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The Buddha in the Classroom
Toward a Critical Spiritual Pedagogy

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To teach with a moral lens, especially one centered in compassion and reinforced by an awareness of suffering, may require taking stands that challenge the dominant quantitative paradigm based on high-stakes testing and accountability. Yet what are the tools that would allow educators to renew their sense of compassion with themselves and their students? We draw on the diverse literatures of spirituality, social justice, and education. Following Thich Nhat Hanh and others, we find that Buddhist stories and parables are a useful tool in the contemporary United States for awakening or reinforcing compassion and mindfulness in teachers, students, and administrators so that they can address the joint challenges of "too much emptiness" and "too much fullness."

Keywords: *spiritual pedagogy; critical pedagogy; Buddhism; contemplation; compassion*

> Our young people today grapple with too much emptiness and too much fullness. They are too empty of the resources that sustain the human spirit—devoted love, a sense of meaning and purpose, a feeling of ongoing connection to something larger than themselves, adults who model integrity, serenity, and peace. And they are glutted with sensationalism, stuff, and speed. The result of both the spiritual void and this toxic overload that our culture promotes to fill that void is often numbness (Kessler, 2004, p. 62).

Many public school teachers and teacher educators currently operate under a virtual state of siege: Basic social services for students continue to be cut, high-stakes testing now drives most curricula, and teacher education is increasingly

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market driven and privatized. To teach with a moral lens, especially one centered in compassion and reinforced by an awareness of suffering, may require taking stands that challenge the dominant quantitative paradigm based on high-stakes testing and accountability. It is incumbent on caring educators to work toward the ethical and equitable education of all students—many of whom are immigrants, students of color, or from low-income families, and many of whom are from groups that have typically underperformed in standardized education—and to renew their pedagogical practice in a manner that allows for true care for all students.

After the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind law, and more dramatically, since the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, educators have been struggling with how to manage both the inherent demands of the profession—teaching, grading, classroom management—and the externally imposed demands of a market- and standards-driven government that views teachers as technicians rather than as stewards (Ben-Peretz, 2001). Increasingly, teachers are pushed away from teaching moments and positions in which they can inspire positive citizenship and into roles in which they merely administer rigid curricula and exams. Furthermore, the singular challenges brought upon educators by the events of September 11 force us to take seriously our moral charge to take care of students and to keep them safe, but the current punitive, high-stakes testing environment makes this difficult. Similarly, after the shootings at Columbine, Colorado, and at Red Lake, Minnesota, school personnel found that they had to increase their commitments to the well-being not only of students' minds, but of their persons (Aronson, 2000; Berry, 2001). How schools respond in the immediate aftermath of such crises directly affects the students therein. For example, after September 11 one New Jersey high school turned its library into an impromptu counseling and grief center, and another ringed its building with police to assuage the concerns of scared students. On a daily basis, many teachers manage this balance by allowing students to write freely about their feelings and concerns or by spending more time learning about and sharing with them, thereby strengthening an important social bond (Ferguson, 2001; Heller, 1997).

Still, responding within the traditional framework of schooling may limit the extent to which students feel heard and supported. Expanding our "toolbox" to include Buddhist techniques may bring us to novel ways in which to help students. Educators understand and appreciate that students, like teachers, need to navigate life concerns that at times outweigh the importance of typical school subjects and activities. For example, understanding the inevitable presence of suffering may help teachers navigate uncharted and uncomfortable waters and may encourage educational practices and pedagogies that affirm human possibility, rather than our limitations. Establishing compassionate classrooms—those steeped in both high expectations and caring community—can prepare students to be competent in affective as well as cognitive domains. The question this article addresses, then, is this: What are the tools that would allow educators to renew their sense of compassion with themselves and their students?

