two-part process, confronting and coming to understand the dharma. When he uses the term confront in this way, he indicates that the dharma is something we need to grapple with, especially when it seems to contradict culturally dominant perspectives. The dharma requires that the practitioner cannot simply accept the teachings upon hearing them but rather needs to deeply examine their significance. Learners must come to see for themselves and take agency in their

[70] Matthew Kapstein. *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 166.

learning process. Practitioners begin by interpreting the foundational teachings of the Buddha in terms of receiving and clarifying the content of their message.

Second, practitioners learn to understand their lives through the perspective of the teachings and spiritual practices that they take up. Coming to understand the dharma is far more than a conceptual process as the dharma can only to be understood when it is taken up as an operative element in the practitioner's understanding and approach to life. Interpretation in the context of engaging with dharma is far more than the study of texts; it is the use of the teachings to interpret one's own life. Not only does the practitioner need to learn to interpret the world around her in the context of the dharma but she also must reinterpret herself in that process. This means that the relationship to the practitioner's physical experience, thoughts, emotions, relationships and patterns of interaction all become newly understood through her relationship to the dharma.

In this process, the practitioner finds herself reinterpreting who she is and how she exists in relation to others. Eventually she organically finds herself in the position of communicating what has been learned so that others might benefit and in so doing the learner becomes a teacher. The process of learning as a student thereby informs one's understanding of how others learn, thus informing one's ways of teaching when in a teaching role.

At the First Council at Rajagrha following the Buddha's death (around the beginning of the 5th Century, B.C.)[71], when the vast number of the Buddha's

[71] Paul Williams, *Buddhism, Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005), 107.

teachings were purported to have first been gathered into one collection by the assembly of Arhats, seemingly contradictory teachings attributed to the Buddha were uncovered.[7273] The doctrine of skillful means was asserted as the principle used to explain the fundamental integrity underlying the apparent incoherence between various expressions of dharma. In other words, the notion of skillful means was used to explain why there were so many different expressions of dharma attributed to the Buddha. The doctrine of skillful means is used to account for the necessity of a contextualized learning process that includes variance within it according to what is needed in various contexts and for engaging different types of students. The doctrine of skillful means indicates that the priority for Buddhist education is to replicate the experience of wisdom (and in the *Mahayana* tradition also compassion) and to do this a variety of methods of teaching must be used to speak into different contexts.

According to Davidson, "in hermeneutics, the term [skillful means] explains apparent contradictions among the Buddha's teachings as rooted in his skillfully teaching his listeners what they needed to hear at a particular time, so that they would persevere on the path and eventually see things properly."[74] This indicates that the doctrine of skillful means not only allows for a diversity of expressions, but it also ranks them according to criteria established within the various schools.

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[72] Ronald M. Davidson. *Tibetan Renaissance : Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[73] There is not only widespread disagreement about the dates of the First Council, but some contemporary scholars (such as Paul Williams in Mahayana Buddhism; The Doctrinal Foundations) assert that there was no historical event of the First Council and the notion of the Council is a device aimed at establishing a canon from among competing claims.

[74]Buswell, Robert, "An Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism" in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* ed. by Ronald M. Davidson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 292.

Davidson's chapter on the "Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism" provides specific examples of how Buddhism has been inculturated since the time of the Buddha. Language has been a primary issue from the beginning of the Buddhist teachings. As far as the Buddha's stance about which of the many possible languages would be appropriate to use to recite the Sutras and Vinaya (ethical code), he is said to have supported the use of local dialects rather than codifying a single formal language.[75] This is the case because he was concerned with serviceability of the teachings for the needs of a variety of practitioners. Davidson makes the point, however, that since early Buddhism there has been "tension between the more conservative masters of Buddhist doctrine and those who, either tacitly or not, were open to the prospect of the reinterpretation and recodification of the dharma preached by the Tathagata."[76] This tension between adaptation and authenticity must be kept in mind when altering content and methods for presenting dharma.

2.A Sources of Authority for Adaptations of Dharma

The example of the historical Buddha is used as a touchstone for authorizing new presentations of dharma. In his ongoing effort to make the dharma accessible, the Buddha gave new teachings and updated his ideas throughout his lifetime. In this way, he provided an example of realization that unfolds in dynamic and ongoing pedagogy. During his lifetime, the Buddha sent

[75] Ibid., 293.
[76] Ibid.

out his realized students to transmit dharma. He actively supported and endorsed their teaching as “his representatives” or as the embodiment of the same wisdom he himself had so thoroughly integrated.[77] It is essential to recognize that from the beginning of Buddhism, spiritual insight has served as the primary basis for teaching.[78] Adaptations of the tradition have been generated out of the exchange between realized teachers and students and the Buddha supported this process during his own lifetime.

Davidson points out that “during the more than forty years of the Buddha’s teaching career, there were many monks acting as authoritative teachers of the doctrine throughout the kingdom of Magadha and its border areas.”[79] The many teachers had formed a “network” to continually check in about the ongoing distribution of new teachings by the Buddha and Arhats.[80] Davidson describes this dynamic as “two processes” one of “elaboration” or continual distribution and reformulation of the teachings and the second of “consolidation” or systemization and codification of these various and even contradictory teachings. This entire process rests on the notion of the participants involved having the power through their skillful means of adapting while remaining true to the constitutive elements of the tradition.

According to Davidson, this process rested on these three elements all of which are related to the doctrine of skillful means. The first point is that “the dharma could be learned from a disciple’s preaching of the word of the Buddha.”

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

The second point is that “a person in the presence of the Buddha could be inspired by the power and presence of the Buddha to speak the dharma in his own words.” The third point is that “the rubric of dharma was very early extended to the teaching of the immediate disciples of the Buddha, the Arya (realized) Sravakas, whether or not the presence of the Buddha inspired their preaching.”[81]

Standards of authentication for the Buddhist teachings were drawn from the life of the Buddha and the need to codify his many teachings arose after his death. Davidson suggests that this process of creating a canon of teachings emerged “in accordance with certain rules of criticism that were to be applied during the discussions of whether or not a text or interpretation was to be considered authoritative.”[82] One of the primary “rules” of interpretation was described by Davidson as the mandate for “following dharma and not individuals” or putting the primacy of transmission on practice and teachings rather than on the identity of the person who taught it.

Davidson points out that in the Mahayana period four criteria for determining “inspired speech” emerged. First, the teaching had to be “significant” and “not nonsense.” It had to be “endowed with doctrinal principle and not its opposite.” Not only did the teaching need to be in keeping with dharma, it had to serve to improve the embodied realization of those who received the teaching. In other words it is inspired speech, “if it destroys the defilements and does not cause their increase.” Dharma could be recognized in its capacity to lessen the three poisons. Dharma could be recognized because it revealed the empty

[81] Ibid., 294.
[82] Ibid., 297.

nature of dualistic habits of mind or, "if it illuminates the benefits of nirvana and does not increase the faults of samsara."[83] These four principles can be used to analyze whether a given teaching is skillful.

Davidson emphasizes the notion of efficacy as a criterion for consideration in the authentication of new presentations of teachings. For example,

> While the dharma, or more precisely the dharma spoken by the Buddha, could define the enlightenment of the Buddha, its primary goal was to develop the same quality of realization in others. In the Pali Nikayas this characteristic of the dharma is called its ability to generate the fruit of mendicany (samannaphala) and is considered to be unique to the buddhadharma. This unique ability of the dharma was both its ultimate benefit and its final touchstone. That which does not confer liberation could not be considered dharma.[84]

In the Pali Sutras discussed in Chapter 2, a common theme is that the Buddha's teaching engendered new depth of insight in the listeners. Davidson points out that it is this capacity of the dharma to generate realization in others, that is one of the main markers of its effectiveness and its authenticity. Teachings are considered authentic, from this perspective, if they produce the intended result of growth in spiritual maturation.

Mahayana movements emerged four to five centuries after the Buddha lived, and were based on texts (like the *Vimalakirti Sutra*) that purported to be teachings by Gotama Buddha. Davidson cites a variety of methods of establishing authenticity in the early Mahayana period. One of the methods used to authenticate the Mahayana tradition was the strategy to "identify Mahayana in the abstract with Mahayana in the particular: a vindication of the theory of the

[83] Ibid., 310.
[84] Ibid., 295.

bodhisattva career implied that the scriptures of the Great Vehicle were the word of the Buddha.[85] Because the bodhisattva path as a concept has merit, the argument went, the scriptures associated with this soteriology were therefor legitimate. Another argument used to defend the authenticity of the Mahayana scriptures was the occurrence of an alleged second council at Rajagrha, in which the Mahayana teachings emerged. Thus the commonly accepted occurrence of the earlier council was invoked to add an air of legitimacy to the Mahayana canon.

Another example of a method meant to establish the authenticity of the Mahayana sutras can be found by attributing the recitation of the Mahayana sutras to well known disciples of the Buddha, such as Ananda. Several other arguments offered included that the Buddha himself would have predicted the Mahayana and warned people about it as a threat if it truly was one just as he issued other warnings about the decline of his teachings in times to come.

Another, more ubiquitous explanation of the origin of the Mahayana involved what Davidson refers to as the notion of "simultaneous origins." This is the idea that "While the Buddha was preaching the Sravakayana to his disciples at Sravasti and elsewhere, he was also teaching the Mahayana."[86] This line of thinking corresponds to the premise that the skillful means of the Buddha placed him outside of the normal constraints of time and space. The Buddha was also able to offer multiple teachings simultaneously according to what would be effective for the students. For some students, such as the Sravakas, a particular

[85] Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance : Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*, 306.
[86] Ibid., 309.

approach to dharma was helpful. For other students, the Mahayana teachings of the bodhisattva path and the inseparability of samsara and nirvana were more suitable, and thus the Buddha taught both.

The Mahayana is also claimed to be legitimate because it cures specific types of defilements. As discussed earlier, because the Mahayana is effective and therefore "it must be the word of the Buddha since only the Buddha's word can serve as the proper antidote."[87] The argument here is that the Mahayana's nondual approach is an effective "antidote for the various defilements (klesa) by virtue of its status as the basis for the arising of all nonconceptual gnosis."[88] Therefore the nondual Mahayana dharma is authentic because it works. Teachings are true if they are significant, from this perspective, and if they contain ideas consistent with increased wisdom. It is dharma, if it "destroys the defilements (klesahapaka) and does not cause their increase and … if it illuminates the benefits of nirvana and does not increase the faults of samsara."[89] The emphasis here is clearly on the efficacy of teachings as a rationale for establishing their authenticity.

Lopez also addresses the issue of efficacy when he considers the question of how to regard contradictory teachings or even teachings that are ultimately untrue. He claims, "Because many of his disciples were emotionally and intellectually unable to comprehend his true teaching, it is said that the Buddha often taught what was ultimately false but provisionally true in order

[87] Ibid., 310.
[88] Ibid., 310.
[89] Ibid., 310.

compassionately to lead all, eventually to the final truth of enlightenment."[90] The teachings of the Buddha were provisionally true in that they supported growth in the direction of liberation. These teachings helped students to practice and this made them true. They had a positive effect and this implied that they were skillful. Despite the fact that the teachings were ultimately untrue in that they did not express the deepest truth of nonduality, they served a useful function of supporting progress and thus could be understood to be dharma.

Lopez emphasizes the expediency of skillful teachings. He suggests that "For the Buddhist exegete, original understanding is not the issue; the goal is the communication and eventual replication of the content of the Buddha's enlightenment."[91] For Buddhist hermeneutics, in other words, the primary issue is whether a teaching functions for the student in a way that supports the growth of nonconceptual wisdom.

Drawing on these contemporary scholars, I would like to highlight three principles for evaluating authenticity of interpretations. First, adaptations of teaching methods and/or content should further the fundamental goals of increasing wisdom and compassion in students. Second, teaching methods should respond to the experience and concerns of students. Teachers should not simply repeat the content and method that they themselves found helpful but rather should be able to be flexible according to the needs of their students. Third, teaching authority resides in those who have embodied realization of the principles of dharma. From the time of the Buddha, Buddhist teachers have

[90] Lopez, *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, 50.
[91] Ibid., 52.

displayed a diversity of personalities and styles. In contemporary times, we should continue to proactively bring forward teachers who embody a diversity of embodied perspectives.

2.B The Four Reliances

The early Buddhist traditional teaching on the four reliances engages the issue of evaluating whether an interpretation of a text is authentic. The four reliances have remained normative throughout Buddhist history. [92] These four reliances can be found in the Sutra of the Four Refuges of early Buddhist tradition, which was included in 4th century systematic treatises such as the *Abhidharmakosa*[93] and the *Abhidharmakosa-vyakhya by Vasubandhu.*[94]

These four reliances are summarized by Lamotte as follows.

(1) The doctrine (dharma) is the refuge and not the person (purusa).

(2) The spirit (artha) is the refuge and not the letter (vyanjana).

(3) The sutra of precise meaning (nitartha) is the refuge, not (the sutra) the meaning of which requires interpretation (neyartha).

(4) Direct knowledge (jnana) is the refuge and not discursive consciousness (vijnana).

[92] Lamotte, Etienne "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Varanasi: Jainendra Press, 1988), 11.
[93] Vasubandhu, the author of the Abhidharmakosa is thought to have lived around 400-480 CE, however these dates are highly contested.
[94] Lamotte "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, 12.

The first reliance, according to Lamotte, asserts that a text cannot be claimed to be authentic merely based on the assertion that the Buddha stated it. The content "cannot be dependent on human authority, however respectable, since experience shows that human evidence is contradictory and changeable; adherence should be based on personal reasoning (yukti), on what one has oneself known (jnata), seen (drsta) and grasped (vidita)."[95] In other words, the text is legitimized because it is reasonable, not merely because of its alleged source.

However, reason is not always the ultimate arbiter, such as "in the case of a beginner who is unable to understand by himself the teaching which has been given to him, faith in the master's word is a provisional necessity."[96] Beginning practitioners need to rely on a teacher because as established above in the contexts of both the Pali Canon and the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, dharma can sound counter to expectations. It is not reasonable to expect that a person without practice experience could discern based on their dualistic worldview what is true or false. This reliance on the teacher in the beginning of one's path is meant to be verified in one's own lived experience especially through the knowledge gained through the application of practice over time.[97]

The second reliance, as presented in the *Catuhpratisaranasutra*, asserts that "The meaning is single and invariable, while the letter is multiple and

[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 13.
[97] This is why the Tibetan tradition offers the advice to carefully check a teacher for a period of time before formally declaring oneself their student.

infinitely variable."[98] This second reliance explains how it is possible for there to be such a diversity of expressions of the principles of dharma. The second reliance insists that these various expressions need to be in accord with both conventional and absolute truth. They cannot uphold one without the other. Another mark of authentic dharma is that it needs to be accessible to the student.

This second reliance emphasizes that one who has simply memorized the content of teachings cannot transmit dharma. The second reliance emphasizes that words alone are not enough for good understanding. The student must seek the underlying meaning(s) that the words express. According to Lamotte, this indicates "purely literal exegesis is therefore bound to fail."[99] But at the same time, the proper expression of dharma is important and teachers need to present information meticulously. A teacher should seek feedback from someone "capable of judging whether he is right or wrong," whenever it is possible.[100] Lamotte suggests, "If scholars counseled the search for the spirit with so much insistence, it is because the meaning of the texts often lacks clarity and needs to be interpreted."[101]

The third reliance speaks to the problem of reconciling the multiplicity of expressions of dharma. This reliance offers a key to interpreting the apparent contradiction between teachings. The third reliance suggests that meanings pertaining to definitive or ultimate reality and experience of that reality trump

[98] Lamotte "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, 13.

[99] Ibid., 15.
[100] Ibid., 14.
[101] Ibid., 16.

meanings pertaining to the relative truth. When interpreting texts, the reader must remember that the Buddha "did not restrict himself to exactness of wording when expressing himself" and would alter his presentation based on the needs of the audience.[102] Here, Lamotte cites Nagarjuna's presentation of the various categories of adaptations the Buddha commonly made to his teachings in the *Treatise*. These are summarized as follows. The Buddha is noted to have been willing to adopt the "current idiom" and spoke in accessible language. The Buddha also spoke in terms of the worldview of the audience by engaging their cosmology, religious beliefs etc. When he taught he engaged the particular issue or proclivity of the student. For example, "to the sensouss (ragacarita), he taught the contemplation of a decomposing corpse (asubhabhavana); to vindictive and hate-filling men (dvesacarita), he recommended thoughts of goodwill (maitricitta) regarding those close to one and so on."[103] The key point is that when students were ready to hear teachings directly pertaining to ultimate truth (as that term was understood in diverse Buddhist traditions), the Buddha gave such teaching. Such teaching on the ultimate truth trumps teaching that he gave to students ready only to hear teaching pertaining to conventional truth. For example, the Buddha spoke of persons and things in many contexts (conventional truth), as if they existed as they appear, as self-existent entities (interpretable, neyartha).[104] In other contexts, he broke persons and things down into impermanent, dependently arisen components of the five skandhas, thereby pointing to ultimate truth as understood by pre-mahayana abhidharma schools. Those are the

[102] Ibid., 21.
[103] Ibid., 22.
[104] Ibid., 16.

"precise"(nitartha) teachings for those schools.[105] In the Madhyamaka school, sutra passages directly expressing truths of emptiness, thusness, non-duality were the "precise teachings", (nitartha) directly pertaining to ultimate truth (here understood as emptiness. On the other hand, teachings in the Pali sutras about the five skandhas would be considered interpretable (neyartha, not directly teaching ultimate truth).[106] [107] [108]

The fourth reliance, asserts "sound hermeneutics are based not on a theoretical or conceptual understanding of the noble truths, but on direct, non-concpetual knowledge." Conceptual knowledge "in nature, remain[s] blemished by delusion" whereas direct non-conceptual experience "constitutes the single and indispensable instrument of true exegesis."[109] Conceptual knowledge and dualistic expressions of dharma are regarded as a tool, which facilitate the trainings that in turn lead to non-conceptual, non-dual wisdom. The fourth reliance emphasizes that the direct experience of nondual wisdom is the only ultimately valid form of knowledge. Nondual wisdom is the highest expression of dharma.

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[105] Ibid., 16.
[106] These principles of nitartha and neyartha as they are presented above come by way of John Makransky's clarification on earlier iterations of this Chapter.
[107] Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism: An Overview of its Philosophy and Practice ed. Geshe Thupten Jinpa. (Sommerville: Wisdom, 1995), 25. The Dalai Lama describes the teaching of the third reliance in this statement. "In Mahayana Buddhism a distinction is made between two categories of scriptures: *interpretable* scriptures, which are those whose meaning can, at best, be taken as provisional and therefore require further interpretation beyond their literal meaning; and *definitive* scriptures, which are those scriptures that can be taken at face value as literally true." The Dalai Lama's point here is that the nondual expression of the dharma, which is a precise teaching trumps the relative expressions of the dharma.
[108]Blumenthal, James, *Śāntarakṣita, Rgyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen, Madhyamakālaṅkāra* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2004), 184**.** Definitive scriptures address "the ultimate nature of reality" whereas scriptures that discuss relative reality are understood as "interpretable.
[109] Ibid., 24.

The entry defining *upaya* in the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* "refers to methods skillfully employed by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to assist sentient beings toward enlightenment..."[110] This aspect of *upaya* refers to the principle that the ability to transmit the experience of dharma to others is understood as an outflow of the teacher's spiritual realization. In other words, a being that embodies wisdom and compassion enjoys the ability to evoke these capacities in others. The more intensely a Buddha or Bodhisattva experiences these qualities the more power he/she has to evoke them in others. Buddha Sakyamuni is understood by the tradition as having immeasurable power to awaken beings because of the depth of his wisdom, which manifests spontaneously in his ability to effectively teach beings.

Corless echoes the significance of a hermeneutic based in spiritual realization and applies it to the contemporary North American context. "An American Buddhist voice," he argues, must emerge out of deep formation in a tradition not just out of a conceptual familiarity with it. In other words, he argues, "the Dharmologist [Buddhist theologian] must insist that for the mind to investigate reality without mis-taking it, it must be properly trained, and that this training does not consist in stuffing the mind with information but in sharpening, clearing, and transforming it through the triple practice of sila (morality), samadhi (concentration), and prajna (wisdom)" (Corless 104). This understanding preserves the traditional Buddhist notion of translation and interpretation as an

[110]Keown, Damien, "Skilful Means" in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* ed. by Robert E. Buswell (Fair Oaks: Gaci, 2003), 871.

act that is based on spiritual experience not just intellectual capacity. It also provides a challenge to those functioning within the academy by insisting that the hermeneutical endeavor requires a broader skill set than capacities in Buddhist languages, history, doctrine and so on.

In addition to requiring that the Buddhist hermeneut be trained in the practices of the tradition, he also suggests that the Buddhist interpreter should have insight into their cultural context. Corless insists, "skillful translation of terms is not enough to indigenize the Dharma, we need to find out how it might best fit with American culture."[111] A Buddhist practitioner/scholar is thus responsible to their broader context including awareness of the cultural, political, social, artistic, and economic elements of their world so that they can successfully practice skillful interpretations. Implicit in Corless's work is a notion of scholarship in which hermeneutics are used at the service of a tradition and includes in it normative and constructive purposes.

