Awakening to School Community:
Buddhist Philosophy for Educational Reform

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ABSTRACT: Recent critiques of educational reform have called for new theories of community. Buddhist principles of attention, interdependence, emptiness, and compassion are examined and evaluated against assumptions, arguments, and advice offered in current reform literature. Buddhism redirects educational reform toward the practice of meditation. Buddhism knits into a seamless philosophy freedom, compassion, and engagement for individuals in community. The policies, procedures, and practices of educating children in schools given Buddhist teachings center on paying attention, being compassionate, experiencing freedom, and living together with others rather than some hoped for but never achieved vision of success.

RÉSUMÉ: Récemment, des critiques sur la réforme scolaire ont exigé un nouveau concept pour l'Education. On y analyse et on y évalue les principes Bouddhistes tels que l'attention, l'interdépendance, le sentiment de vide et la compassion, cela; face aux hypothèses, aux débats et au conseil qui régissent la réforme littéraire d'aujourd'hui. Le Bouddhisme redirige la réforme scolaire vers le chemin de la méditation. La liberté, la commisération, et le respect de ses engagements chez les individus, constituent la trame philosophique d'une étoffe sans fin. Dans les établissements scolaires bouddhistes, les règlements, procédures et pratiques dans l'éducation des enfants sont basés sur le fait d'être attentif aux autres, sur le fait d'avoir de la miséricorde pour les autres, sur l'expérience de la liberté et sur la vie en communauté plutôt que sur l'espoir, sans jamais voir l'accomplissement d'une réussite.

Community identifies an important concept in educational reform literature (Starratt, 1996). Scholars describe improving schools through developing: a community with shared values and common purposes (e.g., Grant, 1988; Merz & Furman, 1997; Raywid, 1988; Sergiovanni 1994); a community of learners where teachers and students engage in reciprocal teaching and participate in decision making (e.g., Barth, 1990;

Brown & Campione, 1994; Oxley, 1997); and a professional learning community with a focus on teacher development and professionalization (e.g., Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Weissglass, 1996). Indeed, criticizing the frequency with which reformers apply the term Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) wrote "community has become an obligatory appendage to every educational innovation" (p. 942). Education is not alone, open to such comment. Palmer (1998) stated, "models of community (if not the thing itself) have grown like weeds in our society, a response to our deepening pain of disconnection and yearning 'not to be cut off' " (p. 90). Or perhaps such growth ensues from the notion that community contributes significantly to the quality of life (Lewis & Lyon, 1986) or maybe that community is the level of social organization where the potential for reform is most likely to occur (Lyon, 1989). Whatever the function and justification significant interest is being given to community based reforms for schools and society.

Much of the community based reform literature, including that in education, draws on early sociological writings (e.g., Tönnies, 1940; Durkheim, 1965; Simmel, 1950). It has been argued, however, that community theory based on this tradition handles poorly issues of difference (Friedman, 1990; Stone, 1993; Young, 1986). Citing bias and depreciation of diversity, Bushnell (2001) challenged educators to redefine community for the schooling of children. Her argument calls for development of a model of community that is more dynamic and less idealistic than that found in the reform literature. Interestingly, such sentiments for generating new theory are shared by many who advocate community oriented reform (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985). And in moving in this direction Bellah and colleagues (1985) and Palmer (1990) recognized Eastern traditions as offering such philosophy. Both texts briefly discuss as examples Buddhism and Taoism. Neither work provides the deeper examination and reflection needed to connect Eastern understanding of community with that written in the West.

The purpose of this article is to advance such inquiry. The article provides an exposition of Buddhist teachings and explores the applicability of its thought about community to educational reform. In order to appreciate and contextualize that which Buddhism contributes, the article proceeds with an overview describing several themes present in Western literature that utilize community for school improvement. Following this section, an examination of Buddhist philosophy is offered. In particular, the article discusses the principles of attention,

interdependence, emptiness, and compassion to frame the understanding of community in Buddhism. An assessment and interpretation of these teachings connected to the previously identified themes ensues. Finally, the article offers a summary of ideas for advancing community based educational reform theory and practice.

School Community as Educational Reform

Educational literature that seeks to reform schools through community initiatives mirrors much that is posited in the broader social writings on which it draws. Most notably, social scientific discourse of the previous century embraced the loss of community as a major assumption. Nisbet (1990) made this argument when he wrote, "surely the outstanding characteristic of contemporary thought on man and society is the preoccupation with personal alienation and cultural disintegration" (p. 3). The loss of community is perceived as penetrating and eroding the very core of modern society. Community lost is witnessed in the disintegration of American culture: from its bowling leagues (Putnam, 2000) to its rural schools (Theobald, 1997). Indeed media pundits, policy makers, and academic scholars frequently blame the ills of society and problems in schools on the loss of community evidenced in changing social preferences and values. The degree and significance of this perspective of community lost for society and schools cannot be missed or minimized.