To begin to answer this question, we draw on the diverse literatures of spirituality, social justice, and education. We do so to bring to educators stories from

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a tradition that has always connected a commitment to social justice with an awareness of human suffering and a desire to alleviate it. (As we shall see, this lies at the root of the Buddha's compassion.) Moreover, the Buddhist tradition has always acknowledged that students may be suffering in their own lives and that they bring their experiences from the outside world into the classroom. For more than three millennia, Buddhist traditions have been developing practical lessons that cultivate mindful awareness and compassion, lessons that effectively transform students and educators from human beings that blindly suffer into insightful and caring people who understand suffering, its causes, and its contexts and who consequently strive to overcome their own and others' suffering. In what follows, we will first discuss our framework for social justice and then turn to the Buddhist lessons that will constitute the basis for a critical spiritual pedagogy centered on compassion and mindfulness.

Social Justice and Transcendent Pedagogy

> Teaching for social justice, we must remember, is teaching what we believe ought to be—not merely where moral frameworks are concerned, but in material arrangements for people in all spheres of society. Moreover, teaching for social justice is teaching for the sake of arousing the kinds of vivid, reflective, experiential responses that might move students to come together in serious efforts to understand what social justice actually means and what it might demand (Greene, as cited in Ayres, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998, p. xxix).

This description of social justice recalls the power of imagination and the importance of not limiting possibilities by current patterns and relationships. It is hard to overestimate the importance of being able, at this time, to imagine better and safer futures, yet the opportunity to do so, at least for school-based educators, is often clouded by the need to conform to No Child Left Behind.

To transcend the present reality, both students and preservice teachers need to engage with the world, ask, and inquire, not just memorize to score well on a high-stakes test. For example, among the educational goals of the creative arts, which are fundamental to preparing students and citizens to think critically, are accepting ambiguous engagement and imagining new possibilities. This is perhaps especially important for students who cannot easily imagine a better life. Poetry, although certainly de-emphasized in No Child Left Behind, has long provided a lens and a craft through which to imagine an improved world.

As an illustration, in a poem about the German artist Kathe Kollwitz, an artist known for her depictions of victims of war and social injustice, poet and human rights activist Muriel Rukeyser wrote, "I am in the world/to change the world/my lifetime/is to love to endure to suffer the music/to set its portrait/up as a sheet of the world" (Rukeyser, 1985, p. 215). Later in the same poem, Rukeyser asks, "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life?/The world would split open" (p. 215). What would happen if educators told the truth about the roots of the problems their students bring to school, tinged as many of them

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are with histories of racial and economic injustice? Or about the inequities of public schooling in the United States and how they relate to the bludgeon of No Child Left Behind, the high-stakes test scores? We need poetry and other creative arts to offset the market mentality, which sees students as proverbial widgets in need of a faster assembly line.

Confidence in poetry as liberatory, as a means to imagine change first in order to later act on it, recalls the work of the late Audre Lorde, the former poet laureate of New York State. In her essay, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Lorde implores women in particular to use poetry to imagine a better world:

> It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. (Lorde, 1984, p. 37)

Because of her poor eyesight and presumed learning disabilities, Lorde was excoriated as a child for being defiant and insolent when she wanted to print her name in pencil and not in crayon (Ayres, 1995, p. 35). The truth was unconventional: As a visually impaired child, Lorde was nonetheless gifted and, as it turned out, prolific and successful. When testing and rigid classifications do not allow for students to develop individual strengths, the potential for learning is compromised. Poetry and other creative arts provide a useful entry into examining student potential for imagination, as well as evaluation. Citing earlier lines of the Rukeyser poem introduced above, Greene (1988) comments,

> To tell the truth is to tear aside the conventional masks, the masks adopted because of convention or compliance, the masks that hide women's being in the world. It is to articulate a life story in a way that enables a woman to know perhaps for the first time how she has encountered the world and what she desires to do and be. (p. 57)