Makransky points to a complicating factor in contemporary Buddhist hermeneutics, that legitimization of new teachings have traditionally been rooted in an attribution to the historical Buddha.[112] Despite the fact that skillful means provides a warrant for adaptation, the pattern of the tradition has been (and largely continues to be) an ahistorical presentation of all true dharma as having

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[111]Corless, "Hermeneutics and Dharmology: Finding an American Buddhist Voice" in *Buddhist Theology : Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* eds. Roger R. Jackson, and John J. Makransky (London: Routledge Curzon, 2000), 102.

[112] Lamotte "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, 11. Lamotte, summarizes the "rules for the assessment of textual authenticity according to the minds of Buddhist scholars" as the following. "For a text to be considered as the "word of the Buddha," it must be based on the authority of the Buddha himself, of a formally constituted community, one of several particularly learned "elders"; it should further be in harmony with the doctrinal texts (sutra), the disciplinary collections (vinaya), and the spirit of Buddhist philosophy."

originated from the Buddha (for authority) even if a particular teaching emerged after his death.

In the past, as discussed in Davidson's article above, there were a variety of methods of legitimizing adaptations. But alongside these other strategies, the traditions also claimed that the Buddha himself was the source of any new development. Mahayana scriptures, for example, were attributed to the Buddha despite the fact that they emerged centuries after his passing. "Mahayana *sutras*, although they appear centuries after the historical Buddha, use a literary device to fulfill that criterion: they mythologize history to place the scripture back into the time of Sakyamuni Buddha, so he can inspire and certify it."[113] Within this structure, the Buddha was often portrayed as a witness of one of his disciples who actually proclaimed the sutra. The Buddha's role was to endorse the content put forth. Implicit in this shift was the premise that it is the "disciple's own appropriation of the Buddha's teaching in practice experience which actually empowers him or her to stand in for the historical Buddha Sakyamuni as the teacher of the new scripture."[114] In other words, the Buddha's presence gave further credence to the veracity of the teaching. But the teaching itself was also understood to be legitimate because it was rooted in the realization of the teacher who proclaimed it. It was not acceptable, however, to strip the new sutras of their connection to the historical Buddha.

[113] Makransky. John, "Historical Consciousness as an Offering to the Trans-Historical Buddha", in *Buddhist Theology : Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* eds. Roger R. Jackson, and John J. Makransky (London: Routledge Curzon, 2000),112-113.
[114] Ibid., 114.

Makransky points out that historically, the doctrine of skillful means "provided a hermeneutic to organize and order hierarchically all the teachings and practices from past Buddhist traditions in relation to the present, in systematic, sectarian schemes. Other schools of Buddhist thought are labeled as *upaya,* a ladder of skillful means that leads upward to the teaching of one's own school as highest."[115] The doctrine of skillful means helped Buddhist teachers to systematize the diversity of teachings including seeming contradictions and varying points of emphasis. It also enabled teachers to classify teachings into systems that celebrated their own teachings as the most profound. They did not deny that the other teachings were valid but rather framed them as merely provisional. The teachings of other schools of Buddhism were contextualized as only expressing partial rather than ultimate truth.

Makransky suggests that educators, scholars, and practitioners need to affirm "the inevitability of new authentic embodiments and expressions of Dharma in our culture, emergent now and in the future, as a phenomena in long continuity with the ancient process of ongoing (never closable) Mahayana revelation that has always been specific to time and place."[116] This declaration refers to the need to acknowledge that the unfolding or "emergent" character of tradition is in keeping with how dharma has always responded to new cultures. The dharma today must continue to respond to its cultural context as expressed in individuals and communities.

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[115] John Makransky, class handout for Theology 505 on Jan. 20, 2009.
[116] Makransky, "Historical Consciousness as an Offering to the Transhistorical Buddha" by John Makransky in *Buddhist Theology : Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*), 113.

For this reason, Makransky argues additional modes of authenticating change in the tradition that acknowledge the historical consciousness of our time and place. He proposes shifting attention away from ahistorical means of establishing authenticity and toward "the ways diverse communities have appropriated the Dharma in practice experience accompanied by doctrinal change." He emphasizes that turning our attention to the earlier manifestations of adaptation and the criteria that permitted them (some of which are summarized above throughout section 2 of this chapter) will "sensit[ize] us to the possibility of new expressions already emerging and those to come."[117]

In short, this section presented perspectives from within the Buddhist tradition on the topic of how to evaluate the authenticity of adaptations of dharma. The first of the four reliances indicates that the multiplicity of expressions of dharma can be reconciled by relying on personal experience in conversation with a qualified teacher. The second reliance emphasizes that teachers are qualified primarily through their embodied realization of dharma and also from their ability to express the intent rather than just the literal content of dharma. The third reliance indicates that teachers should rely on both relative and ultimate perspectives when teaching dharma but that the ultimate perspective trumps the relative. The particular presentation of dharma should be influenced by the needs and capacities of the student. The fourth reliance suggests that teachers should prioritize the direct experience of nondual wisdom above all else.

[117] Ibid., 127.

Corless's work adds to the conversation the crucial role that critical scholarship can play in preparing teachers to recognize points of cultural relevance that can guide them in the process of inculturating and translating their teaching. He also emphasizes that the process of inculturation can be best understood by those who have engaged in the formative practices of the Buddhist tradition and have experiential as well as academic insight into their functions and meanings. Makransky points out that contemporary teachers need to find culturally relevant means of authorizing teachings in addition to traditional ones. He emphasizes that situating the process of inculturation in the historical-cultural context of the Buddhist tradition can add tremendous insight into the process of contemporary issues.

This section has established that the inculturation of Buddhist teachings requires teachers to hold awareness of both relative and ultimate perspectives in their interactions with students. Teachers should prioritize the growth of nondual awareness (or wisdom) in their students. But to support the emergence of this wisdom, teachers need to be aware of the influence that cultural patterns have on their students. Having investigated the early and Mahayana Buddhist tradition as well as contemporary voices, the next section weaves these strands together into a summary of Buddhist perspectives on the doctrine of skillful means and its implications for the inculturation of pedagogical processes in contemporary North American contexts.

3. Distilling the Doctrine of Skillful Means

3.A From the Pali Canon

- Knowledge in the various traditions of Buddhism is understood to be primarily experiential. Theoretical or conceptual learning is at the service of this experiential realization. This has deep resonance with American traditions of education, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
- Skillful Means is closely equated with the *process* of coming to knowledge, the *practices* that bring a person to this experience of knowing, and also the content of the teachings that facilitate experiential learning.
- The teacher's capacity to transmit dharma is contingent on her own realization and depth of practice. This is a key issue for religious education, as it indicates that the transmission of Buddhism, at least in part, requires a teacher who has experienced the fruition of the path.
- Different teachers have differing strengths in their realization and teaching capacity. There is a distinction made between the capacities of teachers. There is also a fundamental distinction drawn between the skillful means of the Arhats versus the Buddha himself.
- Variation between learners requires a multiplicity of curricula and pedagogies.
- There are dynamics of reciprocal learning. Students learn from one another as well as from the teacher. This emphasis on dialogical learning is congruent with the Western emphasis on conversation and communal learning.

- Repeatedly, the Buddha is seen transforming the ideas that a student comes to him with and uses them as an opportunity to provoke both personal and social transformation.
- The student is expected to be an active learner once she has entered the path. A failure to do so is described as being like a patient who has been prescribed a medication but does not take it. The student bears responsibility for engaging in the activities and practices that the teacher has recommended.
- The learner is embedded in a learning community that is utterly indispensible to her ability to mature spiritually.

The early Buddhist teachings emphasize that the Buddha and other teachers who exemplify the doctrine of skillful means have tremendous capacity for effective teaching. Skillful means is equated with a capacity to recognize the needs of learners, no matter what their religious or cultural background may be, and to respond to them in effective ways. The Pali Canon also emphasizes that liberative knowledge is rooted in embodied experience. Meditation is prioritized as a form of experience that can lead to not just knowledge but wisdom or insight. In the Sutras, there are also a variety of examples of the transformative impact that education has on learners. Buddhist education is meant to engender shifts in both perspective and behavior, as we see in the examples of the impact that the Buddha has on the people who engage with his teachings.

3.B From Vimalakirti Sutra/ Early Mahayana Context

- In the Mahayana period, a new emphasis was placed on the capacity for more people, specifically bodhisattvas, to embody tremendous capacity for skillful means.
- The teacher repeatedly pushes others beyond a quiescent practice that is narrow in scope.
- The learning process is extremely challenging and often uncomfortable for students.
- The core tenant of Mahayana philosophy, the inseparability of wisdom and compassion, influences skillful means.
- The inseparability of *samsara* and *nirvana* emerges as a core theme in *Mahayana* expressions of skillful means. In other words, because realization of *nirvana* can be communicated in and through *samsara*, *samsara* no longer needs to be avoided or renounced.
- Magical capacities are connected with expression of skillful means in Pali and Mahayana sutras. The capacity to operate outside the physical and conceptual constraints that bind ignorant beings is seen as a display of skillful means.
- Choosing to teach from the various vehicles should not be about which sect the teacher most identifies with as his/her own preference. Rather the choice

among the various ways of expressing dharma should arise out of the needs of the student.

- Vimalakirti could engage any type of person in any context, all on the basis of his profound realization and his correspondingly vast skillful means.
- The body of a great bodhisattva is understood to be a means of transmitting dharma and helping beings. The body becomes an opportunity for freedom for oneself and others.
- A bodhisattva is unafraid to deeply challenge people he meets by pointing out the limitations of dualistic perspectives.
- Efficacy is a fundamental criteria for establishing the authenticity of new presentations of teachings.
- The four 'reliances' are a useful mechanism for interpreting dharma. Recognizing that the nondual expression of dharma trumps the dualistic one is essential.
- A Buddhist practitioner/scholar is responsible to their broader context including awareness of the cultural, political, social, artistic, and economic elements of their world so that they can successfully practice skillful interpretations.
- Contemporary times may require alternative modes of authenticating change in the tradition that acknowledge the historical consciousness of our time and place.
- The evaluation of the adaptation of teachings in contemporary times can be guided by knowledge of historical efforts in this arena.

In sum, as we consider the material presented in Chapters 2 and 3 we can see that much in Buddhist traditional pedagogy can be drawn out and used in conversation with American traditions of education. Both emphasize the imperative for the teacher to respond to the needs of individual learners and to cultural contexts. Effective teachers recognize that students differ from one another in their learning needs. Therefor teachers play a vital role in the learning process, as they are charged to find points of relevance that engage the learners.

A second primary point of resonance between Buddhist and learner-centered pedagogy is the primary role that experiential learning plays in the educative experience. Experiential realization, in Buddhist pedagogy, is prioritized above theoretical learning just as it is in learner-centered pedagogies. Moreover, Buddhist pedagogy emphasizes the process of translating experience into lived wisdom. The effectiveness of the teacher is seen as largely relates to her own embodied wisdom and capacity to respond to the needs of the learner.

The third key point drawn out of the early and Mahayana texts relating to pedagogy is the emphasis on transformative learning. In the Pali Canon and the Vimalakirti Sutra there is ample evidence to suggest that learning is seen as a dynamic encounter between teacher and student that leads to both social and personal transformation. The learning community and the interactions between students are also seen as essential components to transformative learning processes.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the Buddhist tradition for insight regarding the process of inculturation. We have established core themes of regarding skillful means from within the tradition, which can be drawn upon to engage the question of what constitutes successful adaptation of Buddhist teachings and practices. These three core themes are that Buddhist pedagogy is responsive, experiential, and transformative. Next, in Chapter 4, we will turn our attention to the current landscape of Buddhist-derived teachings as they are applied in secular and interreligious contexts. My intent here is to draw out principles and guidelines for a philosophy of education that can guide the process of effective inculturation into the contemporary North American secular context.

CHAPTER IV

AN OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF BUDDHIST ENGAGEMENT IN THE 'SECULAR' WORLD

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents an overview of how Buddhist-derived meditation practices are used in secular contexts in the United States, with a focus on pedagogical implications. In this chapter, I will situate the larger trend of using meditation in support of improved physical and mental health. Some of the primary health benefits addressed by meditation include mitigating the physical and psychological impacts of stress, preventing and treating compassion fatigue in caregivers, and supporting treatment of mental illnesses like anxiety, depression, and post traumatic stress disorder.

The various contexts where meditation is taught call for different methods of pedagogy. Settings where meditation is used to meet people with mental health issues require different pedagogical processes than settings where healthcare providers exploring methods to treat burnout receive meditation instruction. This chapter looks at the functions that meditation is intended to serve, and draws out present practices in applying meditation to various secular settings. Based on this exploration, additional guiding principles to advance the process of pedagogical inculturation are enumerated. Essentially, the focus in Chapter 4 on pedagogical trends in teaching meditation in contemporary, American secular settings builds on the pedagogical principles established in

Chapters 2 and 3 that were drawn from the Buddhist tradition. This conversation between traditional and contemporary teaching processes in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 points to the dialectical nature of the process of inculturation.

1. Meditation As a Resource for Better Health

1.A Overview of Meditation Research

Meditation techniques are increasingly applied in a variety of clinical and educational settings to meet the needs of a diverse set of physical and psychological social issues. Currently, there are 10 million Americans and hundreds of millions of people in the world who practice meditation.[1] Meditation and Mindfulness are often associated with Buddhism but actually all major religions have a practice of meditation or contemplation. There are a variety of techniques that fall under the umbrella of meditation, and the functions of meditation are diverse. Not only are there a host of meditation techniques, but also there are many methods employed in teaching these techniques. Little has been done by way of enumerating the types of pedagogical practices used for the various techniques. Moreover, even less has been written about the rationale behind the diversity in teaching methods, or about ways to interpret the efficacy of the various approaches in the diverse contexts in which they are used.

Defining the concept 'meditation' becomes an important question, especially when the term is used to refer to different types of practices that are undertaken for a variety of purposes. Meditation is a process that in its most

[1] Walsh, R. & Shapiro, S, "The Meeting of Meditative Disciplines and Western Psychology: A Mutually Enriching Dialogue," *American Psychologist* 61, no. 3 (2006): 227.

fundamental form engages the use of attention in a specific and intentional way. Peter Harvey describes meditation as "a skill akin to learning to play a musical instrument: it is learning how to 'tune' and 'play' the mind…"[2] Teaching meditation, therefore, requires an attentiveness to supporting the individual's capacity to recognize when the mind is dull or agitated, and how to negotiate the various mental states with practice over time. Harvey also suggests that "like gardening: one cannot force plants to grow, but one can assiduously provide them with the right conditions, so that they develop naturally."[3] Again, this points to a pedagogy that supports commitment to process.

Teachers of meditation, like music teachers, have skills or techniques to offer their students. But these techniques are regarded as building blocks, like scales for the musician, which must become integrated in the embodied experience of the students. It is through this embodiment that the skill of formal meditation process becomes a dynamic, integrated approach to mental processes that is applicable in any situation. In this way, pedagogy for meditation focuses not only on formal meditation practice but also the application of the insight gained through these formal practices in the rest of lived experience.

The goal of meditation, from the perspective of some, is "a gradual increase in calm and awareness."[4] Calm, here, has to do with equanimity in the sense of increased capacity for flexibility in responding to internal and external stimuli. Calm also relates to the physiological calming effects of meditation, which will be examined more closely below. Awareness, in this context, means clarity

[2] Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism,* 244.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

with regard to what is happening with one's internal states as well as clarity with respect to one's experience of social relationships. Awareness is described by Christopher Germer as the result, or fruit, of training in mindfulness. He suggests that awareness is a capacity "that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment."[5]

Meditation, in other words, is a training that leads a person to experience the world in a way that is not strictly limited by habits and reactivity. This kind of awareness is "the opposite of being on autopilot; the opposite of daydreaming, it is paying attention to what is salient in the present moment."[6] Teaching meditation, from this perspective, is targeted not only at building a skill of watching breath or calming the mind. The purpose of teaching meditation is to provide an effective tool to transform fundamentally dissatisfying habits of thought, emotional response, and embodiment.

Mindfulness as a technique is the best-known and most researched approach to meditation. Christopher Germer parses out the definition of Mindfulness and differentiates the various forms of meditation from one another.[7] Mindfulness, says Germer, "is an English translation of the Pali word *sati… Sati* connotes *awareness, attention,* and *remembering.*"[8] He suggests, "A basic

[5] Germer, Christopher K, "Mindfulness: What Is It? What does it Matter?" in *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy,* ed. Christopher K. Germer, Ronald D. Siegel, and Paul R. Fulton (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 6-7.
[6] Ibid., 6.
[7] Ibid., 15.
[8] Ibid., 5.

definition of *mindfulness* is “moment-by-moment awareness,” which refers to the process of remaining attuned to present experience as it unfolds.[9]

Meditation, however, is a tool that can be used to support Mindfulness or other additional goals like insight. Germer notes that there are “two distinct methods of meditation: insight (*vipasana)* and concentration (*samatha*)” which are “neurologically different practices.” They are distinct in the sense that the concentration practices focus and calm the mind whereas the insight practices are understood to broaden the mind and provide better understanding into the nature of emergent experience. Training in insight meditation techniques “helps us to develop the capacity for relaxed, choiceless awareness in which conscious attention moves instantly and naturally among the changing elements of experience.”[10] In other words, insight meditation is meant to reveal the process of knowing as it unfolds. It is a method to gain insight into the phenomenology of perception. As Andrew Olendzki explains,

> Insight meditation involves some concentration of the mind, but rather than holding awareness steadily on a single object, it focuses in a disciplined way on the *process* of unfolding experience. We attend carefully to the arising of various thoughts and emotions from latent regions of the psyche, their surging into activities of body, speech, and mind, and their passing out of view as the next event occurs.[11]

Insight meditation allows for enhanced precision in recognizing the elements of experience as people train to become aware of the nuances of their physical,

[9] Ibid., 6.
[10] Ibid., 16.
[11] Andrew Olendzki, “Wisdom in Buddhist Psychology” in *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice*, eds. Christopher Germer and Ronald Siegel (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 129.

cognitive, and emotional lives. In this sense, insight meditation can support Dewey's emphasis on building knowledge from experience.

Meditation has been used to address a variety of physical and psychological conditions. Mindfulness Meditation is "a promising form of treatment for several physical and psychological conditions, including stress and mood symptoms in general, anxiety disorders, depression relapse prevention, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, binge eating, substance abuse, and skin related diseases."[12] This is the case because the body has a physical, cognitive, and emotional response to concentration meditation as described in the following passage:

> Major dependable autonomic trends include slowing of breath and heart rate, decrease in oxygen consumption, lowering or stabilization of blood pressure, decrease in skin conductance, and fewer spontaneous skin conductance responses—a pattern of responses suggesting generalized sympathetic inhibition. Electroencephalogram recording during meditation tends toward a steady decrease in initial beta level and an increase in alpha and then theta as the session progresses…[13]

These various physiological indicators are understood to be evidence of physical and mental calming.

Ideally in research the impact of meditation is measured not only through the subjective self-reporting of practitioners, but also by gathering and analyzing the various physical results of meditation. Over the last 30 years a body of research has been accumulating which supports the notion that people who meditate can strengthen or improve various kinds of mental capacities such as

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[12] Ramel et al. "The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Cognitive Processes and Affect in Patients with Past Depression." *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 28, no. 4 (2004): 434

[13] Goleman, D.J. & Schwartz, G.E. . "Meditation as an Intervention in Stress Reactivity." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychotherapy* 44, no. 3 (1976): 456.

concentration, resilience to stress,[14] or affective qualities such as love and compassion.[15]

The wide variety of clinical applications for meditation includes treatment for sleep disorders, for post-traumatic stress, and for chronic pain. Meditation practice also heightens capacity for attention to detail and it has been observed, "some advanced practitioners … detected fleeting facial micro-expressions of emotion more effectively than any other group (including the top scorers—CIA agents)."[16] It appears that training in concentration meditation impacts fundamental perceptual capacities. Researchers have demonstrated that advanced practitioners exhibit "almost complete inhibition of the startle response," which suggests that the calming effects of meditation can be verified in the monitoring of the most basic reflexive systems in the body.[17]

It is essential to recognize that meditation has both immediate and longitudinal impact. Cahn and Pollich demonstrate that "Regular meditation practice can produce relatively short-term states as well as long-term changes in traits."[18] The short-term state of concentration during and after meditation is

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[14] Keng et al. "Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies." *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 6 (2011), 1041-1056. This article summarizes the 30-year history of empirical research on mindfulness as an intervention for psychological issues. As part of the review of empirical research on mindfulness there are sections on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), and other modalities that draw on mindfulness practice.

[15] Hofmann et al. "Loving-kindness and Compassion Meditation: Potential for Psychological Interventions." *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 7 (2011), 1126-1132. This article presents an overview of the methods and empirical research on loving-kindness and compassion meditations. It highlights the impact of these techniques for problems related to interpersonal relationships and depression, social anxiety, and caregiver stress.

[16] Walsh & Shapiro, "The Meeting of Meditative Disciplines and Western Psychology: A Mutually Enriching Dialogue." *American Psychologist* 61, no. 3 (2006): 237.

[17] Ibid.

[18] See Cahn, R.R. & Polich, J. "Meditation States and Traits: Eeg, Erp, and Neuroimaging Studies," *Psychological Bulletin* 132, no. 2 (2006), 181.

accompanied by long-term shifts in personality and resilience. State changes associated with meditation include “a deep sense of calm peacefulness, a cessation or slowing of the mind’s internal dialogue, and experiences of perceptual clarity and conscious awareness merging completely with the object of meditation…” Trait changes for long time meditators “include a deepened sense of calmness, increased sense of comfort, heightened awareness of the sensory field, and a shift in the relationship to thoughts, feelings, and experiences of self… ”[19] This is significant because it demonstrates that meditation does not only impact a person while she is meditating or for a short time after. Meditation can actually shift the habitual mental, emotional, physical, and interpersonal experience of the meditator over time.