Given this position of community lost, it is not surprising to find following in its wake the quest for community – for community is viewed as the solution to the current milieu (Lyon, 1989). The quest is about the pursuit of "the good community, the better community, the very best possible community" (p. 240). And such argument is also mirrored in educational reform. Weissglass, writing in a manner typical of the educational literature, claimed school reform comes:

> At a time when schools are dealing with the effects on children of increased divorce rates, single-parent families, alcoholism, homelessness, violence, ethnic prejudice, sexual and physical abuse, and availability of drugs. As a result many people, including myself, hope that schools could both provide a refuge for our young people ... and do a better job of helping them learn. ... To achieve a transformation of schools into caring communities of learners will require changes of a greater magnitude. (1996, p. 175)

Weissglass is not alone among reformers in viewing the quest for community as involving modifications of some magnitude (e.g., Etzioni, 1993, 1996; Bellah, et al. 1985, 1992; Bushnell, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Knight Abowitz, 1999; Kemmis, 1990; Merz & Furman, 1997; Nisbet, 1990; Oxley, 1997; Palmer, 1998; Shields & Seltzer, 1997; Starratt, 1996; Theobald, 1997). Yet the quest for community that is advanced is not without limits. In the literature there is much discussion that focuses on delineating appropriate ways of understanding and rebuilding community.

The language of appropriate conception and action pertaining to the quest for community occurs for a number of reasons. The various positions, however, share an assumption that place individualism and collectivism in opposition. The model of a pendulum frames much of the debate about social policy and the potential impact of initiatives for swinging the weight of policy in one direction or the other. For example, Etzioni's (1996) recent treatise on the communitarian argument for societal regeneration embraces such model. Inherent to the dualistic model of the pendulum is a dilemma for reformers. Reforms instituted to redirect social action toward collective responsibility should not create too much momentum such that the weight of policy moves too far in that direction, for social policy that too strongly protects the community is viewed as threatening individual rights. Failure to protect the rights of individuals is presented as unacceptable given the coupling of such rights with a philosophy of freedom.

Given such problem, the test for scholars has been the delineation of policy that will be successful, but not too successful in strengthening outcomes of collective responsibility. As such, the dualism tends to influence a quest for community subject to numerous restrictions and clauses. Shields and Seltzer (1997) framed the quest for community in schools along such lines. Their reconceptualization of community into a "community of difference" identifies as crucial the protection of individualistic heterogeneity against the tyranny of collectivistic homogeneity.

Therefore, the framing of individualism and collectivism as dualistic can be seen shaping the literature in a number of ways. The dualism tends to eclipses other possibilities than that of the quest for community, however redefined or balanced, given the loss of community. The dualism tends to result in community being treated as suspect, even in literature that advocates social improvement through community oriented reform.

The quest for community is about social improvement (Lyon, 1989). The sizable body of educational literature that pertains to community shares this goal as it pertains to schools (Merz & Furman, 1997). Language used in the quest tends to emphasize creating community through: initiating conversations to clarify conflicts, build consensus, and facilitate decision making (e.g., Etzioni, 1996; Oxley, 1997; Theobald, 1997); attending to things shared including professional values and social morals (e.g., Starratt, 1996; Merz & Furman, 1997; Little & McLaughlin, 1993); and establishing policies that promote relationships and attend to the context and place in a holistic fashion (e.g., Bellah, et al., 1992; Kemmis, 1990; Theobald, 1997). At first glance such activities seem ordinary and limited in scope and depth of change. Although as previously noted, the improvements that are hoped for involve modifications of some magnitude. Indeed, they are nothing short of transforming.

The transformation of public schools into better places of learning for students and working for teachers has been the goal of the educational reform since its inception in the effective schools research. And although there have been many changes in schools over the past half century, current rhetoric pertaining to accountability, site-based decision making, school choice, service learning, small schools, multiculturalism, classroom assessment, cooperative learning, learning organizations, inclusion, and so forth suggest that the achievement of transformation promised by reformers remains for the future. Advanced in each reform are goals of varying kinds, which could be grouped according to their questions and answers, but all share an overarching goal of school improvement.