What might knowing how women "encountered the world" have to do with education for social justice? The answer lies in the irreducible importance of inquiry—the fact that to ask about the world is to engage with it. Through inquiry, students can learn to be subjects and not objects of history, and students and teachers can come to believe they can make a difference in the world (Freire, 1970). During the early years of an already violent century, it is crucial for all students to inquire about the world and to seek solutions from diverse points of view. Education for social justice includes the charge to teach and to prepare responsible global citizens who know and care about others; it is crucial that students learn about the diverse groups that form their communities as well as the global community, including, for instance, learning about the world's more than one billion Muslims, some of whom reside in Iraq and Afghanistan. This charge recalls the earlier poetic challenges by Lorde and Rukeyser to not be limited by the usual and to deign to think in innovative ways.

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One way to engender innovative thinking is through the use of metaphors:

> Teachers' knowledge, including the ways they speak about teaching, not only exists in propositional form but also includes figurative language or metaphors. The thinking of teachers consists of personal experiences, images, and jargon, and therefore figurative language is central to the expression and understanding of the teachers' knowledge of pedagogy (Ornstein, 2003, p. 16).

One metaphor long used by educators to describe how students learn and grow in their classes is that of students as seeds in need of watering and sunlight. Acknowledging that educators need to accept their students holistically, Hanh (1991) extends the metaphor to include a Buddhist perspective:

> There are many kinds of seeds in us, both good and bad. Some were planted during our lifetime, and some were transmitted by our parents, our ancestors, and our society. In a tiny grain of corn, there is the knowledge, transmitted by previous generations, of how to sprout and how to make leaves, flowers, and ears of corn. Our body and our mind also have knowledge that has been transmitted by previous generations. Our ancestors and our parents have given us seeds of joy, peace, and happiness, as well as seeds of sorrow, anger, and so on. (p. 74)

It behooves educators to accept that we cannot fully change students and that they bring to our classes multiple perspectives and possibilities. For us to teach compassionately, however, we need to water those perspective seeds toward just and peaceful solutions to inevitable problems and limit-situations. Freire (1970) argues that what distinguishes humans from animals is our sense of agency and the fact that we are "not only in the world, but with the world" (p. 3). His words serve as reminders of the capacity to resolve disputes mindfully:

> Human relationships with the world are plural in nature. Whether facing widely different challenges of the environment or the same challenge, men are not limited to a single reaction pattern. They organize themselves, choose the best response, test themselves, act, and change in the very act of responding. They do all this consciously, as one uses a tool to deal with a problem. (Freire, 1970, p. 3)

And the very tools with which we respond to others, to their spectrum of emotions, are based on the metaphors, stories, and imagination we have at hand to think through those emotions. In particular, when thinking about compassion and suffering, the Buddhist tradition has a deep reservoir of metaphors and narratives with which we might educate ourselves.

Parables and Buddhist Practice

Even though Buddhist thought in contemporary America is most often employed in the arenas of self-help and personal healing, we have found that

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Buddhist thought has much to offer educators. For instance, the notions of *tool* and *metaphor,* as introduced above, are combined in the powerful Buddhist term *upaya,* a word usually translated as the clunky "expedient means." The term upaya reminds us that the Buddha was a pragmatist—some would rather say he was psychologically acute, and certainly the Buddhist intellectual tradition developed sophisticated theories of mind and psychology. The Buddha believed that a teacher had to use techniques that were appropriate to the students before him or her. To understand the power and sense of upaya, we turn to one of the paradigmatic illustrations of upaya, a story that is also foundational in the Buddhist tradition, the *Parable of the Burning House.* (In this way, we can see the power of metaphors or stories to reveal new perspectives on teaching and on the way we can help others.)