Research on the impact of compassion meditation in many contemporary teaching settings has replaced a focus on the traditional philosophical, historical, and cultural context of teachings. In other words, people learning meditation in secular contexts in order to gain health benefits are more prone to be interested in and motivated by information supporting the relevance of meditation to their particular problem. This in turn means that educators may find themselves speaking less about topics like karma or nirvana and more about fMRI scans. Not only does the content of the lessons shift given the interest of students, but the processes of teaching are impacted as well, as will be further explored in Chapter 5.

When the aim of meditation becomes physical and mental well-being, rather than spiritual growth, questions about teaching methods naturally emerge.

[19] Ibid.

According to learner-centered pedagogy, the goals of the learners should drive the process of education. If a learner is interested in reducing back pain, she will not likely be inherently invested in engaging with the philosophical, historical, and cultural elements of the Buddhist tradition as a prerequisite to learning the tools that will mitigate her physical pain. Likewise, if a person suffers from trauma and is motivated to learn meditation in order to find ways to cope with intrusive thoughts or hyper-arousal, she will also likely not be interested in philosophical, historical, and cultural elements of the tradition, at least before she has accessed the tools she perceives as valuable to him in her own suffering.

Moreover, a trauma survivor will require different learning methods than will the person with back-pain. The nuances of the type of pedagogy that may be beneficial for a trauma-survivor will be further explored later in this chapter. At this point, however, it is important to emphasize that the driving concerns of learners have implications for discerning what constitutes effective pedagogical practices.

It is not a straightforward process to strip philosophical, historical, and cultural elements from teachings. For example, instruction in meditation practice requires at least some form of theoretical context so people can understand what they are doing. The theory surrounding meditation instruction must be comprehensible and relevant to the learners, but it also has to dovetail with the process of learning meditation. For this reason, to maintain the depth of the tradition and integrity to its constitutive elements, the process of pedagogical adaptation requires input from traditional perspectives. In other words, the

pedagogical practices enumerated in this chapter need to be put into conversation with the principles derived from the Buddhist tradition in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.A.1 background on compassion meditation

It is important to keep in mind that the range of meditations used in secular contexts is expanding beyond Mindfulness and Insight meditation. In addition to these two categories of meditation, concentration and insight, discussed thus far in this chapter there are also other meditations that use visualization processes to enhance the capacity for qualities such as love, joy, gratitude, and compassion.

Compassion meditation is not widely applied in secular settings at this time; however, its prevalence is currently on the rise.[20] There are various methods used in traditional as well as contemporary teaching processes associated with the cultivation of compassion, love, forgiveness and other positive psychological traits. Germer and Siegel highlight compassion training as a form of meditation, which has complementary yet distinctive applications from Mindfulness practices.

> Childhood attachment styles can impact the capacity for compassion in adulthood (Gillath, Shaver, & Mukilincer, 2005), but even those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles can increase their compassion levels after being primed with words, memories, or stories of secure attachment (Carnelley & Rowe, 2007, 2010). Training programs designed

[20] Paul Gilbert, Dacher Keltner, and Kristen Neff are examples of scholars researching the measurement of compassion and methods for its cultivation.

> specifically for cultivating compassion (Miller, 2009) and self-compassion are currently under development.[21]

Compassion is recognized as intimately connected with early nurturance experiences yet also as a skill that can be developed. Compassion training is newer to the American, secular arena than Mindfulness practices,[22] which have been both utilized and researched for decades. One distinction in the meditation techniques that increase compassion is the tendency to rely on visualization and the recitation of phrases (not unlike the use of affirmations) as core process.[23]

Makransky points out that compassion meditation is based on the cultivation of love.[24] The outcome of training in love is "sensing all beings as dear," and this capacity empowers compassion because when other beings are regarded through a perspective of common humanity, then "reflecting on the sufferings they undergo, compassion for them naturally arises."[25] The implication here is that training in love supports the later training in compassion. The technique of cultivating love relies on visualization processes and the recitation of affirmations. Love, or loving-kindness meditation, emphasizes growing the intention for others to be happy and well. Compassion meditation is directed to the capacity to engage suffering, both ones own and that of others. The premise is that persons who have trained in love meditations, who have meditated on the

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[21] Ronald D. Siegel and Christopher K. Germer, "Wisdom and Compassion: Two Wings of a Bird" in *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice*, eds. Christopher Germer and Ronald Siegel (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 19.
[22] Ibid.
[23] John Makransky, "Compassion in Buddhist Psychology" in *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice*, eds. Christopher Germer and Ronald Siegel (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 19.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 7.

wish for their own and others happiness, will be better able to direct their attention to compassion, or engaging with freedom from suffering. This has implications for the pedagogy of these meditations that are targeting the growth of prosocial (caring about the welfare of others) states.

Meditations on loving-kindness and compassion also lead to significant, measurable responses. Self-report measures (where the meditator provides information about their subjective experience using scientifically validated questionnaires) such as Kristen Neff's "Compassion for Others Scale" are one way of measuring the impact that compassion meditation has on individuals. Measures are administered before and after training in meditation to capture changes in outlook and behavior. Neff's scale asks people to respond to statements such as "sometimes when people talk about their problems, I feel like I don't care," "I don't feel emotionally connected to people in pain," or "I notice when people are upset, even if they don't say anything."[26] We can see in these questions, that compassion is constructed as relating to the response to suffering of others and also to a person's capacity to recognize what she is feeling (Mindfulness).

Researchers have found that there are distinctive outcomes that emerge from the practice of compassion meditations as compared to Mindfulness practices. For example, practitioners of these compassion meditations are noted to have an increased "ability to respond with subjective compassion together with objective relaxation while observing a video of a severely burned patient that

[26]Kristin Neff, *Compassion for Others Scale*, (2011, accessed 10th March 2012) available from http://www.self-compassion.org/scales-for-researchers.html.

ordinarily elicits intense disgust."[27] In this particular study, meditation was shown to decrease the physical and mental distress responses that often are correlated with exposure to suffering. The meditators, when presented with a person who had suffered severe burns, were both calm and compassionate to the suffering they witnessed. This combination of relaxation *and* compassion is significant because relaxation alone could indicate a lack of empathetic response in the meditator. The combination of compassion with relaxation, however, indicates that the meditators were able to feel connected to the person's suffering without themselves experiencing either vicarious distress or numbness.

Research has established that loving-kindness and related meditation leads to decreased physical pain and psychological distress. Greater quantities of meditation produced greater benefits in the form of both decreased pain and decreased anger.[28] A study on empathy using the Empathy Construct Rating Scale demonstrated that empathy was significantly increased as a result of loving-kindness meditation, whereas anxiety and depression were significantly decreased. Another study indicated that adults who kept a daily journal listing things they were grateful for had an increased reporting of levels of happiness and also an increase in health-promoting activities like exercise and sleep habits.[29]

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[27] Walsh & Shapiro, "The Meeting of Meditative Disciplines and Western Psychology: A Mutually Enriching Dialogue." *American Psychologist* 61, no. 3 (2006): 237.
[28] Wallace, B. Alan & Shapiro, S. "Mental Balance and Well-Being: Building Bridges between Buddhism and Western Psychology." *American Psychologist* 71, no. 7 (2006): 698.
[29] Ibid.

One of the key findings coming out of both psychological and neuroimaging studies is the notion that the brain changes throughout life and that meditation is an effective way to create desirable neural shifts. This does not mean that genetics and environment are unimportant. As Daniel Goleman suggests, "To be sure, each of us has an innate temperament that makes us more or less prone to happy or dour days" but that the baseline of our proclivities can be impacted through meditation. He emphasizes the correlation between meditation, resilience, and happiness. Goleman claims, "Happiness thrives with resilience, the ability to overcome upsets and return to a calmer, happier state. There seems to be a direct link between stress, resilience, and the capacity for happiness."[30]

More recently, Goleman has written about recent research on meditation as a means of altering attachment set-points (tendency to return to an established, habitual level) in adults. The implication of this research is that neuroplasticity (the capacity for the neural networks in the brain to change in response to experience) continues into adulthood, which in turn has pedagogical implications.[31] That the brain can shift into positive patterns of affective and cognitive regulation indicates that adults can be taught skills that can contribute to more satisfying and healthy lifestyle habits. Moreover, adults who understand this possibility are more likely to be drawn to meditation as a tool for healthy living rather than necessarily for spiritual growth per say.

[30] Goleman, Daniel, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 182.
[31] Ibid., 159.

Goleman is also interested in the role of meditation in the processing of interpersonal experiences. He used fMRI studies of the brain while it is activated in a state of empathy for another person's suffering and compared this to what is found when the subject experiences suffering herself. This comparison revealed that "emotion-specific circuits activate both when we ourselves experience the given emotion, and when we witness someone else feeling it."[32] This emotional mirroring capacity of the mind is of intense interest in the development of moral traits and in the role that meditation could play in this process.

That the brain resonates with the emotional experience of others speaks to a fundamentally social element of emotional experience. The recognition that the capacity for empathy can be increased with the practice of loving-kindness and related meditation techniques implies that moral development can be enhanced by the regular practice of meditation. One could also presume that the relational nature of compassion and compassion meditation should impact the means through which it is taught. This is a key point that will be further developed in Chapter 5 in the context of feminist and Deweyan pedagogies.

[32] Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, 327.

2. Clinicians and Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue has received a great deal of attention among professional caregivers in recent years.[33] Meditation is increasingly touted as an effective tool to ward off and treat compassion fatigue. This connection between meditation and preventing or healing from compassion fatigue brings many new learners to classes offering meditation techniques.

A variety of studies have demonstrated that "therapists who work with traumatized clients often show signs of psychological distress, such as PTSD, as a result of these interactions."[34] What is compassion fatigue? It is defined by Figley, who coined the concept in 1995, "as the formal caregiver's reduced capacity or interest in being empathetic or 'bearing the suffering of clients.'"[35] There are two key elements of compassion fatigue; one is avoidance and the other is arousal. Avoidance refers to the caregiver's aversion to engaging with the content of the trauma as is necessitated in many treatment modalities.

[33] There is disagreement among both theologians and scientists about the term compassion fatigue. The objection on behalf of Buddhist theologians is that true compassion could ever become fatigued. The notion here is that compassion includes the recognition of wisdom of the unconditioned (emptiness) and is therefore not something that need be effected by conditions or vulnerable to running out. It is distinct from pity or neurotic concern that could lead a person to feel depleted over time. Scientists like Dr. Emiliana Simon-Thomas object to the term on the grounds that it conflates compassion with empathy and interestingly takes a similar form of objection against the notion that the pro-social experience of compassion could become fatigued. Regardless, the fact remains that compassion fatigue is a topic that is recognizable and is included in scientific literature so even if there are philosophical objections to the term it is one used in this paper for the purpose of joining an existing conversation. Incidentally, my own feeling is that telling people that they are depleted because they aren't feeling true compassion isn't a particularly helpful starting place pedagogically either. I think that meeting people in their experience of fatigue, burnout, and stress is a much more helpful starting point.

[34] Adams, Figley, and Boscarino "The Compassion Fatigue Scale: Its use with Social Workers Following Urban Disaster," *Research on Social Work Practice* 18, no. 3 (2008): 238-250.

[35] Adams, Boscarino, and Figley "Compassion Fatigue and Psychological Distress Among Social Workers: A Validation Study," *Am J Orthopsychiatry* 76, no. 1 (2006) 103-108.

Arousal refers to activation of physiological and psychological processes such as racing thoughts, increased heart rate etc.[36]

There are many ways to unpack this notion of compassion fatigue. One key point is to differentiate between empathy and compassion, noting that empathy is the biologically rooted impulse toward connectivity that is wired in our brains from the time of birth. Empathy is the capacity to *recognize* what another person is feeling, and has been connected to biological survival skills by psychologists such as Dacher Keltner.[37] Compassion, on the other hand, is a more complex experience that correlates not only to recognizing another person's suffering but also includes the desire to alleviate this suffering. In this way it can bridge into altruistic action.

In the context of this interest in preventing and treating compassion fatigue there is increasingly a great deal of interest in tools for self-care that can help professional caregivers. Meditation is emerging as a resource for many professional caregivers who are concerned about the impact of vicarious trauma on the caregivers' well being and on their fundamental capacity to perform their jobs effectively. This concern increasingly brings professional caregivers to meditation as a resource to help buffer against compassion fatigue or to heal

[36] A NIH report titled "The Compassion Fatigue Scale; Its use with Social workers following urban disaster" investigated the distinction between secondary or vicarious trauma, also known as compassion fatigue and job burnout. The study looked at 236 social workers who were first responders to the September 11 terrorist attacks. The study concluded that not only is compassion fatigue is a quantifiable phenomenon using this particular measure but also that can be quantified as distinct from general burnout.

[37] Dacher Keltner *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), 2-16.

from it when it has occurred. It also is sparking a proliferation of methods,[38] courses,[39] and books that seek to educate clinicians in the process of meditation.

This proliferation of programs highlights the need for discussion about the rationale behind the various pedagogical techniques and ways to assess effectiveness. Over time, as studies emerge comparing the efficacy of programs like Roshi Joan Halifax's or John Makransky's Compassion Training techniques with other similar types of trainings developed at Emory and Stanford, there will be more of an opportunity for systematic evaluation. For now it is useful to recognize that there are trainings derived from various Buddhist traditions, including Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan, which present Compassion Meditation in systematic and secularized formats. Retreats, 8-week courses, and drop-in classes offering professional continuing education credits are on offer for this professional caregiving population. Moreover, it is clear that Buddhist practices are interesting to American caregivers who are seeking to ward off or heal from compassion fatigue.

Teaching this population requires different pedagogical processes from those used in traditional Buddhist contexts. For example, settings that offer continuing education credits require educators to enumerate not only teaching objectives and their relevance to the professional aims of participants but also

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[38] *About the Training Programs at Upaya*, (accessed 1st February, 2012); available from http://www.upaya.org/roshi/. Roshi Joan Halifax runs retreats for healthcare providers especially those who work in palliative care and hospice settings. The Foundation for Active Compassion has also offered a variety of trainings for clinicians centering on this theme of care for the caregiver.

[39] *Why Train in Meditations of Natural Wisdom and Compassion?* (accessed 1st February, 2012); available from http://www.foundationforactivecompassion.org/social-service. The Foundation for Active Compassion has also offered a variety of trainings for clinicians centering on this theme of care for the caregiver.

the methods by which these goals will be measured. This kind of format requires a repackaging of traditional teaching techniques in ways that can be significant. For example, the use of case studies for exploring how meditation is relevant to various professional contexts is a common technique in such settings, which is distinct from a more traditional approach to teaching meditation which would more readily emphasize the need to practice meditation oneself and from that personal experience the learner would then grow her ability to apply meditation-based skills to various contexts.

In professional education settings, the principles of skillful means explored in Chapters 2 and 3 are tested. In both early and Mahayana Buddhism, it is emphasized that the teacher needs to teach dharma in a way that is accessible to students and supports their embodied realization of wisdom and compassion. When cognitive frameworks such as case studies or presentations of empirical research are needed in order to fit into a context, the doctrine of skillful means would support the teacher in adapting her teaching as long as it does not undercut the potential for students to gain experiential insight.

A teacher may well modify the commitments expected of students learning meditation depending on the context she is teaching in. For example, a common emphasis in professional education contexts is on the benefits of short, frequent meditation sessions. This is the case because demands for intensive time commitments would not be digestible by these learners. Likewise, if the teacher emphasized monasticism or renouncing worldly engagement in such settings, learners would not be able to approach the skills they are invested in

appropriating. For similar reasons, emphases on devotional or ritual practices are downplayed in such secular settings. But core processes, such as the practice of meditation itself and the exploration of how meditative processes can be integrated into personal and professional life are retained from traditional Buddhist pedagogical approaches.

2.A Clinical Perspectives on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Meditation is not only relevant to those who care for trauma survivors but also for those who have survived trauma themselves. There is an increasing body of literature to support the use of alternative treatment methods prominently featuring the efficacy of meditation as an intervention for use with survivors. In the first part of this section I will present an overview of the traditional approaches to treating PTSD and then will clarify how meditation is taught to support the therapeutic process.

2.A.1 traditional approaches to treating PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as defined in the DSM-IV-TR, (diagnostic and statistical manual) is a mental illness that emerges after an experience that threatens one's own physical survival or the life of another person in close physical proximity.

> PTSD is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury

experienced by a family member or other close associate (Criterion A1) (DSM IV-TR). [40]

PTSD symptoms include anxiety, sleep disorders, hyper-vigilance, difficulty focusing, and an intensified startle reflex.[41] Current American Psychological Association practice guidelines for treatment of PTSD prominently features psychopharmacology, especially the use of antidepressants in the form of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Psychotherapeutic interventions including cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, and psycho-education such as self-care methods are all suggested means of treatment. Exposure therapies, and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) are also endorsed as beneficial approaches.[42]

In any method of treatment for trauma survivors there is an emphasis on processing traumatic memories by finding a new relationship to the event. Physiological symptoms associated with trauma lessen when the sense of imminent danger for further violence or uncontrollable reliving of past violence has been achieved. When this happens, survivors feel safer and are more able to engage with the world around them. As symptoms decrease the capacity for relationship increases.

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[40] American Psychiatric Association, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Diagnostic Features," in *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV-TR.* (Arlington: APA, 2000), 463. In the diagnostic features section of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder the following description is offered. "The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganized or agitated behavior) (Criterion A2). The characteristic symptoms resulting from the exposure to the extreme trauma include persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event (Criterion B), persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (Criterion C), and persistent symptoms of increased arousal (Criterion D). The full symptom picture must be present for more than 1 month (Criterion E), and the disturbance must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (Criterion F)."

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

Goals of Trauma Treatment are as follows[43]

- Increase safety and stability
- Reduce levels of hyper-arousal
- Re-establish normal stress response
- Decrease numbing/avoidance strategies
- Face rather than avoid trauma, process emotions, integrate traumatic memories
- Foster recovery of concurrent problems
- Re-engage in life/reconnect with others

2.A.2 complementary approaches to PTSD treatment

Grodin et al.'s article, "The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Among Refugees: A Systematic Review" points out that much of what would fall in the category of complementary alternative medicine in this country would actually be much more recognizable to refugee trauma survivors than our western medical treatments.[44] When I worked at Dr. Grodin's clinic, the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights, it was evident that patients felt deeper resonance with what many Americans would consider to be foreign alternative approaches than with western psychotherapeutic concepts such as depression. It made more sense to Somali refugee women that acupuncture needles and meditation would help with their physical and emotional pains after

[43] These goals come from a power point presentation shared by Dr. Michael Grodin.

surviving rape and torture than talking about their intrusive thoughts and traumatic experiences from the past alone in a room with a stranger.

There are fundamental distinctions between psychotherapeutic methods for treating psychological symptoms and holistic approaches. The perspective underlying the majority of psychotherapy modalities relies on the medical model. In the medical model, the focus is on illness and treatment of symptoms as opposed to a wellness model, which focuses on health and the promotion of well-being. Within the illness-centered model, psychological symptoms are seen as *deviations* from a normal baseline way of functioning.

From a Buddhist perspective or the perspective of positive psychology, the best way to treat a distressed mind is to allow it to relax, and align with its intrinsic qualities of love and compassion. Dryden and Still clarify that "instead of attacking symptoms as essentially negative and undesirable, the emphasis [in meditation] is on nonjudgmental acceptance of symptoms, and a focus on more positive alternatives."[45] In other words, meditation practice allows a person to encounter the experience of any given symptom in terms of its fundamental somatic, cognitive, and emotional content. This capacity to experience symptoms without adding aversion, judgment, or labels can in and of itself provide an element of relief to a patient.

Survivors of trauma suffer from high levels of bodily agitation and ongoing intrusive thoughts often with violent content. Meditation does not make these

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[44] Grodin, Michael et al. "The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine among Refugees: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 13, no. 3 (2009): 585-599.
[45] Dryden, W. and Still, A. "Historical Aspects of Mindfulness and Self-Acceptance in Psychotherapy," *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* 24, no: 1 (2006): 7.

experiences go away but it does allow them to relate to them in a new way. Meditation as an approach to healing from trauma is increasingly recognized as a useful corrective to the tendency for patients to struggle against and thereby intensify unwanted symptoms. Meditation counters the tendency to suppress the distressing mind states experienced by trauma survivors. When this habit of avoidance is relaxed, many trauma survivors find that their symptoms decrease in turn.

In the chapter on mindfulness for trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder in *The Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness*, the authors assert that mindfulness practices can be used to support the efficacy of the standard exposure approaches to treating trauma. They suggest this is the case because typical exposure treatments that are focused on learning to increasingly tolerate contact with existing patterns of fear are only successful for some patients. This standard approach is too overwhelming for many trauma survivors and this can frequently lead to the premature termination of therapeutic relationships, and often concurrently prompts self-medication in the form of substance abuse. When introduced in this context, Mindfulness practice provides clients with tools for relating to the painful thoughts and emotions that are raised through the exposure therapies.

This raises the question of precisely how mindfulness practice supports exposure therapy? Mindfulness is defined by Kabat-Zinn as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally.”[46]

[46] Follette, Victoria et al. "Contextual Behavior Trauma Therapy." *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders; An Evidence-Based Guide* 21, (2009), 309.