The point is that educators have been hearing about and attending to improvement oriented reform for a long time. Theobald (1997) offered a warning to those who seek to introduce community reform in schools about "the predictable arguments of naysayers, the we-tried-that-and-it-doesn't-work types" (p. 125). Change itself is presented as a primary source of stress for people and therefore must be addressed in the reform process. Expounded is the need for participants in school reform to be included in establishing the ground rules for instituting initiatives, as well as procedures to be followed for addressing participant concerns related to change. Improving schools through community reform – or any reform for that matter – becomes a complex process. Each recommendation for facilitating change adds new issues, strategies, and goals. With each new goal the potential for goal displacement increases,

which is only too well described in the organizational literature (Perrow, 1986).

In summary, what emerges from this overview of the literature is support for the need to develop new notions about community for school improvement. The assumptions, arguments, and advice forwarded in the literature involve and entertain numerous weaknesses beyond those biases articulated by scholars critical of the traditional model of community. As will be shown, Buddhism offers a philosophy rich in conceptual as well as technical discourse, which addresses or reframes these concerns and challenges pertaining to community based educational reform.

Sangha and Dharma

Buddhism awards community particular status given its teaching of taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Jewel of Sangha, as Batchelor (1983) defined is "the Buddhist community of faith" (p. 142). Sangha is a Sanskrit word that means "herd" or "assembly" (Perry & Ratnayaka, 1982).

Batchelor (1983) defined sangha as a community of people who follow teachings of the Buddha and thus share specific values and norms. A sangha consists of disciples of the Buddha who have moved along the path toward awakening. In talking about community, Nhat Hanh (1994) related a story of the Buddha's visit to a sangha of three monks. In the story, the Buddha asked the monks about their practice and perception, observed their interaction with each other and their environment, praised their level of engagement and awakening, and counseled them with encouragement and teaching. As the end of Buddha's visit drew near, the three monks received instruction on the Six Concords for attaining harmony: living together in a place, sharing the basics of everyday life, following the teachings, using speech that preserves harmony, encouraging and instructing one another, and respecting each other's perspectives. The Buddha is said to have departed with the promise that a community that follows such teachings will be peaceful and happy.

At first glance, the above definitions and story about community in Buddhism resonate with the utopian undertones of the traditional or *Gemeinschaft* model of community, which has received much criticism. Read Nhat Hanh (1994) a little further however, and this interpretation is confronted by the words, "every Sangha has its problems. It is natural.

... An imperfect one is good enough" (p. 8). It should be noted that Nhat Hanh does not communicate a teaching of complacency or apathy, which is a perspective that many have inappropriately attributed to Buddhism (Thurman, 1998). Nhat Hanh's statement cannot be correctly interpreted as resignation to the status quo for he followed it with, "we do our best to transform the Sangha by transforming ourselves into a positive element of the Sangha, accepting the Sangha, and building on it" (p. 8). The language of Nhat Hanh, as well as other Buddhist teachers, is not that of capitulation but of transformation.

Perry and Ratnayaka (1982) in their discussion of community in Buddhism, warn their readers about misinterpreting sangha and advise that its proper meaning can only be derived from a correct understanding of Buddhist teachings – the dharma. Therefore, an examination of the dharma becomes necessary to better understand the nature of community and the transformation advanced in Buddhism. Specifically, the four dharma principles of attention, interdependence, emptiness, and compassion will be used to facilitate the interpretation of sangha as applicable to the discussion advanced here.

Attention

Bare attention is the Buddhist teaching of approaching the understanding of existence through experience (Epstein, 1995). Awareness and mindfulness are other terms used to convey this concept (Beck, 1993). Kabat-Zinn (1994), in providing a definition of attention, wrote that it is "not the same as thought. It lies beyond thinking ... [Attention] is more like a vessel which can hold and contain our thinking, helping us to see and know our thoughts as thoughts" (p. 93). Attention is an awakened state of being and is discussed in Buddhism as being developed through the practice of meditation.

It is the sitting meditation that Westerners most often think of as meditation. There are many forms of meditation however, including breathing, sitting, walking, yoga, loving-kindness, insight, and so forth. Indeed, meditation can be done with any activity. Hearing the telephone ring, stopping at a red light, washing dishes, drinking tea, and eating a tangerine identify a few of the day-to-day kinds of activities that can be easily used for meditation (Nhat Hanh, 1991).

Beck (1997) identified 13 common misperceptions of what meditation is when she defined what it is not. All 13 misperceptions relate to the single misunderstanding that meditation is goal oriented – whether that

purpose is enlightenment, nirvana, physical health, psychological wellness, emotional stability, or intellectual insight. Indeed, trying to achieve such goals is understood as a hindrance or problem to achieving attention. There are techniques used in meditation, yet meditation is not technique (Nairn, 1999). Strict practice of technique establishes in the mind the attainment of proper form, becoming a goal.