In an extravagant house of a rich man, children are playing with their toys. Suddenly, a fire breaks out. The children continue playing with their toys, not minding the calls of the people around them, distracted by their playthings. "They are oblivious of their suffering and the thought of getting out does not occur to them" (Strong, 1995, pp. 135-137). Now this rich man considered all the ways he might bring his children out, because calling to them had not helped. He thought of running in to gather them, but they might think it was a game and run away into the flames. He thought of using stern language, but that would only momentarily distract them from their pastimes. So he thought to himself, "I should by some skillful means cause these children to come out of the house." Now knowing his children well, he called out the names of their favorite toys, suggesting that he had assembled them all outside in the garden. The children thus rushed out of the house, eager for the new toys. "There is no reason to think that in this case the man was a liar because he was using skillful means in order to get his children to come out of the burning house, and that gave them the gift of life . . . his concern is for the well-being of others" (Strong, 1995, pp. 135-137).

In this story, one of the best known passages from Mahayana Buddhist literature, the analogies are clear: As human beings, we are like the children in the burning house; in turn, the burning house, like the material world around us, is a cause of our suffering. We are distracted from the cries of those who wish to let us know about this because we are obsessed with our immediate desires, as the children are with their toys. If we are lucky, someone will lead us out of this potentially catastrophic inferno by skillful means. If not, we will suffer horribly.

Upaya is thus a story, tool, metaphor, analogy, and technique that helps us help others. Furthermore—and we can dig into this parable for a lifetime—an upaya is any skillful means that helps us empower others to help themselves. We all know many heroic stories of teachers who "saved" an individual student in a school system that was oppressive and uncaring; the parable above asks us: What upaya could a teacher use to save all the children? What upaya could a teacher use to lead students (recall the Latin root *educare* means *to lead out*) so that they follow and learn on their own volition?

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Following Thich Nhat Hanh, we find that Buddhist stories and parables are a useful tool in the contemporary United States for awakening or reinforcing compassion and mindfulness in teachers, students, and administrators. We now turn to these stories and parables. As we do so, we are aware that some readers may wonder if we are promoting Buddhism; rather, we care about connecting the practical lessons that Buddhism has to offer us with the particular set of dilemmas that we face today as educators. The label *Buddhist,* per se, is not nearly as important as the practice of mindful awareness, and we approach the Buddhist tradition in much the same way that a scholar of religion would approach the tradition: as a rich body of narratives and insights that opens us up to compassion and grounds our practice in mindfulness.

The Life of the Buddha

The life of the Buddha, himself a great storyteller, is the story of the Buddhist tradition. (It is also a subtly and intricately detailed story, and one that we can only sketch here. Nonetheless, even this introduction illustrates the Buddha's path to mindful and compassionate practice.) Siddhartha Gautama lived in India approximately 2,600 years ago. He was born a rich prince and enjoyed everything a human being could desire: the pleasures of the mind and of the flesh, felicitous family relations, and a deep sense of his power, place, and purpose. But one day, the prince wandered out of the palace and witnessed three profoundly troubling sights: an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. At the same time, he also saw an ascetic who was happy. He could not get these troubling visions of suffering out of his mind, and nothing distracted him—not pleasures, not his family, not power. He also did not understand why the ascetic did not seem to suffer. The young prince was so troubled that he decided to take the radical step of leaving everything behind in an attempt to figure out what troubled him. He gave everything away and became a beggar; he went to numerous teachers and traveled far and wide. After approximately six years of truth seeking, he stopped under a Bodhi Tree and began to meditate; his powers of meditation became so strong that he eventually achieved true enlightenment, or nirvana.

In attaining enlightenment, the Buddha had become perfectly content, had no further desires, and fully understood the truth about human existence. He was no longer troubled and could have remained under the Bodhi Tree in a state of bliss forever. But he chose to use his enlightenment for the betterment of others, to help them alleviate suffering.

The Buddha did so because of *karuna,* or compassion, a key term in the Buddhist tradition. Karuna welled up within the Buddha at the moment of his enlightenment: He understood how much others suffered, he realized that his knowledge enabled him to help others—and so he stayed in this world in order to do so (Boorstein, 2002). He stayed, then, to alleviate the suffering of others.