Mindfulness meditation as taught by Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction method begins with learning to focus attention on the breath and allowing thoughts and sensations to come and go without following them with one's attention. By engaging with this process over time, people become experienced in the habit of allowing thoughts to pass by without a strong sense of identification with them. They learn that somatic and emotional patterns arise and then pass, and they find a new perspective on their physical, mental, and emotional experience. With this training, people learn that they do not have to be congealed in habitual patterns of reaction when painful experiences arise.

The premise of applying Mindfulness meditation in the context of trauma therapy is that clients who engage in exposure therapy after learning this practice will be more successful because their meditation training helps them to be able to tolerate painful thoughts and emotions. They are understood to have learned to replace avoidance or dissociative responses with a capacity to face difficult emotions and thoughts without being triggered by them because of their meditation training. Meditation training supports the therapeutic process because meditators learn that they do not have to believe or identify with thoughts and emotions and thereby have more space to choose how to respond to internal or external triggers, which supports the capacity for symptom management.

Peter Levine is a Buddhist psychologist whose work focuses on the role that the body plays in trauma. His emphasis on the somatic roots of trauma has engendered a method of healing that is rooted in the body. He asserts, "I do not view post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as pathology to be managed,

suppressed, or adjusted to, but the result of a natural process gone awry."[47] His book describes the physiological response to trauma, and how trauma symptoms are actually the body's attempt to rid itself of the stored stress it has taken on from violence or the threat of violence. He focuses on the process of transforming personal and societal trauma into fodder for growth. Levine's method, Somatic Experiencing, relies on working with body sensation and specifically emphasizing how important it is to "be aware of how your body is experiencing these [traumatic] emotions in the form of sensations and thoughts."[48] His technique is heavily influenced by Buddhist mindfulness meditation.

"Meditation and Treatment of Female Trauma Survivors" discusses the deficiency of the most common cognitive-behavioral approach to treatment.[49] The authors argue that the exposure treatment and cognitive processing therapy are not as helpful for people with "prolonged histories of interpersonal abuse."[50] They assert that "exposure and cognitive restructuring approaches *may not be helpful and can even be harmful* to some trauma survivors."[51] Their understanding of the limitation of traditional trauma treatments is summarized as follows; "when encouraged to reexperience the trauma (a routine procedure in prolonged exposure), they [the trauma survivor] could be so overwhelmed by intense negative emotions that they can no longer consciously process the

[47] Levine, Peter A. & Frederick, Ann. *Waking the Tiger : Healing Trauma : The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1997), 6.
[48] Ibid., 12.
[49] Mo Yee, Lee et al. *Integrative Body-Mind-Spirit Social Work: An Empirically Based Approach to Assessment and Treatment* (New York: Oxford Press, 2009.)
[50] Ibid., 276.
[51] Ibid. 277.

trauma."[52] These emotions can take the form of fear, terror, anger, helplessness, or pain. According to Lee et al the primary goal in treating trauma survivors is to help them "attend to current experiences as well as to differentiate them from trauma-based emotional and behavioral responses so that they can make choices that are responsive and beneficial to their current needs and situations."[53] Meditation is a significant resource for trauma treatment precisely because it supports the capacity to engage with current experience and buffers against the continual, unintentional reenactment of painful, traumatic memories which cause so much suffering to people living with PTSD.

To recap, survivors of PTSD typically suffer from intrusive thoughts in the form of vivid memories of past traumatic experiences. The vivid nature of these intrusive memories makes it difficult for the survivor to recognize the experience as a memory. Instead the memory pulls them in and triggers mental, emotional, and somatic distress. Meditation has been highlighted as a resource for survivors because it trains them to recognize these intrusive memories as they arise, which in turn allows the survivor to stay grounded in the present experience without becoming overcome by their painful, vivid memories.

Teaching meditation to trauma survivors, however, requires different pedagogy than might be used in other contexts. For example, when teaching trauma survivors it is important to repeatedly remind them that they can meditate with their eyes open rather than closed as many survivors find that closing their eyes prompts an increase in intrusive thoughts. It is also helpful to instruct these

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

learners that they can meditate in whatever physical position they find tolerable/comfortable. Difficulty finding physical comfort is a common issue for these survivors given that most of them have intense bodily pain. Another modification is to make meditation sessions shorter than one generally would with non-traumatized populations. It can also be helpful to give frequent verbal prompts when guiding meditation so that the listeners are not left with prolonged periods of silence that can provoke agitation. It is also helpful to reiterate each session that people can take a break anytime if they become overwhelmed during discussions or guided meditation. During class discussion, it can be useful to normalize experiences of agitation and anxiety on one hand or numbness on the other. This list of adaptations is not exhaustive but it captures some specific pedagogical adaptations that are intended to support survivors bring their whole selves to the learning process.

3. Case Study; Stanford CCARE

Next I will turn attention from the topic of pedagogy of meditation for healthcare contexts to the work being done at Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE). CCARE's compassion training program is considered here as an exemplary pedagogical approach to meditation which is also relevant to the discussion at hand because the program is intended to translate Buddhist practices of compassion for a broad, secular audience in ways that are culturally relevant. From this investigation I will suggest further themes relevant to the larger question of inculturation of Buddhist pedagogy.

3.A History; Genesis of CCARE

In 2010, *Shambala Sun*, published an article called "The Science of Love" which explored a contemporary trend in research to study morality from the vantage point of investigating and growing prosocial rather than antisocial behavior.[54] The new trend, according to the article, is to study moral behavior and its various dimensions. The basis for qualities such as empathy, compassion, and gratitude is now emerging as a more common focus of research. The University of Wisconsin, Emory University, Dr. Kristen Neff at University of Texas, Dacher Keltner at the University of California at Berkeley, and Stanford's CCARE are examples of this trend.

In 2005, the Dalai Lama came to Stanford University and following on the momentum of that event the center was founded. The Center is part of the medical school, specifically within the Stanford Institute for Neuro-Innovation and Translational Research at the School of Medicine. The Dalai Lama made his largest personal donation ever in support of the center. Two Silicon Valley donors, each contributed to the effort with million dollar gifts. In this way, the center was born out of private philanthropy rather than public or institutional funds.

[54] Milgram's research is cited as an example of the old approach to research on morality. Milgram studied the dynamics that led people to perform inhumane actions when they were ordered by others to do so. His research led to new questioning about the ethics of using human subjects.

The mission of CCARE is "to support and conduct rigorous scientific studies of compassion and altruistic behavior." The center has an interdisciplinary approach to research, "drawing from several disciplines including neuroscience, psychology, economics and contemplative traditions." Reflecting the location of the center within the Medical School, however, compassion research is predominantly oriented toward measuring impacts of the various interventions in terms of mental, physical, and emotional health indicators. Measures of self-report as well as biological markers are generally collected and correlated whenever possible.

3.B The Two Branches of CCARE; Research and Education

CCARE has two key functions, which are conducting research and disseminating educational programs based on research findings. When the Dalai Lama made his founding donation to CCARE, "His Holiness asked for only two things: make sure the science is impeccable, and make sure all the work is universal and secular."[55] [56] These mandates ask that the research at the center is unbiased and conforms to rigorous scientific standards. Meditations disseminated through CCARE are derived from a religious tradition, Tibetan Buddhism, but the aim of the center is to apply the practices in secular ways and to study the results.

[55] Boyce, Barry "The Science of Love," *Shambhala Sun* (2010).
[56] For a discussion of the notion of secularity as it is used by the Dalai Lama and in this context see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

CCARE's current Associate Director and senior scientist, Emiliana Simon-Thomas holds that the distinction between CCARE and other possible approaches is that the Center's research is not intended to support meditation or to measure the effects of Buddhist practices. Rather, the interest is in establishing the best possible processes for engendering compassion. Dr. Doty, the Director of the center said that if there are other methods besides meditation that more effectively support the cultivation of compassion for some situations or issues, than it is our obligation to pursue those alternative means. His emphasis is on the compassion itself, understanding it and cultivating it. Dr. Doty paraphrases the research on compassion thus far it has been established that, "being compassionate benefits individuals by improving their health, it boosts their immune systems, and ultimately it makes them happy." He argues that what we know about the value of compassion and how to generate it should be made accessible to individuals and collectives in the form of educational offerings as the end result of the scientific work done on the topic.[57]

Research at CCARE approaches the study of compassion from various angles. The premise here is that the multiple perspectives should problematize and inform one another in ways that will provide depth to understanding of compassion and also prevent conceptual limitations that can arise when a topic is approached by means of a single methodology. This interdisciplinary approach

[57] *TEDxGoldenGateED - James Doty* (accessed second December 2011); available from http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/TEDxGoldenGateED-James-Doty-2.

dovetails with the premise in the doctrine of skillful means that a diversity of perspectives is needed to engage with a diversity of interests and capacities.[58] [59]

3.C Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)

3.C.1 what is compassion in the context of CCT?

Defining what compassion is has direct implications for how to build facility with it. There is currently a great deal of interest in the scientific community to establish norms for defining as well as measuring compassion. Compassion, in

[58] *Research Projects* (accessed third December 2011); available from http://ccare.stanford.edu/programs/research-projects. One of CCARE's studies pertains to the neuroeconomics of giving versus receiving charity. This study investigates, through the use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and self-reporting, how those who receive charity process this experience. The goal of this study is to inform the distribution of charity and public goods so that neither the benefactor nor the receiver feels alienated. Another study investigates the notions that "ordinary people" have about heroism, compassion, and altruistic behavior. Providing insight into psychological constructs around the topic can provide useful insight for educators. A third, and related study investigates heroism and transformational processes among former gang members. This study is based on in-depth interviews of individuals who have renounced prior violent behavior and now actively participate in and advocate for peace-building efforts in their communities. Again, this work can inform the process of educating for nonviolence and compassionate behavior. Another project is in the field of optogenetics in which lasers are used to stimulate the social regions of the brains of mice in an effort to understand how neurological processes of compassion operate and can be enhanced. Establishing neural correlates of processes of compassion will help not only describe the experience of compassion but also can inform ways in which the skill of compassion is increased.

[59] This summary of research was presented to CCARE staff by Philipe Goldin at Stanford University on 17th August, 2011. There are several studies at the center explicitly related to the practice of meditation. One investigates the neural correlates of compassion in Buddhist adepts and novices. In this study, the fMRI scans of advanced Buddhist meditators are compared with novices in the performance of behavioral tasks related to compassion. The purpose of this study is to better understand what the complex mental process of compassion looks like in the brains of those who have more and less ready access to the trait. Another study investigates the effects of compassion training by comparing how participants in the course compare to wait-listed individuals on various compassion measurement indexes. Initial findings show increased compassion for others and self-compassion, reduction in fear of compassion (for self, for others, and from others), decreases in anxiety and depression, and a significant relationship between the quantity of home meditation practice and overall benefit derived.

the context of this Stanford training, is understood to be a several phase process, which includes the following elements.

> (1) An *awareness* of suffering in others (cognitive/empathetic), (2) *sympathetic concern* related to being emotionally moved by suffering (affective), (3) a *wish* to see the relief of that suffering (intentional), and (4) a *responsiveness* or readiness to help relieve that suffering (motivational). Thus we view compassion as a combination of a cognitive perspective and an affective state that gives rise to cooperative and **altruistic** behavior.[60]

This definition is more complex than the traditional Buddhist definition of compassion, which is simply the wish for others to be free of suffering.[61] The Merriam-Webster definition for compassion is "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it."[62] In *Compassion: An Evolutionary Analysis and Empirical Review* compassion is defined as "the feeling that arises in witnessing another's suffering and that motivates a subsequent desire to help."[63]

It is noted in scientific literature that there is a distinction between empathy and compassion. Empathy is defined as "the vicarious experience of another's emotions." It corresponds with the first step in the description of compassion offered above. Empathy is repeatedly described in scientific literature as "other-focused" in that it has to do with recognizing the emotional state of another

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[60] Langri, Jinpa, *Compassion Cultivation Training Program: A Nine-Week Course on Cultivating A Compassionate Heart and Mind*, unpublished manuscript, 11.
[61] Cutler, Howard and Dalai Lama, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (New York: Penguin, 1998), Chapter 7. The Dalai Lama, when asked about what compassion is and why it is a central part of the spiritual path offered the following comments. "Compassion can be roughly defined in terms of a state of mind that is nonviolent, nonharming, and nonaggressive. It is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility, and respect towards the other."
[62] Compassion (accessed third of November 2011); available from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compassion.
[63] Goetz, Jennifer, Keltner, Dacher, Simon-Thomas, Emiliana, *Compassion: An Evolutionary Analysis and Empirical Review* in Psychological Bulletin 2010 Vol. 136 No. 3, 351-374, p 351.

person.[64] Empathy is understood to be the ability to know and even mirror another's emotional experience whereas compassion includes within it the wish to act or to help alleviate this suffering.[65] Clarity in defining empathy and compassion are a necessary first step on the path of converging on standard measures. At this point, the various institutions looking into compassion and empathy have not agreed upon a single instrument or set of instruments. In fact, one of CCARE's next research projects will be to pilot the Compassion Measurement Index (CMI), which is intended to fill this significant gap. In the meantime, each research team working in the field uses its own battery of measures. In terms of education, advances in operationalizing compassion and measuring it will be essential for establishing when effective pedagogy has or has not been employed.

3.C.2 overview of CCT

Stanford's Compassion Training Course is not the first of its kind. Emory University's Geshe Lobsang Negi authored a Compassion Training Course derived from Tibetan Buddhist practices years before Stanford's program emerged. The rationale behind creating another Compassion Training curriculum was largely prompted by the desire to more explicitly meld the traditional Tibetan compassion meditations with input from disciplines such as neuroscience and psychology. Compassion Cultivation Training was developed at CCARE by Geshe Thupten Jinpa in collaboration with an interdisciplinary team of

[64] Ibid.
[65] This is the rationale behind the name CCARE. The understanding is that compassion necessarily bridges into *altruistic* behavior.

psychologists, contemplative scholars, and researchers.[66] As noted in the Shambala article, Thupten Jinpa is known not just as a translator of languages but as a person who "moves easily from Buddhist perspectives to Western perspectives and back again."[67]

Stanford Compassion Training is a nine-week course intended to be taught by instructors with familiarity with contemplative practices as well as psychology. There is no expectation of prior experience with meditation by the learners in the course although the class description is explicit that openness to learning meditation is required. The course is intended to be secular and accessible to people from any type of background.[68]

The format of the course and pedagogical methods are intended to reflect the core contemplative processes as well as effective adult education methods. Classes are two hours in length and group discussion is a central component of the sessions. Group discussion is intended to fill multiple functions including an opportunity to normalize concerns, raise objections, and learn from the process of reflection of experience. A primary feature of the pedagogy is the emphasis on inviting conceptual objections, doubt, and difficulty into the learning environment. I will return to the relevance of inviting the range of experience into the classroom in the next chapter when I look at Deweyan and feminist pedagogies.

Another core pedagogical device is the use of guided meditation coupled with shared reflection. Each week, a new element or step is added to the

[66] Tracing a detailed relationship of CCT to its Buddhist roots is beyond the scope of this current project. However, a succinct orientation to the Lojong tradition which CCT is derived from will be provided in Chapter 4.
[67] Boyce, Barry "The Science of Love," *Shambhala Sun,* 44.
[68] Chapter 1 includes an in-depth analysis of what is meant by secular in this context.

meditation practice and the meditations build on one another throughout the duration of the course. The experience of meditating together in a group, in itself, is an important pedagogical element especially because it counters a common misconception that meditation is a private activity, undertaken by individuals for their own personal gain. Teaching and practicing meditation in a group highlights the relational elements of meditation. This is particularly important in secularized American learning environments, where there is a tendency to strip meditation from the interpersonal and communal contexts of traditional Buddhist settings.

Dyad work derived from psychotherapy is another core pedagogical process of the course. For example, the week when the principle of common humanity is explored, there is a guided dyad exercise that engages the topic. In this exercise, the class is broken into pairs. Each person takes a turn sharing something she is having difficulty with while the other partner practices the skill of nonjudgmental listening. After each has shared an experience they are instructed to look at their partner, noticing the elements of the persons' face. Then they are instructed to close their eyes and consider how the partner has had many highs and lows in their life, has felt various forms of suffering, confusion, and pain. The partners are invited to notice how they feel with respect to the shared common humanity with this person and their struggle. The goal of this exercise is to support the recognition that the partner, though not well known to them in the details of her life, nonetheless has a fundamental sameness on a human level. The dyad exercise is meant to support the other types of experiences the learners encounter in the classroom, such as meditation and group discussion.

Stories, poetry, and art are other elements of pedagogy that are central to the program. The use of affectively laden material is meant to balance or complement the other elements of pedagogy. When a student encounters a poem or news story that moves her, it can bring her to experientially engage the theme more directly than a rational/conceptual path alone would be able to. Weekly presentation of redacted scientific research selected for its relevance to the weekly theme is another element of pedagogy that spans the course from week to week. The premise of bringing together a combination of affective, intellectual, interpersonal, and meditative processes is meant to support engagement with the various elements of a person's experience. It is also intended to offer access points to various learning styles. The range of pedagogical devices echoes the premise of diversity of methods in the doctrine of skillful means. It also correlates to learner-centered, experiential approaches to contemporary pedagogy, which will be explored more deeply in Chapter 5.

Participants have weekly homework assignment comprised of daily meditation and also informal, exploratory exercises intended to support the practice of compassion in the context of daily life. For example, a typical informal homework assignment for the week that focuses on common humanity would be to look for an opportunity to notice when we are annoyed with someone in daily life and rather than react or retreat from this situation, to experiment with the idea, "Just like me, this person wishes to be happy, loved, and appreciated; just like me this person wishes to be healthy, safe, and free of suffering." The

intention here is to intentionally shift cognitive response patterns to support changes in attitude and behavior.

Each class involves small group or larger group reflection on how both the formal and informal meditation assignments went the prior week. The pedagogical premise here is that people can be encouraged to reflect on their experiences after they have had them and thereby learn from them and build habits. Additionally, the pedagogy here embodies the notion that people can train through meditation and informal exercises to shift their cognitive, affective, and embodied experience while they are in the process of having it. Therefor, experience that has been reflected on shapes future behavior as will be further described in the sections on Dewey and feminist pedagogy in Chapter 5. This feedback loop also echoes core traditional pedagogical practices of training in meditation alongside investigation of the impact that meditation has on the rest of ones life.

In terms of curriculum, there are six steps to the training program that are taught in these nine weeks. The first step of the program focuses on mindfulness meditation and stress reduction or “settling the mind” as it is described in the protocol.[69] This step spans the first two weeks; the first week includes an orientation to the course in which an overview of the material is presented, introductions are made between participants and with the leader(s), and a simple

[69] The approach to Mindfulness here is similar to that of the introductory Mindfulness exercises authored by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

breath meditation practice is introduced.[70] The second week's content delves further into settling and focusing the mind. The thematic emphasis of this second week is the cultivation of concentration, its role in stress reduction, and creating the groundwork for having new relationship to thoughts. The guided meditations, group discussion, dyad exercises, short presentations of relevant research and homework are all intended to forward these thematic points not only as objects of interest but actually as embodied knowledge.

The second week explores common dynamics of meditation for beginners and emphasizes that the lived experience of meditation often does not conform to expectations. For example, many students anticipate that meditation will make them feel peaceful if they do it right and are confused when meditation does not lead them to feel immediately more relaxed. It is essential in this context to clarify that beginning the process of meditation often actually reveals the distracted habit patterns of the mind that may have gone previously unnoticed.[71] This new awareness of underlying distraction or agitation is often experienced as evidence that the meditation is not working properly. If it is not engaged head-on, it often leaves students discouraged and unwilling to continue meditating.[72]

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[70] There is a strong emphasis on creating positive group dynamics as the course is taught in a participatory, dialogical manner. The extent of the group alliance directly impacts the extent of mutual learning that can happen.

[71] Pema Chodron, "Preface" in *Commit to Sit: Tools for Cultivating a Meditation Practice,* ed. Joan Duncan Oliver (New York: Tricycle: 2009), xii. Pema Chodron addresses this phenomenon with the following statement. "Meditation is not just about feeling good, however. To think that is to set ourselves up for disappointment every time we sit… Buddhist practice is about diving into our real issues and befriending the deep-seated habitual patterns that keep us stuck in ignorance and confusion. In meditation, we come as we are. Complete acceptance of ourselves, with our passion, our aggression, our ignorance, and our sanity, is the essence of *maitri*-unconditional friendship with ourselves."

[72] I have heard many students report that they "are not good at meditating" after they have only tried it briefly.

The pedagogy for this section is generally a combination of small group and then larger group discussion. Concerns and challenges more readily come up in the smaller groups that can then be invited to enter into the larger class discussion. Challenges can be normalized in the larger group context simply by asking about people's initial experience with meditation. When there is a safe enough space for learners to speak in, they will confide the particular challenges they face, and will come to quickly recognize that most of their concerns are in fact shared experiences.

Once one student speaks up and is met with a nonjudgmental response by the teacher, other students will be more likely to speak about their own challenges. In this way, the point emerges that each individual's challenges have particularities but the underlying principle of the need to train a distracted mind is common. This creates an opportunity not only for engaging willingness to work through challenge but also to share tools for meditation processes in a responsive way. This pedagogy is intended to create a conversational culture in which students feel responded to rather than lectured at. The information comes across organically rather than in a prepackaged way and this functions to make students feel engaged in the learning process. Group discussion about challenges also helps foster compassion between students and allows for the intentional cultivation of nonjudgmental listening skills.