The Buddha's enlightenment, as tradition tells us, entails Four Noble Truths (adapted from Koller, 2002, pp. 155-60):

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1. From birth, life is suffering.
2. Suffering begins with desire.
3. To cease suffering, remove desire and craving.
4. The technology for doing so is called The Eight-Fold Path (a path that advocates "the Middle Way")

The Eight-Fold Path is as follows:

"Wise" or "Right"

1. View
2. Intention
3. Speech
4. Action
5. Livelihood
6. Effort
7. Mindfulness
8. Concentration

Whereas all the Noble Truths will aid us, the first is especially apt for our purposes here. That suffering exists and permeates our world is not a bleak or pessimistic message; it is an assumption about what happens in the world. Moreover, as we live with that assumption, it conditions us to notice the suffering in the world.

The Buddha quickly gained converts and his monks formed a community known as the *sangha.* The Buddha brought his followers together and organized them into a community of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The details of the various communities that emerged need not concern us here; what is crucial is that the Buddha was committed to a notion of community, just as we try to build community among our colleagues and in our classrooms.

Although the Eight-Fold Path mixed internal and external aspects, some Buddhists developed specifically mental means of "arousing the mind set on enlightenment," (Strong, 1995, p. 164). One aspect of this was the taking of a vow (*pranidhana*); one early version of such a vow gives its flavor: "After crossing over the stream of [rebirth], may I help others across; being freed, may I free others; being comforted, may I comfort others; gone to nirvana [enlightenment], may I lead others there." (Strong, 1995, p. 164).

Once a person had made such a vow, the path to enlightenment was circumscribed by *paramitas* (usually translated as *perfections*). These were six in number, and were sometimes expanded to ten: generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity. Following Boorstein (2002), we take here the expanded list, which we will return to in the last section (see the Appendix).

The Four Noble Truths in the Classroom

Increasingly, students in U.S. schools come from around the globe, and they sometimes come from places of great suffering—suffering that is often nearly or

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completely invisible to those living in the earth's most wealthy and powerful nations. Students from Cambodia may have parents who lived through the genocidal Khmer Rouge; other students may have themselves fled from the *genocidaires* of Rwanda. Or the Congo. Or the Sudan. Or they may be victims of brutal regimes in North Korea or Myanmar (Burma; Gourevitch, 1998; Power, 2002). This is not to dwell on the wretched state of much of humanity; it is to stress that we, as morally responsive teachers, should be aware of the great tragedies of humanity that are taking place before our very noses, tragedies that sometimes engulf us, and tragedies that sometimes inform or determine our students' pasts and presents.

Many Buddhist lessons or injunctions are much more difficult than they seem, and being aware of suffering is one such lesson. For suffering is all around us; and once we start noticing it, it is difficult to stop. Are we responsible for all the suffering that we discern? To what extent should we educate ourselves about the complexities of the genocides around us? And how do we pay attention to one set of miseries when other miseries also confound us? For example, is the suffering of a homeless man any less than the suffering of a refugee in a camp? Indeed, facing the suffering of the world or even—to put it more concretely—facing the suffering of our students is an act that requires both courage and knowledge, an act of both heart and mind.

Reflecting on suffering leads us to acknowledge the variety and radical heterogeneity of suffering; there are innumerable modes of suffering, from familial strife to toxic neighborhoods to immense historical tragedies. Seated next to one another may be a student who dodges drug dealers on her walk to school and a student who was born in a now-war-ravaged land. If the students in our classes inevitably suffer, what can we do to alleviate or lessen their suffering?

One of the powerful aspects of the Noble Truths is that recognition itself is part of healing. Acknowledging the suffering of another is ultimately a profound act and one that is immediately felt by the other person. And as we acknowledge, and pay appropriate respect to, the suffering of our students, we bring them into a space where all of us are human—and *that* is a step toward a sense of an authentically compassionate classroom community. Such a step is crucial in the path from compassion to the alleviation of suffering, a path that potentially involves several such steps, each of which requires effort, self-examination, and a willingness to transform oneself: being mindful of another's suffering, having compassion for another's suffering, helping another to lessen suffering, becoming mindful of one's own suffering, having compassion for one's own suffering, and, finally, lessening one's own suffering.

When teachers acknowledge the suffering of their students, they might also acknowledge their own suffering. This reflexive mood is captured in the following poem by Chogyam Trungpa, called "Helping You."

> The only way
>
> I can let you know
>
> That I need your help
>
> Is to insist

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> On helping you.
>
> (Brandon, 1976, pp. 102-103).

If attending to every kind of suffering might engender various anxieties, the Buddhist tradition provides a palliative in the form of one of its most fundamental practices: *Samadhi* meditation or *centeredness*. Samadhi aims to bring the practitioner to a place of stillness, tranquility, and, above all, clarity; it is a nexus of emotion and philosophy, of feeling and learning, of nurturing and teaching. Just as students can be overwhelmed by the various forces and troubles in their lives, so may teachers: Indeed, if teachers are trying to be compassionate to all students, they may need moments of quiet self-reflection to order their priorities and find the strength to face the challenges that lie ahead. Samadhi can also be compared to the kind of "self-purification" that Martin Luther King Jr. calls for in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." King writes,

> Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self-purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?" (King, 1963).

As King's questions suggests, this kind of centeredness is not merely beatific "inner peace;" rather, it is an internal focus on what is most important and most present. Like King's fellow resisters, the Zen monk in the following story is not concerned so much with his personal peril, but with something more profound—and in this case beautiful.

> A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.
>
> Two mice, one white and one black, little by little, started to gnaw away at the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted! (Barnstone, 2003, p. 567).

As the preceding paragraph illustrates, the Buddhist tradition and the techniques we are advocating here are not always easy and smooth. As the Buddhists themselves stress, kindness and compassion require strength, effort, and knowledge. Certainly, empathy and calmness will help, but the compassion and mindfulness we are highlighting is not merely the absence of anger or indifference, but rather a positive mental capacity that is subtle, and at times, difficult to achieve.

There is an edge to Buddhism, even if the Buddha preached the Middle Path. The Buddhist way brings comfort but it is not necessarily comfortable. Buddhism was, and remains in some contexts, a radical tradition. For example, the untouchables of India—the oppressed population that Mahatma Gandhi called children

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of god (*harijans*)—converted en masse to Buddhism as an act of defiance of Hindu oppression. Often this radical spirit is expressed through a sense of questioning everything; just as the Buddha questioned all the fundamental assumptions of his society, so the Buddhist tradition continues to question everything—including itself.

Even karuna itself has an edge; consider, for instance, having compassion for those who seem to stand counter to everything you represent, who seem to live to contradict and embarrass you. A story told of the Zen monk Bankei (1622-1693) shows how karuna can frustrate some students, even though it can help and inspire others.

> Bankei's students were many and diverse. One day a group of them came to their teacher and said politely, "One of your students is misbehaving. He is not doing his homework. Please discipline him."
>
> The teacher listened to them patiently. But the students did not see him do a thing.
>
> A few days later, a larger group of students approached the teacher and said politely, "As you know, one of your students is misbehaving. He is not doing him homework; he is not learning his lessons. Please discipline him."
>
> The teacher listened to them patiently. But the students did not see him do a thing.
>
> A few days later, an even larger group of students approached the teacher and said, "Your student is misbehaving. He is not doing him homework; he is not learning his lessons. And you do not seem to care to discipline him. If you do not discipline him, throw him out of the school. If you do not wish to throw him out, we will leave."
>
> The teacher listened to them patiently. Then he said, "You may leave; you are learning your lessons. It is the student who cannot who needs me." (Adapted from Brandon, 1976, pp. 47-48)

A Toolbox for Educators

The parable above touches on an issue that every experienced educator has faced: how to teach those students for whom the educator might not have an affinity? Indeed, the parable itself helps to overcome the issue by emphasizing how much such students may need attentive education. We believe that the cornucopia of Buddhist stories and mindfulness traditions contain many tools that educators can use on a daily basis to make themselves and their pedagogy more compassionate. In this section, we will address several examples of techniques for bringing mindfulness and compassion into the classroom.