The premise behind beginning the course on compassion with Mindfulness meditation is that it allows participants to relate to the thinking process in a new way. Even though they will not necessarily become

experienced Mindfulness meditators in two weeks of practice they are often able to have more insight into the possibility of a relationship with thoughts that is more nuanced than the one they came into the course with. By engaging with a combination of daily Mindfulness meditations and informal practices the premise is that some foundational skills can be built. Informal practices during this section of the course include activities such as choosing a prompt in daily life as a cue to return to Mindfulness of present experience.

In these two weeks, the premise is that learners can appropriate the basic principles of mindfulness. This possibility of a less rigid relationship with one's own mind is connected with the possibility for shifts in relationships with others. The premise is that students can at least conceptually understand in the period of two weeks that their relationship to their thoughts and feelings is a more nuanced one than they may have previously recognized.

This insight of recognizing that one can relate to thoughts in a new way is itself helpful but also supports the unfolding of the rest of the course. When challenging responses or habits of thinking emerge in relation to the process of engaging suffering, students can be reminded that thoughts and emotions are malleable and that defenses or reactions need not be viewed as supremely reliable. For example, two common concerns when people are first confronted with the prospect of training in compassion are that increased compassion will either make them naive and easily manipulated on one hand or emotionally overwhelmed on the other.

When these concerns are voiced following on instruction in basic mindfulness practice they can be responded to in more effective ways. A teacher could ask the learner who is concerned with either of these two negative outcomes to simply try the new meditations, thoughts, and behaviors and see how they function. They could remind the learner that from one perspective, these concerns are habitual thoughts in their own right. It is possible to notice the concerns without letting them have the final authority. Rather, the student can be encouraged to simply experiment with new practices and ways of thinking and see what the result of this might be. If they find that they are becoming overwhelmed or easily taken advantage of then they can always drop the trainings. But the principle gained through the initial exposure to mindfulness, that a person does not need to be confined by each thought or belief and that thoughts and beliefs themselves can be reworked, becomes a key insight of the course.

For this reason, teachers often refer to “thought experiments” in the following weeks of the course. The motif of experimenting with new perspectives or testing out new ways of thinking to see how they function relies on the insight that thoughts are malleable. Thus, the first step of Mindfulness meditation prepares people to wear their thoughts more lightly and to enter more readily into playful experimentation with new thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

Step two officially begins the process of cultivating compassion. This step focuses on loving-kindness and compassion for a loved one. The rationale for starting with a loved one is that with loved ones it is relatively easy to connect

with the cognitive, emotional, and physiological experience of the desire for another being's happiness. It is based on the premise that since all beings have loving relationships it is possible to start from these to build out widening circles of positive regard.

The anthropology supporting this approach in the protocol is that people are inherently compassionate and loving but become congealed into patterns of thought and behavior that undercut this capacity.[73] In other words, the anthropology of the human is a very positive one in this protocol.[74] The human is seen as possessing an inherent capacity to care for others and to be deeply connected to their own experience and to the desire for the best for others. Compassion is not understood as a capacity that is created anew in some way. Rather, the process of training in compassion is meant to reveal that which is already there within the person but simply not accessed. Or as Jinpa said,

> What CCT aims to do is to make people become more aware and more connected with their compassionate nature so that their instinctive response to a given situation will come from that compassionate understanding standpoint rather than negative excessive judgment.[75]

In other words, we train in meditation so we can automatically respond to our own thoughts and actions of others from a perspective of compassion and wisdom rather than reactivity and negativity. Meditation is used to access an underlying capacity of compassion for self and others, which is available when a

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[73] Gyamtso, Khenpo Tsultrim, *Buddha Nature: the Mahayan Uttaratantra Shastra* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications: 2000). More description of the doctrine of Buddha Nature is offered in Chapter 4.

[74] This is somewhat surprising given the Gelugpa background of Thupten Jinpa and the proclivity of Gelugpa soteriology for more gradualistic than sudden approaches to enlightenment. This gradualistic approach is associated with the Rang-tong perspective.

[75] Thupten, Jinpa, *Why Cultivate Compassion?* (accessed 2nd November, 2011); available from http://ccare.stanford.edu/sct/why-cultivate-compassion.

person is shown how to access it. Another interesting point contained within Thupten Jinpa's elaboration on this statement is that the negative excessive judgment often begins with negative excessive *self*-judgment. It is in part for this reason that self-compassion, as we see next, is a critical part of the program.

In this perspective it is clear that humans are seen as fundamentally compassionate but are also recognized as pliable. People will be biased toward negative or positive perspectives depending on their habits of thinking and interpretation.[76] This correlates to the doctrine of karma (the Buddhist law of cause and effect) or "the ingrained habit of re-acting to our own narrow thoughts of everyone so as to make our thought-made sense of self feel real."[77] One of the implications of the notion of karma is that through training, it is possible to see through habitual patterns of reactivity and projection and thereby become free from suffering.

Loving-kindness and compassion for oneself (also known as self-compassion) is the third step of the training. This step is based on some familiarity with Mindfulness (the first step) in that it requires a capacity to be aware of what is happening in one's physical/emotional/psychological experience. However it moves beyond simply being aware of what arises. In this step the participants actively engender compassion for their own suffering and a desire for their own happiness.

This process counters feelings of worthlessness and the deeply rooted processes of self-deprecation that are noted by many to be particularly rampant

[76] Makransky, John, *Awakening Through Love* (Sommerville: Wisdom Publications, 2007), 36.
[77] Ibid.

in our culture at this time.[78] It is interesting to note that the protocol moves from the direction of experiencing compassion and love for others first as a basis for then cultivating these qualities with regard to oneself. This is correlated to the challenge that many experience in our culture for self-compassion and positive self-regard.[79] The curriculum is laid out in this way in recognition that self-compassion is a prerequisite to compassion for others.

The CCT protocol is based on the premise that people can best enter into self-compassion by recalling and strengthening the recognition of how it feels and functions to have compassion for a loved person.[80] This natural compassion for a loved person in mental/physical memory is intended to support the participant's capacity to turn this sentiment toward themselves. Correspondingly, the pedagogy used in the protocol follows the principle of the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means, which is to engage with learners in terms that are relevant to them. This particular sequence of beginning with the innate compassion toward a loved one as the basis for self-compassion and then broadening from these steps to offer compassion to difficult people and larger numbers of people reflects a pedagogy that is not only experiential but also iterative. This pedagogy is iterative in the sense that teachers intentionally facilitate a set of experiences

[78] Cutler, Howard and Dalai Lama, His Holiness *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (New York: Riverhead, 2009). The Dalai Lama distinguishes between self-confidence and arrogance in the following statement. "In making the distinction between conceit and valid self-confidence… one could think in terms of the consequences of one's attitude- conceit and arrogance generally lead to negative consequences whereas a healthy self-confidence leads to more positive consequences. So, here when we are dealing with 'self-confidence' you need to look at what is the underlying sense of 'self.'

[79] Many teachers of the protocol have commented that self-compassion is the largest struggle for most participants but also the biggest insight or growth area that people leave the course with.

[80] Makransky's Natural Wisdom and Compassion practice operates from the premise that the process of receiving love and later compassion can serve as the wellspring for the capacity to extend compassion to others.

that encourage a learner to build on and refine her knowledge of a principle over time. There are points of resonance here with the work of Dewey, which will be further explored in the next chapter.

The fourth step of the protocol is embracing shared common humanity and appreciating the deep interconnectedness of self and others. This step emphasizes the similarities between self and other in the shared—even universal—desire for happiness and freedom from suffering.[81] It also includes reflections on the interconnection of people and the physical world.[82] This step is understood to be the empathetic basis for compassionate connection. Within this step, there is a trajectory of beginning with engendering a sense of common humanity with a loved one, then with a neutral person, and finally to a difficult person. This trajectory has many implications, but one is to recognize the commonality between people, which has the benefit of challenging feelings of social isolation as well as building a basis for compassion. It is meant to stretch from the relationships that are less challenging to ones that are more difficult.[83]

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[81] Langri, Jinpa, *Compassion Cultivation Training Program: A Nine-Week Course on Cultivating A Compassionate Heart and* Mind, unpublished manuscript, 47. This guided meditation instruction further elaborates on the principle of common humanity. "Now recognize the profound similarity between yourself and this person at the fundamental human level, and cultivate this thought: *Just like me, this person also wishes to achieve happiness and shuns even the slightest suffering.*"

[82] Ibid. The following instruction from guided meditation elucidates the notion of interconnection. "Consider the various necessities of your life—the things you require to maintain your life and health, as well as to flourish and achieve genuine well-being. From the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the house we live in to the books we enjoy reading, the ideas that inspire us, and all the many services we take advantage of every day, we depend on others for every single one of our comforts and joys ... and for our very survival itself. *(Pause)* Our lives would be truly impoverished without the innumerable benefits we derive from countless other beings every day of our lives.... Let your mind abide in this awareness of deep appreciation of interconnectedness for a while."

[83] One of the supplementary exercises in this step is a dyad experience. One partner shares with the other about a current experience that they are struggling with. The listener gives her full attention to the speaker and while the speaker is describing his feelings the listener imagines living through this experience, as though it is her own. After the speaker has finished the listener says "Thank you" and the two trade roles.

Step five is the cultivation of compassion for others. This is based on the prior week but now moves beyond recognizing shared underlying needs and empathizing with suffering to actually offering compassion to friends, enemies, and strangers. This step adds the dimension of wishing the person to be free of suffering and focusing this wish as intensely as possible. The pedagogy this week, as in earlier ones, draws on group discussion, dyad work, guided meditation, and presentation of relevant scientific explanations as described earlier in this section. The curriculum for this week emphasizes the benefit of compassion for one's own health and well-being. As Thupten Jinpa asserts in the following statement,

> The psychological and emotional effects of compassion—how when one cultivates compassion for others, the focus naturally shifts away from self and to others, thus expanding the horizons of one's vision. This immediately has the effect of freeing one from excessive self-concern, which generally tends to feel heavy and to make one more vulnerable to feelings of hurt and frustration.[84]

When a person is more compassionate she is necessarily less self-centered, which actually serves to make her happier than if she had focused her attention narrowly on her own interests.

Step six is active compassion practice, which is a secular adaptation of the Tibetan practice of *tonglen* (giving and receiving). It is based on the premise that as compassion for others increases so does the sense of an imperative to decrease their suffering. In this week participants practice taking away the suffering of others and replacing the suffering with positive objects, emotions, and experiences. Active Compassion Practice is intended to engage and

[84] Ibid., 51.

strengthen the desire to do something about the suffering of others. The focus in the transition from step five to step six is from the phenomenology of the experience of compassion to a more active method to exercise it.[85] The pedagogy this week engages the topic of taking on the suffering of others through guided discussion addressing the fears that people may have about turning toward rather than away from suffering. The guided meditation and dyad work both focus on the experience of drawing in suffering and sending out happiness. The guided meditation uses visualization of suffering as dark smoke or fog that is inhaled and transformed into comfort and relief envisioned as radiant light. The dyad exercise prepares learners for this meditation. It begins with one partner sharing a particular suffering and the other partner envisioning taking on the suffering that they are hearing about and transforming this suffering into relief.

The final week integrates the prior practices and themes into one meditation practice that participants can bring forward with them after the course concludes. The pedagogy this week incorporates group discussion and guided journaling exercises which are intended to facilitate the process of reflecting on personal and group experiences throughout the course as well as enumerating next steps in terms of taking the lessons learned forward into life. Evaluations

[85] It is noted in the teachers manual that this practice can be intimidating to some practitioners. The notion of taking on suffering and breathing in suffering visualized as dark clouds or fog can seem overwhelming to some learners. In conversation with John Makransky on this issue, he has emphasized that without grounding in practices of wisdom the suffering (either one's own or another person's) seem concrete. With a concretized understanding of suffering it becomes difficult to muster the desire to take on someone else's difficulties. And even if there is such a desire resistance will inevitably arise. Thus the best support for this *tonglen* meditation is to deepen in one's experience of wisdom. More is discussed on this point in Chapter 4 in relation to the various perspectives taken on the weight of relative to absolute practices in different traditions of *Lojong*.

with questions about the participants experience of the various elements of the course are used to organize the reflection and provide feedback to instructors that can shape future teaching efforts. Guided meditation this week is intended to familiarize learners with the culminating meditation.

The pedagogy and curriculum of Stanford's Compassion Training is an attempt at inculturation of Buddhist practices to meet American, secular audiences. The building blocks of the pedagogy include a combination of small group discussion, large group discussion, guided meditation, and structured dyad exercises. The exact balance of these approaches is not rigidly prescribed in the manual. This is the case because Jinpa's premise is that teachers need to have flexibility to respond to their particular contexts. The goal of the manual is to provide content and methods that can support the teacher but the ultimate determinant of how the course is taught should be the students. Thus the core principle of skillful means, the imperative for responsiveness to learner needs, is retained from the traditional teaching methods.

Other key points from traditional Buddhist pedagogy (as explored in Chapters 2 and 3) are also implemented in this course such as the fundamental imperative from a Buddhist perspective for experiential, embodied learning. The experiential learning emphasized in the tradition and in this adapted course highlights epistemology rooted in the practice of meditation. This course also carries forward the traditional emphasis on learners taking agency for their own learning. The curriculum is based on the premise that learners will actively participate in classes as well as homework assignments. A priority is placed on

the knowledge gained through embodied practices, which dovetails with the emphasis in the Four Reliances on a diversity of expressions as well as the supremacy of experiential wisdom. The methods of teaching in the curriculum are culturally embedded, which is also supported by the doctrine of skillful means.

4. Principles for the Inculturation of Buddhist-derived Meditation into Secular Contexts

- Inculturation requires meeting existing interests and perceived needs. *Responding* to the concern for measurable health benefits as a primary preoccupation of contemporary Americans is one specific way Buddhist practices have become integrated into the contemporary Western culture.
- The process of inculturation is dialogical in that dominant cultural practices not only inform new expressions of Buddhism but are also informed by them. In the case of treating compassion fatigue or PTSD, traditional treatment perspectives have been impacted by epistemology derived from Buddhist meditation.
- An important element of inculturating Buddhist meditation is the use of relevant teaching forms that are accessible to the target audiences. Examples of culturally effective teaching methods include dyad, small group, and large group discussion.

- Pedagogy of Buddhist-derived practices in secular Western settings retains the focus on *experiential* learning especially through the process of meditation.
- The goal in medical and secular settings described in this chapter is to *transform* the learner's experience with regard to areas that they are invested in shifting. For example, courses for trauma survivors are looking to transform relationship to trauma symptoms. Or classes targeting healthcare providers suffering from burnout are targeting transformation in the area of work-place and life satisfaction.

Conclusion

Buddhist derived practices have moved far beyond Buddhist settings and have become established in a variety of secular settings including schools, hospitals, and businesses. Teaching methods differ in these diverse settings according to the needs of the learners. However, pedagogy of meditation needs to be informed both by traditional values and processes as well as by the needs of learners in the new cultural context. The Compassion Cultivation Training Protocol, developed by Dr. Thupten Jinpa at CCARE, is an example of a secularized adaptation of a Tibetan Buddhist curriculum intended for use in the public sphere. It retains elements of traditional pedagogy yet also is adapted in significant ways. We have considered the traditional perspectives on what comprises effective adaptation in Chapters 2 and 3. What can be said in terms of the Western influences on the philosophy of education that can support this

process of adaptation and teaching in diverse contexts? The next chapter will consider this important question.

CHAPTER V

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Introduction

Chapter 5 considers key pedagogical insights from learner-centered and feminist pedagogy in terms of their relevance to the process of the inculturation of Buddhist derived meditation practices. This chapter builds on the traditional Buddhist perspectives on pedagogy discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 as well as on the insights gained from current pedagogical practices enumerated in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes with a proposed philosophy of education for Buddhist practices taught in secular settings, which distills a combination of contemporary and traditional Buddhist influences into a set of guiding principles.

1. Learner Centered Pedagogy As A Resource For Buddhist Education

Dewey's understanding of education is an essential resource for contemporary American pedagogy. John Dewey's 1934 *Art as Experience* explores the connection between experience, learning, and expression. Dewey suggests that we begin our engagement with art by connecting to our experience of it, specifically in terms of what captures us about it. He explores the connection between thinking, experiencing, and aesthetics at length and highlights the dynamic dimension of experience. His pedagogy reflects a strong

interest in change, and in the process of becoming. The human being is always in process, according to Dewey, and thus always able to learn. He challenges the hierarchy of thinking over experience and aesthetics with his approach to education.

For Dewey, economics is at the root of the estrangement of the person from her internal and social processes. The dehumanizing forces of capitalism and dominant paradigms for individualistic education that overly emphasize rationality cause the person to become alienated from her experience.

> We use the senses to arouse passion but not to fulfill the interest of insight, not because that interest is not potentially present in the exercise of sense but because we yield to conditions of living that force sense to remain an excitation on the surface. Prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through control of the bodies and labor of others.[1]

For Dewey, the aesthetic experience and the creative experience are methods to bring us back to our embodied experience that we have become alienated from through our mistaken priorities and unhelpful socialization.

In *Art as Experience,* Dewey argues that in the interaction between humans and the environment, there is a capacity for learning. He suggests that individuals organize the complexity of lived experience according to their own patterns of interpretation. He explains, "we boil down a series of conversations or of complicated transactions and the result is what is essential. We eliminate irrelevancies and retain what is indispensable."[2] This process is driven by not only personality traits but also previous educative experiences; "The gist of a variety of transactions is not the same for a lawyer, a scientific inquirer and a

[1] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, 1934), 21.
[2] Ibid., 305.

poet."[3] In fact, the discipline that a person has been trained in becomes a guiding filter for how she perceives the world. This principle dovetails with Buddhist understandings of karma, as discussed in Chapter 3. The notion of karma includes the understanding that people project their expectations onto experience in ways that are not conscious to them as they happen. In other words, prior trainings and transactions influence how we interpret situations and how we behave which in turn drives outcomes. The Compassion Training program described in Chapter 4 attempts to engage with this process of karmic projection by offering specific exercises such as meditation and working with prompts targeting the recognition of patterns as they emerge in daily experience. This effort is rooted in traditional Buddhist training practices that are meant to create space in the links between interpretation, projection, and action. Interestingly, karmic theory dovetails with Dewey's premise that the process of "selection and simplification" drives our unconscious redaction of experience. Dewey's statement that

> In ordinary perception, objects are taken as if they were external to mind. Therefore, awareness of objects of art and of natural beauty is not a case of perception, but of an intuition that knows objects as, themselves, states of mind.[4]

As Dewey points out, this error of viewing objects as though they are unrelated to mental states and prior formation is a fundamental and generally unconscious one. But it is one that can and should be corrected through education. Specifically, the experience of art, according to Dewey, has the

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 306.

capacity to correct this ongoing epistemological error that humans make. Dewey comments,

> I have had occasion to speak more than once of a quality of an intense esthetic experience that is so immediate as to be ineffable and mystical. An intellectualized rendering of this immediate quality of experience translates it into the terms of a dream-metaphysics.[5]

In this passage, Dewey acknowledges the possibility of experience demarked by intense immediacy, which is endowed with 'mystical' qualities. Moreover, he points out that this type of experience cannot be directly carried into the realm of cognitive understanding.

This is a fascinating acknowledgment made here by Dewey, at least from a Buddhist perspective, as it reads like Dewey is rendering a phenomenological description of the experience of wisdom or nonduality. This is significant to a Buddhist reader, because as discussed in the context of both the *Vimalakirti Sutra* and the Four Reliances in Chapter 3, wisdom (coupled with compassion) is the highest good in terms of the Mahayana Buddhist educative goals. Dewey diverges from Buddhists in that he does not place this kind of experience at the pinnacle of his own system of education. However, that he acknowledges this kind of experience not only as possible but as something that can be evoked by exposing people to direct encounters with esthetic experiences is significant in light of this conversation between Buddhist and Deweyan approaches to education.

[5] Ibid., 305.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey emphasizes that confusion is an essential element in the learning process. He explains,

> The live creature demands order in his living but he also demands novelty. Confusion is displeasing but so is ennui. The "touch of disorder" that lends charm to a regular scene is disorderly only from some external standard. From the standpoint of actual experience it adds emphasis, distinction, as long as it does not prevent a cumulative carrying forward from one part to another. If it were experienced *as* disorder it would produce an unresolved clash and be displeasing. A temporary clash, on the other hand may be the factor of resistance that summons up energy to proceed the more actively and triumphantly… The difficult becomes objectionable only when instead of challenging energy it overwhelms and blocks it.[6]

In this section, Dewey points out that for people to grow they must be confronted by experiences that are challenging or confusing. Humans, according to Dewey, actually require dissonance and disorder in their experience in order to learn. This disorder is experienced as unsettling but the alternative; stasis or 'ennui' is also problematic and unpleasant. Dewey suggests that challenging experiences 'add emphasis, distinction' and in this way add interest to the process of living and learning. Challenging experiences, when they are too chaotic or experienced as 'disorder[ly]', however, do not provide the same kind of opportunity for growth. In other words, for Dewey, educative experience must challenge learners and work their edge in order to be helpful but if the experience utterly overwhelms an individual she cannot integrate it productively into her learning process. This point regarding the importance of being stretched in the learning process resonates with the premise in traditional Buddhist perspectives on skillful teaching. As was suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, based on the

[6] Ibid., 173-174.

examples drawn from early and Mahayana Buddhism, effective teachers challenge and push their students. Here Dewey echoes this sentiment.