For instance, meditation, as a technique, has been extracted from its Buddhist context and used as a general classroom technique in multiple ways, with most educators careful to straddle the line between religion and public schooling.

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Traditional Buddhist meditative traditions have emphasized that practitioners observe their breathing and their thoughts, accept both good and bad mental impulses, and come to a state of "tranquilization of the mind," or *shamatha* (Strong, 1995, p. 117). Such practice requires both conditioning on the part of students and training on the part of instructors; this kind of meditative practice can release intense emotions, emotions to which a responsible instructor must be ready to respond.

Nevertheless, even stripped of traditional Buddhist methodology, the basic elements of meditative practice are still powerful tools. Used as a technique that promotes stillness, silence, and reflection, meditation still has the ability to transform students' perceptions and attitudes, as well as the fiber of the learning community. For instance, some educators use structured silence in the classroom not only for pedagogical reasons—to increase wait time and student participation—but for spiritual ones as well. In "Just One Minute," for example, teacher Naomi Baer (2003) discusses how she uses "one minute of stillness" to ground and focus her class. Although she is well aware of the limited impact one minute of silence has for her often challenging and disruptive classes, it has become an important part of her daily lessons. She writes,

> If nothing else, our sixty seconds has given me a degree more equanimity to start each class. That has been reason enough to continue. It was a huge challenge to accept the chaos in that first loud and disruptive class. But for just that one minute I told myself to let go of all my judgment—I am the responsible teacher, I have to keep order, it is my right and duty to judge and correct. I learned to accept just what is in that one minute. (Baer, 2003, p. 21)

Whereas Baer's (2003) simple exercise speaks to the accessibility of mindful contemplation in the classroom, other, less comfortable methods can serve to instill compassion in students.

For example, activities we label as *mindful reading* and *mindful viewing* can help students to identify external suffering—that is, suffering that affects populations of the world, some of whom may be represented in our classrooms. The case of Cambodia provides an interesting, and particularly horrific, example. A Buddhist and historically peaceful people, the Khmer of Cambodia fell victim to Pol Pot's ruthless, auto-genocidal regime in the late 1970s. Although more than one million Cambodians were killed, surprisingly few Americans of any age are aware of this history. Through movies such as *The Killing Fields,* viewers can be introduced to a world of extreme cruelty, great nobility, civilization lost, and genocidal realities—a world that few have ever contemplated, let alone understood. (We found *The Killing Fields* well complemented by *Swimming to Cambodia,* in which the late Spalding Gray recounts his time on the *Killing Fields* movie set and his struggles to make sense of the historical moment the movie recreates.)

What we stress in this exercise is not a thorough grounding in the complex history of that event—even though that would no doubt be optimal. Instead, we hope that students, as well as educators, respond to the inhumanity that humanity is capable of unleashing on itself. Moreover, by witnessing an example of

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suffering that is no longer on the news or on the cultural radar, they come to a simple, but profound awakening: that there is much more suffering in the world than they know or had, perhaps, even imagined.

We find that this realization naturally leads to compassion, both for the victims as well as for those who are "trying to [cope] with the horror we suffered" (Pran, 1997, p. 12). Feeling this compassion is crucial for inculcating compassion in everyday life; indeed, a clear example of generally shared compassion is a crucial step toward establishing a compassionate classroom.

Similarly, when watching clips from *The Killing Fields,* we hope that viewers pay attention not just to the events on the screen but the emotions that those events create within us. Do we feel angry? Horrified? Disgusted? What wells up within us? Pity? Shame? Fear? Love? When we are mindful of such emotions, we not only learn more about our own mental landscape, but we also see how we are capable of these emotions and how we can harness them.

In addition to mindful viewing, we have introduced short Buddhist parables to explore as a classroom. One text we have found helpful is Hanh's *Peace is Every Step* (Hanh, 1991). The book collects Hanh's pithy and wise ruminations on a wide variety of topics, each of which recasts and transforms our apprehension of the struggles and beauties of everyday life. In one case of implementing these ideas, we asked educators to first look for a passage in the book that spoke to them and then to take some time to reflect on that passage. The entire exercise, which lasted roughly half an hour, brought a widely disparate group together: Each participant was able to find a passage and reflect eloquently on that passage. Such an exercise brings our individual feelings of compassion and mindfulness into a *community* of compassion and mindfulness. In the classroom, such exercises can help students see that compassion is not a "secret" shared by the student and the educator. Instead it is a human value that permeates that space and their activities within space.

Conclusion

If we are to address the joint challenges of too much emptiness and too much fullness with which we began the essay, the incorporation of Buddhist principles of mindfulness and compassion provides a useful framework for whetting our students' educational appetites with thoughtful, as well as challenging, activities. Although attending to every aspect of every student's life is impossible, we still need to be actively mindful about how students (and we) may be suffering in the world and in our classes. In the appendix, we provide a worksheet for educators, a starting place for reflecting on a mindful pedagogy. When we have used this worksheet, we have encouraged educators to connect the paramitas (the Buddhist perfections) to their own pedagogical ideals. (For example, at Montclair State University, we encouraged educators to link the paramitas to the "Portrait of a Teacher" that the university's Center of Pedagogy had developed to guide and inspire future teachers.) In this way, the Buddhist perspective itself becomes a way of renewing educators' engagement with their own pedagogical convictions.

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Similarly, we find that when we encourage educators to stop, meditate, and focus on being mindful, they become compassionate not just toward their students, but toward themselves. To paraphrase Paul Ricoeur (1969, p. 20), compassion is caring for the self through the detour of the other. As educators face the multifaceted challenges before them, they need faith that a compassionate approach to students and their suffering will indeed lead to more enlightened students as well as a more caring and attentive society.

Appendix

Pedagogical Paramitas Worksheet

	The Practice of	*Develops the Habit of*	*By*	*And Can Look Like*	*Challenges for Educators*
1	Generosity	Sharing	Experiencing the joy of not feeling needy, the ease of a peaceful mind, the possibility of the end of suffering		
2	Morality	Calming	Discovering the joy of practicing Wise Action, Wise Speech, and Wise Livelihood		
3	Renunciation	Restraining	Realizing that insatiable wanting is suffering		
4	Wisdom	Discerning	Understanding that although our minds are continually and inevitably challenged by desires, peace is possible		
5	Energy	Striving	Realizing that there is no time other than the present		
6	Patience	Abiding	Understanding "this will change" and "it cannot be other, yet"		
7 }	Truthfulness	Disclosing	Discovering what is true, and telling the truth in ways that are helpful (practicing Wise Mindfulness and Wise Speech)		
8	Determination	Persevering	Seeing clearly into the cause of suffering in order to change habits of mind and action		

(continued)

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Appendix (continued)

	The Practice of	*Develops the Habit of*	*By*	*And Can Look Like*	*Challenges for Educators*
9	Loving-kindness	Well-wishing	Celebrating positive qualities in other people, cultivating forgiveness		
10	Equanimity	Accepting	Experiencing the happiness of impartiality by paying attention to the whole truth of every moment (practicing Wise Mindfulness)		

SOURCE: Adapted from Boorstein, S. (2002). *Pay attention, for goodness' sake: The Buddhist path of kindness.* New York: Ballantine

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