Dewey also points out that there are limits to how much a person can be productively challenged before they transition into an experience of overwhelm, which 'blocks' them from responding proactively and learning effectively. One place that this issue comes up in the pedagogy of compassion meditation is in the selection of examples of dear, neutral, and difficult people to practice the cultivation of compassion in relation to. If a learner chooses too difficult and complicated of a figure to work with, she will find herself overwhelmed and will not recognize her natural, innate empathy for the person. Therefore, when teaching these meditations it is important to emphasize choosing a person who is not overly charged in the emotional sense. When working with a difficult person, for example, Makransky points out that it is more productive to start the practice by choosing someone who we prefer not to see than to pick the figure from our past that has inflicted the greatest emotional scarring on our psyche.[7]

Dewey insists on the unity of experience in terms of the underlying integrity of its various facets such as perception, emotion, intellect, and so on. He claims, "It is not possible to divide in a vital experience the practical, emotional, and intellectual from one another."[8] Dewey suggests that perception is suffused with emotion and that emotion undergirds all embodied experience. He is clear that we can learn from experience, but the fact of experience itself does not necessitate that we learn. Experience is ongoing; humans are constantly

[7] Makransky, *Awakening Through Love: Unveiling Your Deepest Goodness,* 127.
[8] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 55.

experiencing as long as we are alive, but learning requires reflecting on experience rather than simply having it. For this reason, it is essential to support learners of Buddhist meditation in the process of reflecting on what they are learning on the cushion and developing their ability to bridge this learning into the rest of their lives. To this end, it is helpful to give homework assignments that structure the investigation of the various elements of meditation in the context of daily life. It is also important to bring this exploration into the classroom environment, so people can learn from one another and have their own process of inquiry probed and deepened in conversation with other learners.

Rather than philosophically dissecting the contents of our world, as we know it, we need to come to learn about the process of experiencing by means of specific kinds of reflection, according to Dewey. Engaging art, he argues, is a primary way to learn about the world as it is. According to Dewey, "a work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live [sic]."[9] Aesthetics are an especially important domain for learning for Dewey because he sees the visceral experience of art as a crucible for embodied learning. For this reason, Dewey highlights the role of creating as well as viewing art as a constitutive element of the learning process. This is the case because both creating and viewing art endows learners with insight that they can carry into the rest of their lives. In other words, Dewey suggests that the learning that happens through engaging art in turn can be applied more broadly. The central role that

[9] Ibid., 195.

Dewey ascribes to art in his pedagogy is analogous to the central role that Buddhists allocate to the practice of meditation.

Dewey also emphasizes that there are various ways of relating to learning. In the more limited, utilitarian approach to experience, “We journey to get somewhere else because we have business at the latter point and would gladly, were it possible, cut out the traveling.”[10] The process or ‘journey,’ in this approach is subsumed under the aim or goal. But another approach is possible to both life and education, according to Dewey. He suggests, “At other times we journey for the delight of moving about and seeing what we see. Means and ends coalesce.”[11] It is in the congruence between process and purpose in this second perspective that integrated learning can truly unfold.

When ‘means and ends coalesce’ the learner’s conceptual and embodied experience is aligned. The learner is able to make sense out of the challenges she is faced with and experiences satisfaction or even ‘delight’ from this process. Of course, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. They can both be necessary at different times and for different people. The learning experience cannot always be joyful, for as discussed, encountering challenging situations is part of the dynamic process of growth. On the other hand, learners also need to participate in exercises, such as in the production or viewing of art that allow them to engage materials and approaches to embodiment that are not strictly goal oriented. This indicates that there need to be a variety of types of learning experiences undertaken by learners. The doctrine of skillful means corroborates

[10] Ibid., 198.
[11] Ibid.

this need for a multiplicity of learning experiences ranging from meditative, cognitive, and reflective, as established in Chapters 2 and 3. The Stanford Compassion training model likewise emphasizes that effective pedagogy utilizes a combination of affective, cognitive, and verbal learning experiences through engagement with group discussion, scientific study, guided meditation, and dyad work.

Dewey speaks of “egotism” as the obscuring factor that stands in the way of recognizing our own relational nature and the vibrance of experience.[12] He suggests, "Every experience is constituted by interaction between ‘subject’ and ‘object,’ between a self and its world.”[13] For Dewey, reality is primarily composed of these dualistic kinds of experience. We can see places in Dewey’s writing where he acknowledges the possibility of a nondual perspective, as in the passage referring to mystical experience earlier in this chapter. In considering the hopes that Dewey has for students who engage the aesthetic experience we can find much resonance with the key goal of Buddhist education, however, which is to educate for freedom from the suffering caused by self-clinging.

But nonduality is not a central part of Dewey’s framework, and this would be an area where Buddhism could challenge and contribute to his philosophy of education. Dewey’s concern with creating citizens who live in ways that respect the dignity of others could be supported by creating a more central place for the fundamental recognition of interdependence that is inherent in nondual epistemology. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Dewey sees his methods as a

[12] Ibid., 195.
[13] Ibid., 246.

means of promoting "democratic social arrangements"[14] that are superior to "the procedures of the traditional school, since the latter have so much of the autocratic about them."[15] Dewey recommends progressive methods for education because they support learners in becoming individuals who can contribute to participatory social systems. Dewey sees this emphasis on individuality as supportive of collective well-being. He asks,

> Does not the principle of regard for individual freedom and for decency and kindliness of human relations come back in the end to the conviction that these things are tributary to a higher quality of experience on the part of a greater number than are methods of repression and coercion [sic] or force?[16]

Dewey sees a strong connection between social good, democracy, and individual freedom. This is a distinction between Dewey's perspective and that of Buddhism. As discussed in Chapter 3, Mahayana Buddhism would see embodied wisdom or realization of nonduality as intimately connected with interpersonal bonds rooted in compassion. The premise in Buddhist thought is that realization of a nondual perspective is the most fundamental and strongest support for the creation of prosocial societies. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey argues for the need to define the use of the term 'experience' and its relationship to the educative process. He asserts that there is an "organic connection between education and personal experience" but to take an empirical approach to education, requires defining what types of experiences are educative and why.[17] He points out that some experience can be "mis-educative" in that it

[14] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (Indianapolis: Kappa Delta Pi, 1938), 25.
[15] Ibid., 24.
[16] Ibid., 26.
[17] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (Indianapolis: Kappa Delta Pi, 1938), 13.

"may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness."[18] For example, as discussed in Chapter 4, traumatic experiences often create obstacles to learning and lead to maladaptive responses such as hyper-arousal and basic mistrust for self and others. Experience could also be enjoyable but not educative, and lead to "a slack and careless attitude" that trains a person away from the precision and attentiveness that is required for learning.[19]

According to Dewey, the teacher needs to remember that all experience is not inherently educative in the positive sense. Effective pedagogy requires a commitment to ongoing exploration of the impact that the environment has on the learning processes of students. Teachers cannot simply give students predigested information and expect it to lead to embodied learning. As Dewey puts it, "the educator cannot start with knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in doses."[20] Learning, for Dewey, is a process that requires an embodied approach. Students need to be invited into a process of discovery. As discussed above, transformative learning requires facing challenge and working with destabilization.

For Dewey, education can be recognized as effective because of the results it yields.[21] This emphasis on outcomes parallels the Buddhist perspective that skillful means can ultimately be best judged by the increase in wisdom and compassion that it yields. Interestingly, Dewey and Buddhism both use the

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 14.
[20] Ibid., 102.
[21] Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 79.

language of 'fruits' as a metaphor for the goal of education. This bespeaks the common understanding that there the experience of education is meant to unfold in transformative outcomes that have concrete, not just theoretical elements to it. Both Dewey and Buddhist educators emphasize that the process of education should result in changes in not just thought but also in behavior.

Growth alone is also not a sufficient criterion for establishing a particular set of experiences as educative as "a man may grow in efficiency as a burglar, as a gangster, or as a corrupt politician."[22] Dewey notes that experience is cumulative in the sense that "every experience influences in some degree the objective conditions under which further experiences are had."[23] A criminal, for example, limits his capacity to engage with others based on his activities. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey points out that the examination of the forces that bind together a gang of criminals illustrates how mis-educative experiences limit rather than broaden social ties. He explains,

> The ties which consciously hold the members together are few in number, reducible almost to a common interest in plunder; and that they are of such a nature as to isolate the group from other groups with respect to give [sic] and take of the values of life. Hence the education such a society gives is partial and distorted.[24]

In other words, the criminal experiences that this group has in common limit their social connections both within the gang and also to the broader world.

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[22] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* , 28.
[23] Ibid., 30. This notion of experience begetting future, similar experiences is in some respects analogous to the Buddhist idea of karma as described by John Makransky in *Awakening through Love*. Makransky explains karma as the principle that our actions shape the way we perceive self, others, and external stimuli. Again, parallels can be seen here with theories of projection in contemporary psychological discourse.
and in learning.
[24] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 124.

Despite the 'common interest in plunder' the overall effect of the shared experience of crime is one that reduces rather than increases social ties. Dewey suggests that a litmus test for establishing whether an experience is educative in a positive or negative way is to inquire into whether the experience supports the deepening of relationships with other groups or contributes to isolation from others. He suggests that considering the question "How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?" can give insight into whether an experience is educative or mal-educative.[25]

This notion of "full and free," for Dewey, epitomizes the goal of education. "Full interaction with other groups," according to Dewey, is the basis of "progress through wider relationships" and especially relationships across difference.[26] "Full and free" interactions are the antidote to dysfunctional social relationships. He suggests, "The essential point is that isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group."[27] On the other hand, Dewey asserts, "Every expansive era in the history of mankind has coincided with the operation of factors which have tended to eliminate distance between peoples and classes previously hemmed off from one another."[28] Thus the narrow posture of self-interest can be best counteracted through education that enhances awareness of mutuality.

Dewey sees the pursuit of a "full and free" experience as supportive of the capacity for solidarity across difference and as the basis for a functional political

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 128.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 129.

system. This goal, of building solidarity across difference through reflection on embodied experience resonates with a Buddhist approach to compassion education. Mahayana Buddhism emphasized the bridge between one's own experience and that of others, especially in teachings on compassion. But Dewey's understanding of the nature of the individual and of personal experience is part of an entirely different political and cosmological world-view than that which undergirds Buddhist practice. This distinction is worth noticing in terms of its relevance to an inculturated Buddhist pedagogy. As discussed in Chapter 1, in the context of Taylor's buffered self, this sense of separation from other people and from one's own body that is experienced in the contemporary Western worldview is markedly different from the premodern, embodied sense of self that is more closely correlated with the Buddhist worldview.

On the other hand, despite the lack of a nondual agenda in Dewey's perspective on education, he does seek to challenge an individualistic, disembodied sense of self through his pedagogy. For example, Dewey describes the collective nature of experience by articulating the relationship between personal experience and the impact "of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities."[29] He emphasizes, the tendency for experience to be "treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an individual's body and mind" undercuts the recognition of the social and embodied nature of examined experience.[30] Dewey notes that the tendency to overlook the collective, contextual, and social elements of experience reifies a limited sense of

[29] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 34.
[30] Ibid.

personhood, which is overly individualistic and divorced from the complexity of reality.

For example, Dewey describes the impact that the environment has on a poor child raised in a slum and contrasts it with the shaping forces on a more privileged child raised in a small town by the sea. This example drives home the point that context profoundly impacts experience and the learning process, but not necessarily in positive ways. He uses this example to establish the need for the educator to recognize the role of the environment in experiences and in learning. Not only does the educator need to recognize the importance of the environment, but also she actually needs to "utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while."[31] [32] This process is not universal for all learners but rather is particular to the patternings of specific individuals who are impacted by specific contexts. Dewey reminds us that students vary from one another in their conditioning and capacities and therefore a multiplicity of pedagogical approaches is necessary in order to **respond** to their specific needs. He also emphasizes the impact that the environment and reflection on experience can have on the individual. For Dewey, knowledge cannot simply be handed from one person to the other. Rather education happens through embodied and **experiential** engagement. He suggests that education can support social connections by confronting learners with experiential challenges that ideally open them to a more expansive sense of self that is "full and free."

[31] Ibid., 35.
[32] Dewey's call for the educator to understand the context and to proactively shape it for the benefit of learners echoes the principle of skillful means described in Chapter 2.

The emphasis Dewey places on the **transformative** outcome or fruit of learning as well as on the relational, civic elements of learning are the basis for emancipatory and feminist pedagogies explored in the next section.

2. Feminist Pedagogy As A Resource For Buddhist-derived Education

Dewey's understanding of education as a process of constructing knowledge out of experience and the vital role that education has on social and political relationships are carried forward into feminist thinking.[33] Freedom from discrimination, from the perspective of feminists like Maxine Greene, is rooted in the recognition that the socialization of gender roles are inscribed in the embodied experience that both women and men have in the world. Greene comments, "I want to discuss the lived worlds and perceptual realities of women because I am so sharply aware of the degree to which they are obscured by sex and gender roles."[34] She suggests that an education that points the learner toward the phenomenology of experience is a vital component of feminist pedagogy.

Greene argues that education can strengthen the capacity for men and women to leaving behind the damaging implications of experience mediated through unconsciously internalized gender roles. Such an education, she explains, can lead to freedom from stifling socialization. This new freedom supports new choices for both women and men. This premise dovetails with

[33] Frances A Maher and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, *The Feminist Classroom* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 3.
[34] Maxine Greene, "The Lived World," in the *Education Feminism Reader*, ed. Lynda Stone (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Dewey's notion of the "full and free" life that education can empower but here tethers it to the process of transforming the limitations of internalized gender inequality.

Feminism is more than interpretation of texts and practices with gender equality in mind. Feminist pedagogues remind us that gender (as well as race, class, etc.) play a role in the learning processes of both women and men that must not be overlooked if education is to be successful. Feminist pedagogy fundamentally views the purpose of education as linked with the pursuit of freedom, which will require promoting critical consciousness raising that leads to action for women's equality.[35]

This is easier said than done given that even teachers who would like to implement feminist pedagogy are not necessarily equipped to do so. For example, it is well documented that teachers themselves are not reliable reporters of how fairly they balance their time between the genders.[36] This is particularly problematic given that according to feminist educators, for the world to reflect gender equity, the classroom must teach and embody equity.[37] This means challenging and breaking down the erroneous idea that gender is the fundamental determinant of capability or proclivities.

Or as David and Myra Sadker and Karen Zittleman summarize, educators should take to heart "the preponderance of studies on gender differences to date find that boys differ from other boys, and girls differ from other girls more than the

[35] Sadker, Sadker, and Zittleman, *Still Failing at Fairness: How Gender Bias Cheats Girls and Boys in School and What We Can Do About It*, 24.
[36] Ibid., 21.
[37] Ibid., 23.

average boy differs from the average girl."[38] More recently, Caryl Rivers and Rosalind Barnett argued,

> The true story is exactly the opposite of the popular narrative [that emphasizes gender difference]. The overwhelming consensus, validated by dozens of researchers using well-designed samples, is that girls and boys are far more alike than different in their cognitive abilities and the differences that do exist are trivial. That's not to say there are no differences between the sexes-indeed there are-but when it comes to the way boys and girls learn and the subjects they are good at, sweeping statements about innate gender differences don't hold up.[39]

The emphasis here is on using research to debunk widely publicized conceptions about the vast differences between the "Boy Brain" and "Girl Brain." Rivers and Barnett claim that the messages that parents and educators are receiving about "different brains, different ways of reasoning, and different hormones" are leading parents and educators "to believe that their little girls and boys need different stimulation; they need to be handled differently, educated differently, and given different levels of protection."[40] Rivers and Barnett suggest that the emphasis on difference between male and female brains runs counter to neuroscience research. They argue that the research indicates greater similarity than difference between the mental functioning of the sexes.

The emphasis that is placed on gender as a determinant for behavior says more about cultural than biological factors according to this perspective. Beyond this, treating men and women equally within the teaching event, by offering appropriate encouragement and support to all learners can only happen when teachers are aware of their own internalized, often unconscious bias. With this

[38] Ibid., 278.
[39] Caryl Rivers and Rosalind Barnett, *The Truth About Girls and Boys: Challenging Toxic Stereotypes About Our Children,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 2.
[40] Ibid., 3.

kind of awareness, Buddhist teachers could more effectively support the potential for transformative learning in the communities they engage.

It is important to remember in this discussion about gender inequality that the issue is not only one for women.[41] Sexism is damaging for boys and men as well as for girls and women, as "sexist notions of masculinity limit male careers, activities, emotions, and longevity."[42] Men suffer from the limitations imposed by gendered stereotypes even if they benefit from the misallocation of economic resources.[43]

2.A Feminist Approaches to Participatory Pedagogy

In this section I will explore several perspectives on participatory pedagogy with an eye to establishing their relevance to a Buddhist philosophy of education for secular contexts. For example, Sara Crawley's article *Full Contact Pedagogy* offers suggestions for engaging learners in an active educative process. One primary aim of her pedagogy is to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. She asserts, "[O]ur goal as teachers is to incite students to claim their own educations—to engage them so fully in the given

[41] Maxine Green, "The Lived World," in the *Education Feminism Reader*, ed. Lynda Stone (New York: Routledge, 1994).
[42] Ibid., 58.
[43] Carol Gilligan, "Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle," in *The Education Feminism Reader*, ed. Lynda Stone (New York: Routledge, 1994). Gilligan also addresses the problem of male-centered epistemologies in her examination of the impact of operative life cycle descriptions on men and women. She critiques the equating of male development with human development and asserts that this leads to theories that are inaccurate, limited, skewed, and devaluing of women. Her proposed solution is to include the experience of women. This raises an important question for Buddhist religious educators regarding the development schema implicit in Buddhist curricula. To what extent are Buddhist understandings of spiritual development gendered? And if they are gendered, to what extent do they apply to women, or miss the mark for the needs of women students.

discipline we are teaching that they can claim it as a scholar would."[44] The book offers specific methods for reaching this goal. Crawley suggests that lecturing with questions draws students into the perspective of the discipline. She describes her teaching style as interactive and self-reflexive in the sense that she seeks to "encourage students and faculty to constantly evaluate: Why are we doing this?"[45] She does not want students to passively receive information but rather aspires to engage them in the process of knowledge production.

Crawley attempts to "walk through the ideas with them as I facilitate, allowing them the opportunity to discover the arguments for themselves."[46] This style of teaching may appear less efficient than simply transmitting relevant information to students and then allowing them to process it and make sense of it. But Crawley argues that her interactive style is more effective than a traditional style of lecturing. In other words, students do not only learn from their experience and from teachers. Students also learn from one another. As has been suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, traditional Buddhist perspectives on skillful means emphasize the relational nature of learning. Chapter 4, in the example of Stanford Compassion Training, likewise emphasizes the role of social engagement in the integration of core concepts into embodied experience. Large and small group discussion in this context is seen as a primary pedagogical tool.

Crawley's work is in accord with feminist pedagogical commitments to a transparent process that demonstrates that knowledge is created and does not

[44] Sara Crawley, "Full Contact Pedagogy: Lecturing with Questions and Student-Centered Assignments as Methods for Inciting Self-Reflexivity for Faculty and Students," *Feminist Teacher*, 19, no. 1 (2008): 13–30.
[45] Ibid., 29.
[46] Ibid., 15.

just exist in the world as a given. In *The Feminist Classroom*, Frances Maher and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault emphasize the significance of power dynamics in the classroom as an opportunity for learning.

> In *all* classrooms, positionalities [hierarchies of power] are at work. Teachers and students may assume, aspire to, and/or directly challenge and undermine the social structures they inhabit, but they cannot completely step outside them. Yet, if the classroom setting can help students to understand the workings of positional dynamics in their lives, to see them through their "third eye," then they can begin to challenge them and to create change.[47] [48]

Teachers and students, in other words, cannot step outside the dynamics of power. But they can engage power in a purposeful way and learn from the experience. This learning can then translate into insight that applies outside of the feminist classroom. Feminist pedagogy reflects a commitment not only to equality in principle but actually to using procedures that support the engagement of learners as agent-subjects who have agency in uncovering elements of the world and themselves that have previously been obscured. For example, in a feminist classroom, teachers can embed acknowledgment of the contextual nature of theory by "critiquing the *relationships* between particular stories and broader interpretive frameworks."[49] In this respect, feminist pedagogy is closely related to the postmodern perspectives on the situated nature of knowledge and its role in learning presented in Chapter 1. Transparent discussion of power

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[47] Frances A Maher and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, *The Feminist Classroom* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 203.

[48] Ibid., 202. The third eye is defined as "a form of theorizing, but rather than reflecting either a universalized mode of thought-thinking about thinking-or one that is personal or psychological, Phillips gives this way of knowing [applying the third eye] a positional cast: you have to go from the "center out" by first knowing the place where you are." This principle of the third eye creates a bridge between one's personal experience and universal dynamics. It is deeply resonant with principles of compassion derived from the Mahayana traditions of Buddhism.

[49] Ibid., 210.

dynamics in learning contexts can be a powerful tool to support transformative learning.

Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon's book *Learning to Teach through Discussion: The Art of Turning the Soul* offers further means to create effective dialogical learning experiences. This text targets younger students but can be adapted to meet the needs of older learners. The premise of finding points of engagement with the interest of learners is not specific to any particular age. But the way that these points of intersection are found do differ with older learners. For example, adult learners may be more readily able to proactively define their own points of interest, depending on their prior educative experiences. Alternatively, educators working with trauma survivors can draw on their knowledge about the symptoms of PTSD to gain insight into what kinds of issues might be not only interesting but actually could be helpful to address.

Haroutunian-Gordon speaks of three types of questions that educators can use to prompt discussion, which are factual, evaluative, and interpretive. Effective discussions, she suggests, focuses largely on interpretive questions at least at the initial phase of engaging a text or concept. Engaging in evaluative discussion too early in the process undermines the possibility of being impacted by new ways of thinking. This is the case because interpretive questions require learners to repeatedly return to the text and clarify their understanding. Evaluative questions, on the other hand, invite learners to "judge the text … on the basis of criteria they bring to bear on it from without."[50] This kind of evaluation

[50] Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, *Learning to Teach through Discussion: The Art of Turning the Soul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 37.

is not bad, but it is certainly less helpful in prompting students to engage concepts that are new and challenging.

Haroutunian-Gordon advises teachers to prepare for discussion by discerning the "deepest point of doubt" and from this to create a basic set of eight questions that target different parts of the text. The deepest point of doubt (DPD) is the common point of ambiguity about the meaning of the text or "the question the leader wants most to resolve."[51] Engaging the DPD head on creates a shared goal among the participants in the learning experience. For example, a DPD in veterans going through compassion training is concern that if they were to become more compassionate then people would take advantage of them. Bringing up this concern and encouraging them to voice why they might believe this, not only draws them out but also creates a safe learning environment where dissenting perspectives are welcome. Interpretive discussion can facilitate the formation of the learning community through the shared goal and shared process of closely engaging an idea or practice. Interpretive discussion, in this example, would consider the basis for how they developed this belief and the relationship this belief has to their own prior experiences as well as to broader cultural messages. Haroutunian-Gordon suggests, "'learning,' 'thinking' and 'knowing' do not refer to mental events that take place in the minds of individuals … Rather they are words that refer to relations."[52] What she means here is that the learning process, engaging new concepts and epistemologies is not a private enterprise but rather is fundamentally a social one.

[51] Ibid., 91.
[52] Ibid., 13.

This approach requires teachers to not only have familiarity with the texts or material, but also to understand how the learners will receive this material. To discern the DPD, the teacher has to be able to enter into the mindset of the learners to predict what will be interesting, challenging, unclear and so on. Returning to the example of the veterans above, the teacher who is familiar with the symptoms of PTSD can predict that the prevalent experiences of emotional numbing and anger will likely lead to points of dissonance and confusion in the context of trying to develop compassion.

Once the teacher identifies the DPD she will need to find a question that accesses it as well as a set of supportive questions that structure the relationship to the material. In this example, the teacher can normalize the experience of anger and numbness when she describes how meditation and compassion training progress. Knowing the way that trauma survivors struggle with close relationships can guide the teaching process. The teacher can also learn from the students over time and from experience of teaching the material repeatedly. For example, teaching a population like veterans over time, gives a teacher deeper insight into the kind of language, experiential exercises, and accommodations that tend to be more and less successful.

In addition to considering how to present content and the DPD, the teacher also has to make sure that participants are hearing and understanding one another and gaining from each other's insights and points of confusion. The teacher mediates between the material and the students as well as bridging between students and supporting continuity in the discussion and group

engagement. In the context of teaching compassion classes to veterans, there are often group members who are not forthcoming about their traumatic experiences and others who cannot help but return to their trauma and speak about it to the point of upsetting themselves and others. The teacher has to have skills in directing conversation to include the needs and tendencies of various learners.

From the perspective of feminist pedagogy, as described by Maher and Tetreault above, the power dynamics between learners and with the teacher become an opportunity to explore the topic of positionality in the classroom and beyond. In this example, the teacher could not just manage the group dynamic but could actually take the opportunity to make their own effort to keep the discussion moving transparent. This could include a statement such as, “Given that Bob is interested in exploring the intricacies of how this principle of common humanity relates to his experience in Afghanistan but Chris has repeatedly commented that he does not find this kind of inquiry useful, I am finding myself trying to negotiate these competing needs.” The goal here would be to harness the tensions in the classroom to make them an opportunity for shared consideration and learning.

Bringing forward another example here can help further elucidate how engaging DPD can function in a classroom of adult learners, this time a group who are not trauma survivors. *The Vimalakirti Sutra,* which I discussed in Chapter 3, includes long and elaborate descriptions of Buddhafields, rooted in ancient Indian cosmology. Contemporary readers, when they see this material,

often feel alienated by this foreign gestalt and its implications for their own study and practice. A teacher, who works with this text, according to Haroutunian-Gordon, is well advised to engage and draw out this dissonance in class discussion. Inviting in doubt and critique does not mean that the teacher does not need to provide historical context and tools for interpretation that can help contextualize foreign texts. But it does mean that the teacher seeks to empathize with the perspective and concerns of the learner and to structure the learning experience accordingly.

A skillful teacher, therefore, **responds** to the student's driving concerns and deeply held beliefs. Teachers likewise should approach texts and practices with an eye toward establishing their relevance to the lives of learners. Doubt should be welcomed into class discussion as an element of this emphasis on relevance. This point resonates with the discussion earlier in this chapter about Dewey's emphasis on the need to grow through engagement with challenging circumstances and negotiating imbalance.

The Haroutunian-Gordon method is not only intended for engaging texts within classroom contexts. The goal of the approach is to train learners to work together and value one another's contributions. Haroutunian-Gordon suggests, "[N]ow, more than at any time in the past, success in life demands that we communicate with one another despite differences of race, culture, economic, and political background … As we have seen, learning to treat difference as a resource for finding and addressing shared concerns is something that

participation in interpretive discussion engenders."[53] One of the great strengths of this text is that it bridges the philosophical approach to creating community in learning with very specific pathways to do so. Again, we see here that feminist pedagogy draws on Dewey's conviction that educative experiences (in the positive sense) strengthen the ability to connect across difference and contribute to the capacity of individuals and groups to become more civically minded.

We have established in this section that feminist pedagogy builds on the work of Dewey in the emphasis on the social elements of learning, the embodied nature of learning, the crucial role of disequilibrium in growth, and the imperative for reflection on experience in the learning process. Feminist pedagogy also emphasizes the constructed nature of knowledge. The power dynamics in the classroom, feminist educators suggest, can be harnessed as a means of illustrating how positionality functions and can be effectively engaged. Another tool explored in this section is working with the DPD as a way to keep conversation personally and socially relevant. This discussion of feminist pedagogy begs the question, what relevance does feminist pedagogy have for the pedagogy of Buddhist derived practices in secular spaces? To answer this question more thoroughly, it is first necessary to overview the role of gender inequality and the role of feminist pedagogy in traditional Buddhism.

[53] Ibid., 179.

2.B Pedagogical Implications of Buddhist Feminism

Scholars of American Buddhism[54] repeatedly cite gender-related issues as one of [55] the defining features[56] of the process of inculturation. According to Harvey, "Buddhism has, in a variety of ways, sought to improve the position of women living in discriminatory, or otherwise unfortunate, situations. Through its practices, it has also facilitated the self-confidence, empowerment, and spiritual liberation of both men and women."[57] In this section, I examine how the need to address issues of gender equality has driven and can continue to shape pedagogical adaptations in the context of contemporary North American Buddhism.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza defines "patriarchy as a male pyramid of graded subordinations and exploitations specifies women's oppression in terms of the class, race, country, or religion of the men to whom we 'belong.'" Schüssler Fiorenza's work on kyriarchy describes the intersecting nature of the various hegemonic forces. Her work suggests that a close examination of how any single arena of bias functions in turn reveals comparative dynamics in other arenas of

[54] See Charles Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Seager, Gross, Fields, Cabezon, and many others have likewise noted the significance of gender in the American Buddhist context.
[55] Race, class privilege, and heterosexist norms are also important areas of consideration in the North American context. The focus on gender here is not in any way meant to downplay the significance of these other crucial issues.
[56] Race, class privilege, and heterosexist norms are also important areas of consideration in the North American context. The focus on gender here is not in any way meant to downplay the significance of these other crucial issues.
[57] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 409.

inequality. Education, for Schüssler Fiorenza, is regarded as a primary site for creating change in the lives of individuals and institutions.[58]

Buddhist theologian Rita Gross describes feminist theology as the inquiry into "what would make women's lives better religiously and what would make their traditions less misogynist" and speaks to the practical impact that patriarchy has on the process of spiritual awakening.[59] Theologians and educators alike are challenged by Gross to consider the implications of gender inequity on the inner lives of women, on communities of practitioners, on the institutions of Buddhist practice, and on the relationship between these Buddhist institutions and the broader world. Scholars are charged by Gross to prescribe remedies to the problems that their analysis engages.[60] It is significant to note that the tools used in this process include the epistemologies that emerge from Buddhist practices, as well as training in Western scholarly methods.[61]

Buddhism, like other traditions contains a variety of elements that are patriarchal. Women have been largely excluded in the written corpus of Tibetan

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[58] See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), xiv.
[59] Rita Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections: Forty Years of Religious Exploration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 48.
[60] Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 59. The field of Buddhist ethics draws from a variety of sources including the Vinaya, the Sutras, the Jatakas, and commentaries. Core principles that undergird the various forms of Buddhist ethics include the doctrines of karma and rebirth, the four noble truths, and the relationship of wisdom and compassion (in the Mahayana tradition). The doctrines of impermanence, precious human birth, and interdependence also deeply inform Buddhist understandings of ethical matters. As far as discerning the ethics of a particular action, Buddhists pay attention not only to the action itself but also to the intention motivating the action and the attitude taken toward the completed action. This interest in the motivation behind actions emerges out of Buddhist understandings of the various elements of karma. Negative actions are based on greed, hatred, and delusion, whereas positive actions are based on generosity, kindness, and wisdom. Ethical behavior is essential to the path, according to Harvey, because "emptiness can [only], be experienced by minds that are "focused, clear, and inclined to be ethical, active, and compassionate."
[61] See Roger Corless, "Hermeneutics and Dharmology: Finding an American Buddhist Voice," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, ed. Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky (London: Routledge Curzon, 2000).

Buddhism. Less than 1% of biographical stories in the Tibetan canon are about women. Feminist theologians such as Gross emphasize that this dearth of written records about women must be engaged with respect to the impact that this omission has on contemporary practitioners, both male and female.[62]

Rita Gross suggests that reviewing early Buddhist history from the perspective of inquiring into gender roles yields ambiguous results. She asserts that there is both evidence supporting the premise that "women are just as capable as men of achieving Buddhist goals" and also that there are "many stories, including many elements of the Buddha's own story, that do not indicate an auspicious or positive relationship between women and early Indian Buddhism."[63] Gross defines her own feminist project as one that is concerned with uncovering both an "accurate and usable Buddhist past."[64] In other words, she seeks to understand the role that gender has played in Buddhist history but is also concerned with creating a narrative that is *helpful* for contemporary practitioners, both male and female.

Anne Klein contributes to this conversation in her enumeration of additional, *specific* ways that Buddhist practice can support women in dismantling internalized patriarchal identities. She points out that French feminists have been working on the notion of an identity that is not dualistic in its origin, and argues that Buddhist philosophy can support this effort with its "positive view of an interdependently understood identity."[1] She explains that

[62] Kurtis Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.
[63] Ibid., 30.
[64] Ibid., 22.

meditation can help women find freedom from the patriarchal self through paying close attention to the "self of ordinary experience."[1] Through meditation, Klein suggests, women find a means of knowing their experience without judging it.

This nonjudgmental awareness, she argues in turn offers them access to an experience that is not confined to internalized roles. Mindfulness practice can be a tremendous resource for feminists as it "guards against the loss of self in relationship, and at the same time softens the overly hard boundaries that construct oppositional posturings of self and other."[1] In other words, mindfulness practice points out the relational and interdependent qualities of experience while simultaneously grounding women in their own bodies and experience. This supports the capacity of women to find freedom from an overemphasis on the needs of others at the expense of appropriate care for oneself. It also returns the feminist to the imperative to continue deepening her own spiritual understanding through practice. Klein's approach of grounding feminism in spiritual practice reminds us that the extent of a given teacher's capacity to exhibit skillful means in a particular context such as transforming gender inequality, depends upon her own embodied spiritual realization.

Another key issue for feminist theologians involves female leadership and role models in religious traditions. In a Buddhist context, the emphasis on lineage leads to serious concern for issues like adequate representation of women in leadership roles. Buddhist feminists look to examples in early communities as a point of reference for making claims about how religious communities today should function. Likewise, Buddhist feminists pose questions about the early

attitudes of the tradition toward women. For example, a great deal of attention is given to the dynamics that precipitated in the original formation of a nuns order, and what that process might suggest about the role of women in monastic and lay communities today. Some feminist Buddhists argue that at the time of the Buddha there was a progressive stance toward women and that this should serve as a template for contemporary equality.

Others point to examples of exclusion and inferiority of women to paint a bleaker picture. For example, rules about the newest monk having seniority over a seasoned nun serve as counterevidence for gender equality in the Vinaya (Buddhist legal/ethical teachings). This concern for early precedents and arguments over the meaning of such precedents continues to shape Buddhist politics in a variety of ways today. Rita Gross problematizes the issue of women leaders by asking whether the primary concern should be to have more women in leadership positions in patriarchal systems or whether it is more fundamental to reconstruct the systems and their implicit values.[1] She argues that plugging more women leaders into dysfunctional community structures does not actually serve the well being of women practitioners.

While this overview of commonly raised Buddhist concerns related to patriarchy is by no means exhaustive, it does capture the kinds of issues that are raised by practitioners and addressed by scholars within the tradition. Having established that gender inequality is indeed an issue within traditional Buddhist learning contexts the question again emerges, what relevance do such concerns have for the pedagogy of meditation in secular contexts?

In secular settings where Buddhist derived meditation is taught, textual and historical study are downplayed. Nonetheless, learners are often aware of basic information about the source tradition that the meditation is drawn from and consider gender norms in this tradition to be a topic of curiosity. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 1, SBNR learners, who gravitate toward spiritual practice outside the context of institutionalized religion, reasonably also often gravitate toward secularized courses in Meditation. Such persons often have turned away from organized religion due to experiences of or beliefs about abuse of power in religious leadership. Thus questions about the role of gender equity in Buddhism are likely to be raised even in secular settings and accompanied by both interest and limited willingness to explore historical context.

Given my training in clinical social work, when I teach I find myself attuned to the particular ways that the violence of our culture becomes inscribed on the bodies and minds of the women I meet in the classroom. This concern is more than theoretical, sadly, as sexual violence is all-too common in the lives of women across class, race, and educational background. For example, 1 in 6 women have experienced rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.[65] And over half of the girls and women who have experienced sexual abuse knew their attackers before the event.[66] When teaching women with a trauma history, or who are close to other women with such experiences, conversations about compassion are impacted by experiences where compassion was markedly absent. Issues of

[65] *Who are the Victims? (accessed first January 2012); available from* http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims.
[66] Ibid.

numbing, anger, and trust necessarily emerge in the context of exploring the contours of social connection in the context of a secular compassion course.

The significance of this question is heighted by the recognition of the overrepresentation of women in the compassion training courses. More than two thirds of the participants in our first round of public classes offered this in Winter 2012 are women. These women are motivated to learn methods that will help their relationships to themselves as well as their interpersonal relationships. They are also concerned with the particular ways discrimination and violence toward women impacts their lives and the microcosm of the learning environment. For this reason, feminist pedagogies are an essential resource.

3. Summary of Chapter Five

In this chapter thus far we have established pedagogical principles from learner-centered and feminist pedagogy with an eye toward their relevance to the pedagogy of Buddhist derived meditation in secular settings in contemporary North America. Key insights from John Dewey include the need for reflection on experience in the educative process. Dewey also emphasizes the social implications of learning and the potential for education to contribute to positive civic engagement.

Feminist pedagogy builds on Dewey's insights and methods in terms of its primary aim of providing learners with critical consciousness that can be applied in practical ways in the classroom and beyond. Feminist methods emphasize a

synthesis of theory with the learners' experience in order to foster the capacity for changes in praxis. Learning, from the feminist point of view, necessarily includes engagement with power dynamics as a way to train women and men alike in the capacity to overcome discrimination and contribute to individual and collective well-being. Group discussion, especially discussion that welcomes acknowledgment of the positionality of knowledge is highlighted as a prominent element of feminist pedagogy. Following on the discussion of Deweyan and feminist pedagogy, I briefly outlined several of the prominent areas of gender-related concern in contemporary American Buddhists. The feminist consciousness that learners bring to the classroom, I argued, necessarily impacts the learning dynamic.

4. Principles For a Philosophy of Education

There is a need for guiding principles for teaching Buddhist-derived practices in secular settings. A philosophy of education that can effectively direct and inform the process of inculturating teachings must draw on *both* the Buddhist tradition as well as Western ideas. Here I will briefly summarize the arguments that this philosophy of education is based on.

- Buddhist education is primarily experiential and draws on conceptual learning as supportive but not primary.[67] Students need to actively engage with and practice what they are taught to gain benefit from the learning process. (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Repeatedly, the Buddha and Vimalakirti are seen transforming the ideas that a student comes to him with and uses them as an opportunity to provoke transformation. The Buddhist educator must do likewise. (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Choosing to teach from the various vehicles should not be about which sect the teacher most identifies with as his/her own preference. Rather the choice among the various ways of expressing dharma should arise out of the needs of the student. (Chapter 3)
- Inculturation requires meeting existing perceived needs and concerns. Engaging the concern for measurable health benefits as a primary preoccupation of contemporary Americans is one specific way Buddhist practices have become integrated into the contemporary western culture. (Chapter 4)
- Not only does the educator need to recognize the importance of the teaching environment, but she actually needs to "utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have

[67] In John Makransky's April 25, 2011, talk at Emory, he asserted, "Innate compassion training (the approach used in the foundation for active compassion, his nonprofit) is informed, *enhanced* by cognitive reflections from lojong, but they function as *supportive* reflections rather than a the main perspective of the training, which is innate wholeness of self/others (meditations on sameness of self/others, kindness of beings in interdependence, benefits/drawbacks, etc.)."

to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while."[68] (Chapter 5)

- Feminist and learner centered pedagogy reminds us that students do not only learn from their experience and from teachers. Students also learn from one another. Therefore it is essential to build supportive learning communities even in secular contexts. (Chapter 5)
- Students vary from one another in their conditioning and capacities and therefore a multiplicity of pedagogical approaches is necessary. The choice among the various ways of expressing dharma should arise out of the needs of the student and should not be determined by the teacher's own bias. Any system of learning must accommodate difference and diversity. (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5)
- A skillful teacher engages the student's driving concerns and deeply held beliefs. Teachers likewise should approach texts and practices with an eye toward establishing their relevance to the lives of learners. Doubt should be welcome in class discussion as part of the commitment to relevance. (Chapter 5)
- Skillful teachers challenge their students as necessary. They do not merely affirm their beliefs. (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5)
- Inculturated pedagogy is interdisciplinary and engages the whole person of the learner rather than just teaching them the single skill of meditation. (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5)

[68] Ibid., 35.

- The teacher needs to remember that all experience is not inherently educative. Effective pedagogy requires a commitment to ongoing exploration of the impact that the environment has on the learning processes of students. (Chapter 5)
- Transparent discussion of power dynamics in learning contexts can be a powerful tool to support transformative learning. (Chapter 5)

Chapter 1 established the need for the inculturation of Buddhism. In Chapters 2 and 3, the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means was explored with an eye toward distilling guiding principles from the Buddhist tradition for analyzing this process of adaptation of teachings to meet a variety of cultural and personal perspectives. Drawing from Mahayana and pre-Mahayana sutras, traditions of commentary, and contemporary hermeneutics, a set of priorities based on the perspective of the Buddhist tradition was proposed.

One key insight drawn from the doctrine of skillful means that is particularly relevant to the contemporary process of inculturation is the premise that the capacity of a teacher to successfully engage students and adapt teachings to meet their needs is contingent on the depth of the spiritual practice of the teacher and the integration of this practice based wisdom into her interpersonal relations. According to the doctrine of skillful means, the teacher's spiritual maturity should be coupled with an understanding of the cultural context of the students she engages. In other words, the inculturation process should not be left in the hands of individuals who possess only conceptual knowledge about

Buddhist theory. Nor is it appropriate for the inculturation process to be left to teachers who are well practiced but who do not understand the historical-cultural context of the tradition's contemporary context. Spiritual practice *combined* with critical awareness of individual trends and collective belief systems are both vital elements of effective teaching.

Moreover, from the time of earliest Buddhism teachings as illustrated by the Buddha's own dialogues with religious others, interreligious awareness has been understood to be an essential component of effective teaching and of skillful means. As has been discussed throughout the dissertation, effective teachers need to be educated in the beliefs and practices of other traditions and be able to enter into dialogue on doctrinal issues and relevant points of convergence. Interreligious pedagogy remains a vital component of effective teaching in the contemporary context.

Another key point drawn from the doctrine of skillful means is the recognition that there is not a single, uniform and fixed system that is appropriate for all learners. Different learners have unique capacities and proclivities, and therefor teachers must be equipped to respond to individual needs rather than operating according to an overly rigid, predetermined agenda.

The importance of learning within the context of a community was also drawn out of the exploration of the doctrine of skillful means. This imperative for the establishment of supportive communities of practice becomes an especially significant area of concern when bringing practices into secular settings that do not have preexisting networks of social infrastructure.

Throughout the dissertation, it has been emphasized that Buddhist education entails far more than the delivery of a codified system of content. In Chapter 4, it was established that finding points of relevance to particular cultural concerns such as physical and mental health issues have been a vital component of existing efforts toward secularized meditation programs to date. Responding to the culture's strong interest in health benefits and establishing specific areas where meditation can be integrated as a tool for effective treatment has been a priority in the spread of meditation throughout secular settings, especially health care related ones, thus far.

Earlier in Chapter 5, I argued that a Deweyan perspective on the role of experience in education enriches the conversation by problematizing the issue of what kinds of experiences and accompanying reflective processes are most supportive of the growth of learners. Dewey's work also contributed the notion that because the learning process is always contextual, a teacher's role is ever dynamic. There are no simple prescriptive approaches to education, according to Dewey. Teachers must be able to provide a range of opportunities for learners not only to have embodied experiences of core principles but also to support the process of making sense of and expressing these experiences.

Chapter 5 also explored contributions from feminist pedagogical methods, including the imperative to invite a range of perspectives into learning communities. Intentionally soliciting and engaging with points of view that diverge from the dominant value system is a core practice of both the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means and of feminist pedagogy. Dissent and doubt from both of these

perspectives become resources rather than hindrances to individual and collective learning. Feminist pedagogy was also considered with respect to its contribution of specific methods for creating learning environments that intentionally deconstruct deeply held, often unconscious cultural patterns of bias, especially bias against the full participation and development of women or other persons outside of the dominant white, male perspective.

With all of this in place, I will enumerate a redacted philosophy of education. The first element of the philosophy of education is that an inculturated pedagogy of Buddhist derived practices should be ***responsive*** to individual and cultural contexts. The second core principle is that teachers must strive to facilitate opportunities for ***embodied, experiential*** learning that is deepened through active reflection. The third critical point drawn out of the Buddhist resources is the notion that education is meant to be ***transformative***, both personally and socially. These three principles can help guide the work of teachers engaging secular audiences.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored elements of American culture that are relevant to the effective pedagogy of Buddhist-derived practices in secular settings. The methods of John Dewey, which are so influential to Western learning contexts, were explored specifically with an eye to the role of experiential epistemologies. Principles of feminist pedagogy were also considered with regard to their relevance to the transcultural adaptation of Buddhism into the West. The insights

from this chapter were integrated with the work of prior chapters and distilled into a philosophy of education. The next, final chapter will apply this philosophy of education to specific training contexts to illustrate its practical implications.from this chapter were integrated with the work of prior chapters and distilled into a philosophy of education. The next, final chapter will apply this philosophy of education to specific training contexts to illustrate its practical implications.

CHAPTER VI

TOWARD A BUDDHIST-DERIVED PEDAGOGY FOR SECULAR CONTEXTS

Introduction

The premise of this dissertation is that Buddhism must inculturate to meet the context of contemporary North America. Given the widespread interest in the application of Buddhist-derived ideas and practices in a host of secular settings, the capacity for teachers to engage with new ideas and disciplines will be crucial to the tradition's continued relevance. Because there is a high demand for and interest in Buddhist-derived programming in secular spaces, the number of individuals and organizations striving to meet this demand is mushrooming. This trend, coupled with a dearth of professional training programs and accreditation processes means that not only are there are an eclectic array of approaches being used to teach meditation, but there is also minimal discourse engaging the crucial question of what constitutes *effective* pedagogy in action. The previous five chapters of this dissertation have laid the groundwork to address this question. The philosophy of education proposed at the end of Chapter 5 enumerates guiding principles to draw from. This final chapter will apply these principles in a specific learning context to further explore their implications.

1. A Summarized Philosophy of Education

In short, I have argued that a philosophy of education that can guide the pedagogy of Buddhist derived meditation practices in secular settings needs to draw from both Buddhist and secular sources. Having explored both of these sources in chapters 2 through 5, I have distilled three fundamental principles which can be used to structure choices in curriculum design and pedagogy.

The first principle is that Buddhist pedagogy for secular spaces must be ***responsive*** to the interests and capacities of learners. Educators should not impose their own agenda but rather are well advised to find points of intersection between the needs of learners and their own resources. The second principle is that learning is an embodied, ***experiential*** process. For Buddhist-inspired education, meditation is a core experiential process. But in the contemporary North American classroom, meditation should not stand alone as a sole learning device. Meditation is more effective when it is engaged alongside other methods rooted in learner centered and feminist pedagogy such as group discussion and reflective writing. The third principle is that learning should be ***transformative*** and impact the minds, bodies, emotions, and behavior of learners. In other words, the whole person should be engaged and transformed in the process of Buddhist-derived education in secular contexts. Buddhist education is directed at a particular type of transformation, specifically one that engenders an increase in wisdom and compassion in learners, which thereby changes their internal world and social relationships. This agenda is influenced by the work of Dewey and feminist pedagogy in the method of engaging with personal experience through

dialogue and discussion. The secular contexts of teachings also shift the language around transformation from a religiously based discourse that emphasizes enlightenment to a discourse that emphasizes freedom and the relevance of insight to social relationships. Having summarized the guiding principles of an inculturated Buddhist education for secular settings we next turn our attention to the application of these principles in a specific learning context.

2. Buddhist-Derived Education in Secular Contexts

In this section I will describe how the guiding principles established in the philosophy of education enumerated at the end of Chapter 5 apply to a specific learning situation. The context is in an inpatient PTSD unit at the Department for Veterans Affairs in Menlo Park, California, where I will be teaching as part of my work with CCARE. In this setting I will be drawing from the Stanford Compassion Training curriculum but modifying it heavily to respond to the needs of this particular environment. This example, as I see it, is an opportunity to demonstrate how I would implement the philosophy of education I have been developing in this dissertation thus far.

2.A Teaching a Compassion Course at the Menlo Park Department of Veteran's Affairs

Shortly, I will begin teaching a 9-session compassion cultivation course at the women's inpatient PTSD unit at the Menlo Park Department of Veteran's

Affairs (VA). I will be teaching women who are currently in treatment for PTSD. Many of these women suffer from a combination of war related trauma as well as sexual abuse related trauma. In this section, I will illustrate how I plan to apply my philosophy of education in this setting.

In terms of the philosophy of education, understanding as much as possible about the background of the learners is part of the first principle of the philosophy of education, which is the need for educators to be ***responsive*** to learners. Much attention has recently been paid in the media to psychological impact that the wars in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom or OEF) and Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom or OIF) have on men and women who serve in the American Military. There has been a great deal of speculation about the ramifications of the extended tours of duty and constant physical and emotional stress that the service members cope with. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, "10-18% of OEF/OIF troops are likely to have PTSD when they return."[1] Women suffer from higher rates of PTSD than men; for women war related trauma is often compounded by military sexual trauma (MST). MST is the trauma resulting from rape and/or assault that are perpetrated by other members of the military. Teaching a compassion course in this context of the women's inpatient PTSD unit requires familiarity with the symptoms of PTSD, aspects of military culture, and an understanding of the goals and challenges that participants in the course bring to their learning process.

Learning from previous experience with a group of learners (either one's own or others) is another important element of responsive pedagogy. In Chapter

[1] http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/overview-mental-health-effects.asp

4, I discussed the points of intersection between PTSD, treatment for trauma, and the role that is ascribed to meditation in some treatment contexts. Having taught one course in the men's inpatient PTSD unit (and having worked with trauma survivors in other clinical settings), I have gained some experience with the symptoms of PTSD and how they interface with the kind of curriculum I will be teaching. But there are major differences between the experience of the women and the men within the context of the VA that will certainly impact the way that the course needs to be taught in order to be helpful for participants. For example, for many of these women I will be working with, have survived a combination of war related trauma and MST, which compounds the severity of their symptoms. Having been attacked from within ones group by persons who should have been deserving of trust has a different kind of residual impact for survivors and their capacity for relationship than combat against members outside of the group. This type of broken trust will no doubt impact the way that the women approach ideas such as the basic desirability of having compassion. They may well view compassion as correlated with vulnerability, which is an understandably dangerous proposition given that they have been assaulted by people known to them.

Adaptations of content and method based on creating a safe learning environment for trauma survivors is part of the responsive element of the philosophy of education. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are a series of practical adaptations that are essential when working with survivors of serious trauma. These techniques include consistent affirmation that the learners have

agency to guide their own process. In this particular course, this emphasis on the empowerment of learners comes about in various ways. The first will be repeatedly emphasize to the women that they are not trapped in the learning situation either during guided meditations or challenging conversations. Inviting participants to find their comfort zones and to do what they need in terms of their physical self in the learning environment is one example of an important adaptation. Each time I begin a guided meditation I will remind the group to find their own manner of being physically comfortable whether that is sitting, standing, or lying on the floor. I will also remind them that they can take a break at any time if they experience emotional overwhelm.

In this learning environment I will provide many more cues for finding points of safety than I might in other contexts. For example, within guided meditation I will draw on techniques of grounding oneself in the body through breathing exercises and focusing on the point of contact with the ground. Beyond the guided meditations, I will bring in the concept of keeping attuned or mindful of one's emotional response to material and provide tools to mitigate emotional overwhelm, which can emerge for trauma survivors when engaging with affectively laden material.

Moreover, people with trauma histories have a particularly strong tendency to bring in extreme examples when engaging with seminal ideas of compassion education such as the need to offer compassion to challenging people. For this reason, I will continually invite the participants to pick moderate rather than extreme examples. Rather than examining why one might want to

offer compassion to a perpetrator of sexual violence, which would be not only philosophically suspect but also emotionally activating, I will suggest that participants pick examples such as an annoying roommate or the person who steals other peoples sandwiches out of the communal kitchen. The learning environment I hope to facilitate for these women will be much more focused on ideas of titration, balance, and safety than the pedagogy I use in other learning contexts.

Adaptations to content that need to be made for people with traumatic memories also fall under the umbrella of responsive pedagogy. For example, in the men's group guilt was a primary issue. For most, the violence they have perpetrated or the dissonance they feel with their surviving combat when their friends did not, are common narratives behind this guilt.

A constant refrain when describing the guilt is fear over the implications for their relationship with God and what it will mean for their potential to be offered salvation at the time of their own death. This particular area ties in with the interfaith implications of teaching in secular settings. As discussed in Chapter 1, given the religiously pluralist context of contemporary North America, religious perspectives inform the ideas and concerns that learners bring to any subject. This is particularly prominent in the context of moral education or a compassion course.

In teaching the course to women I anticipate that we will similarly need to engage with concepts rooted in their experiences of early Christian formation especially on topics related to guilt and suffering. It is natural that women who

have suffered from trauma will see the violence they have coped with and the symptoms they experience as connected with their ideas about theodicy. I plan to draw out these concerns by probing into their own understandings of what suffering is and where it comes from through group discussion. My purpose in drawing out such conversation is to make visible the unconscious assumptions that drive self-harming behavior and resistance to behavior change.

Guilt, as a driving concern, is coupled with extreme challenges in relating to the principle of self-compassion. The male veterans unanimously reported that they readily relate to the idea of having compassion for others, especially for other veterans. The men found it relatively easy to relate to the practice of taking on the suffering of others (tonglen), which is actually much more difficult for nonveteran populations in my experience.

It may be that the women have a harder time with compassion for others than the men did as a result of the prevalence of sexual trauma. Almost without a doubt, they will find it extremely challenging to feel compassion for themselves. One of the principles I will emphasize in working with the women is to intentionally strip away language implying expectations of any particular feeling. For example, it is common that in the process of teaching about compassion and in guiding compassion meditations to inadvertently frame the process with expectations about how people will feel or think in response to various scenarios.

When I teach compassion to a higher functioning population I will emphasize the physical sensations that the experience of compassion for a loved one evokes. But for this group of women, I cannot presume that they will

experience compassion for a loved one easily. In fact, they will likely find themselves numb or angry when they first engage with the guided meditation working with compassion for a loved one. It is imperative to preemptively prepare for this likelihood by using nonjudgmental language such as “notice what you are feeling” rather than “notice feelings of tenderness” as I might otherwise do in a different context. Then, in group discussion, I will be sure to invite people’s reflective experience on the meditation in a nonjudgmental way. The principle of the DPD is relevant in this context of responding to the common needs of learners as a core element of teaching.

For example, based on what I know about trauma I can predict that these women will feel badly about themselves because they don’t feel affective connection to loved ones as they wish to. This becomes an opportunity to frame the conversation in terms of normalizing the concern that these women are likely to feel about themselves because of their experience of trauma-induced numbness or anger. Feminist insight into the importance of bringing in political and social contexts for the trauma can also support the process of normalizing experiences of mistrust and pain that will likely surface in relation to the topic of compassion. Bringing in information about the prevalence of MST and discussing how it relates to the topic of compassion can help bridge this connection.

Another core pedagogical adaptation to make in this context is to emphasize that affective experience is not the only signal that the exercises are having an impact. Instead it is more helpful in this setting to emphasize that even the intention to explore with curiosity rather than judgment what the current

experience of compassion or lack thereof is like is in and of itself a valuable undertaking. This normalizing will happen in the context of group discussion when the women hear about each other's experience. This hopefully will pave the way for the women to speak honestly about their struggles and to have these struggles framed as part of the process of growth rather than as a source of isolation and shame.

This brings us to the second core principle of experiential learning. The block with self-compassion that is especially prominent in trauma survivors cannot be engaged with cognitive means alone. It will be important in teaching these women to explain why self-compassion is important, and to bring in research about the role it plays in the healing process. But, it is in the ***embodied experience*** of the guided meditations on self-compassion and in the exploration of these principles in the context of daily life that valuable insight will be likely to occur, not through conceptual understanding or a convincing argument alone. For example, in the men's group that I ran, the most constant refrain from week to week was the challenge that they felt turning the compassion they could muster towards others inwards and towards themselves. I could work with this concern cognitively from any possible angle and little headway was made. It was primarily by means of the men's own diligence in doing their daily meditations each morning that they began to see that shifts were possible in this arena. In this way, the exploration that happens in the context of meditation and the application of the principles to prompts throughout the day are the most impactful elements of the learning process. For example, the small moments of reflecting

on the common humanity of a difficult person in the context of a disagreement within the community had a more real impact on the men. These kinds of experiences informed their thinking and in turn impacted their behavior in the context of relationships, such as when they called home and spoke to a spouse. Discussion can certainly support the experiential exercises but cannot replace the insight garnered through embodied learning.

A primary goal for the women's group will be to adapt the practices to make them accessible and relevant so that women can engage with them. Modifying the meditations so that they are short enough, flexible, and have relevant and non-alienating language are all part of this process. Then, with these elements in place, the class itself can become an opportunity for learners to share and deepen insight from reflective consideration of their individual and collective experience with core practices.

Finding ways to connect the learned skills with their own agendas for healing from trauma is another core goal for the course. Shared reflection on experience will be a primary means to support the process of highlighting relevance of compassion education with the rest of their work in the inpatient milieu. Group discussion will also provide the opportunity to help the women tailor their meditations and homework so that they are palatable.

Asking these women to sit quietly will certainly be challenging especially at the beginning. Avoidance and distraction are primary coping strategies for trauma survivors. One practical tool I will offer is recordings of the guided meditations that will be played for them each morning before the rest of their

classes begin. This will provide the group with structure and support to actually do the practices in a regular way. Daily practice in turn will hopefully help keep the themes of the course alive throughout each day. I will offer homework assignments in the form of specific prompts to support this process. For example, during the week where we emphasize self-compassion, the prompt will be to notice times throughout the day that they are thinking self-deprecating thoughts and to experiment with trying something different. Each class will include discussion of not only the meditations but also the experience of working with prompts.

At the end of the course, I do not expect that self-compassion will be something that the women will easily muster. But after weeks of practicing each morning and working with the principles during the day, I hope, that like the men, they might come to see that self-compassion is neither undesirable nor impossible. I hope that they will see self-compassion as something that could be helpful and find ways that work for them to bring self-care and self-compassion into their days in small ways. To this effect, I will point them to the potential for discovering elements of self-compassion in their daily activities as part of the inpatient setting such as the gardening program, the cycling program, or in the service dog-training program. I will encourage them to see their daily activities as an opportunity to explore how compassion for self and others is embodied or what blocks it when it seems to be absent.

I hope for these women to find ***transformation***, even in subtle ways in relationship to their symptoms. I hope that they can find a more friendly and

compassionate way to relate to themselves, which will in turn lessen the suffering they experience. It is my goal that the course will help them find more comfort and meaning in their relationships with the other women on the unit, with their families when they return to them, and with themselves.[2] I hope that even though their symptoms are unlikely to completely disappear that they become able to find some relief in their relationship to these symptoms.

3. Closing Thoughts

Many traditional Buddhists view teaching meditation or Buddhist derived dharma in a setting like the VA as an example of "watering down the dharma." This was a concern that came up at the 2011 Buddhist Teachers Conference in Garrison, New York. Many teachers made it clear that they considered the adaptation of Buddhist practices for secular contexts as an enterprise that stands at odds with the fundamental Buddhist goal of enlightenment. They were concerned that adapting traditional pedagogy and targeting mundane interests

[2] For the men, the practice of meditation itself, became a solace in many of their days that supported the rest of their treatment. Some reported that the guided meditations were the first time they felt comfortable in years. Others said that the process of meditation deepened their insight into their therapeutic process. The veteran who was the most skeptical of the course and who had the most trouble with even tolerating the basic breathing exercises when we began had a transformative experience from the course. He acknowledged that based on his meditation practice and engagement with the topic of compassion he was able to see how his lack of compassion for himself or for his wife had driven the serious problems in their home life including domestic violence and substance abuse. He pointed out that the experience of meditation was for him, more powerful than cognitive therapy, because he could feel shifts where he had previously been blocked. As he put it, "I feel like I've given birth to a shrink." That metaphor for giving birth, he explained, had to do with the challenging nature of engaging with one's previously avoided suffering. That he gave birth to a therapist had to do with his impression that the insight he was gaining through the meditation and reflection processes was related to the kind of treatment and support he had come to the unit to receive.

like alleviating physical or emotional pain undercuts the liberative aims of the tradition and even the survival of the depth of the tradition as it was originally intended to be practiced.

I myself had this kind of concern when I began teaching in secular contexts about six years ago. I was worried about what would happen to the learners or to the tradition when meditation was taught outside of the guiding doctrines. Teaching meditation and discussing it in the terms of people's own concerns rather than in the context of Buddhist doctrines like karma and rebirth seemed not only irreverent but also potentially dangerous. I could not see how it would be possible to teach meditation without demanding that learners first take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha as the basis of the Buddhist path, just as I had.

Years later, after teaching in a variety of secular and Buddhist settings I have a different perspective on this concern. First of all, I have seen many students in secular settings undergo incredible transformation as a result of their reliance on inculturated, adapted practice. I have also seen many card-carrying Buddhists fail to advance in their spiritual practices as they would have liked to. I have also noticed that people who are undergoing intense suffering like chronic pain or emotional distress are often highly motivated to adhere to practice over time because they experience acute negative feedback when they do not.

My feeling now is that the process is mysterious. As a teacher and practitioner, I actually cannot judge who is more suited to the practices I care about and who will benefit from them more. Moreover, in terms of my own

embodied experience, it is undeniable that there is simply no time that I feel more aligned with the lineage that I practice in as when I bring practices to people who draw benefit from them *especially* when they would not have had an opportunity to receive them through traditional channels due to various barriers to entry. Whenever I engage with someone who is authentically wrestling with the concepts and practices related to meditation I feel inspired, whether the person is a Buddhist or not.

It is true that there are limitations in secular settings in the sense that tools like ritual and devotional practice are not generally welcome or relevant. But the core processes of wisdom and compassion can be made accessible in other ways. The spiritual path is long and winding, so it could come to pass that other elements of the tradition, such as ritual, might become important at another stage later in this life (or from a traditional perspective perhaps in a future life).

I also find that the need to reconsider traditional forms when teaching in secular settings provides an ongoing opportunity for me as a practitioner to clarify the essential purpose of the practices and concepts I work with and teach others about. I find it enlivening to respond to the demand to establish and effectively communicate how the tradition I draw from is relevant to the lived experience of learners and to do so without relying on Buddhist jargon or even language of faith. Moreover, I have to admit that the more democratic structure of secular settings suits me better than the hierarchal dynamics that are more heavily emphasized in religious, Lama-centered organizations. My feminist sensibility resonates with the circular structures of secular settings.

4. On the Horizon

My expectation for myself as a teacher is that I will continue to experience teaching as an iterative process. Each time I teach I learn more about the students and about myself as both a teacher and practitioner. Moreover, my own practice continues to develop and inform the way I teach. My hope for teaching meditation in secular contexts like the VA is that the courses I offer will benefit people who are suffering. Moreover, I hope through my work to spread awareness that compassion, like other moral qualities are not simply values held by individuals but rather are capacities that are essential for collective well being that can be grown through the educative process. I hope that others who feel drawn to these practices find their own ways to express what they learn and that together we can respond to a diversity of needs.

I hope that I will continue to be surprised by the students I encounter and feel the inspiration that I do now for the courage people muster to face the suffering that they have previously gone to great lengths to avoid. I am heartened from the experience I have had thus far that these ancient practices are relevant to contemporary settings and can help ameliorate suffering. Moreover, I am incredibly inspired to think of the implications of the prospect of compassion education and meditation training becoming increasingly part of the mainstream culture so it can touch the lives of more and more people and contribute to a more compassionate society.

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