The techniques used for meditation include focusing on a meditative support like the breath, labeling thoughts, and suspending judgment. Suzuki (1996) provides readers with an in-depth description of such techniques including the correct posture and breath for meditating. Yet his language should not be interpreted as endorsing technique. Rather, his language pushes meditation in another way. His perspective reveals trust as a characteristic of paying attention. Beck (1997) touched upon this relationship, when she wrote about attention requiring and developing "trust in things being as they are" (p. 29). The notion of trust that is offered is of the rightness or goodness of things being as they are.

Meditation in all its various forms is simply the effort or practice of bringing the mind to attend to whatever is present. The techniques used in meditating assist in this endeavor through simplifying both the internal and external environment for the meditator. Trust is important in such exercise as attention exposes – it removes the coverings of comfort, security, and control that Buddhism posits as being all too frequently employed by the human mind. To clarify this teaching Chodron (2001) wrote, "how beautiful and wonderful and amazing things are, and we see how caught up we are. ... This is what we are here to see for ourselves. Both the brilliance and the suffering are here all the time" (p. 21). Until trust in things being as they are is sufficiently strong, illusions preoccupy the mind.

Interdependence

Buddhism possesses a complex and compelling philosophy of human psychology and the difficulties that arise in paying attention (Epstein, 1995, 1998; Hayward & Varela, 1992; Nairn, 1999). Briefly stated, it is one of a mind that uses concepts in seeking to make sense of a non-conceptual existence. The monkey is referenced as an example of the problem. The metaphor of the monkey is used to represent the undisciplined mind that searches for and grasps onto concepts. To catch a monkey hunters place pieces of fruit or nuts in a trap with an opening large enough for the monkey's hand to enter, but too small for its fist to

exit. Once a monkey has grabbed the fruit, it does not open its fist releasing the fruit to become free.

The mind according to Buddhist teachings is like the monkey in that it busily engages in and holds on to evaluative, analytical, and judgmental thoughts. Much time is given to thinking about the past, thinking about the future, thinking about wants, thinking about hurts, and so on. Such thinking divides the experience of existence into this and that, concepts. Batchelor (1997) used examples of a pen and daffodil to demonstrate the weakness of concepts. If a pen is broken into its parts and reassembled without the ink refill, would the object still be a pen? Is the ink refill a pen? Plant a daffodil bulb in the ground and watch it grow and bloom. Where in this process are the divisions between earth, bulb, sprout, stem, and flower? They are ambiguous and arbitrary. Batchelor wrote, "things are not as clear-cut as they seem. They are neither circumscribed nor separated from each other by lines. Lines are drawn in the mind. There are no lines in nature" (p. 76).

Suzuki (1996, 1999) made much the same argument when he challenged dualisms that emerge from using concepts. Dispersed throughout both his texts are references to problems with the concepts of good and bad, light and dark, perfect and imperfect, sound and silence, subject and object. For example, in *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness*, Suzuki discussed how there is light in darkness. He used an example where he might say the room he is in is light, while someone else who enters the room may say it is dark. The standard of light and dark exist in the mind of the observer and from this he argued that darkness is light. Suzuki also pointed out that darkness is darkness and light is light. He appears to be playing a language game. His play on words demonstrates his point; humans go about constructing mental concepts that arbitrarily define and divide, which can deaden perception. The practice of paying attention reveals light and darkness – as other constructs – are interrelated or that there is interdependence.

Interdependence is the teaching of the oneness or wholeness that is perceived by the awakened mind. Suzuki's (1999) term "independency" conveys the oneness that is interdependence. Coined to help his Western students, he defined independency to mean "that we are completely independent and at the same time completely dependent" (p. 8). The definition is deceptive however, as his terms independent and dependent depart from their usual usage. He stated, "when we include everything as ourselves, we are completely independent because there is nothing with which to compare ourselves" (p. 66). In this way, the notion of

independent emerges from an appreciation for the interrelatedness of existence rather than its separateness. Such teaching confronts the accustomed view that for individuals our separateness or difference is the source of our independence. Furthermore, our differences are the source for our being dependent. The metaphor of the body is used to convey this understanding. The body is made up of various parts that are different. For example, a hand is a hand and not a foot, knee, or eye. Each body part is dependent on each of the others given the various functions each performs. The unconventional usage of independent (i.e., a whole composed of parts) and dependent (i.e., parts that make up a whole) communicate the oneness of interdependence. Elsewhere, Suzuki (1996) wrote about interdependence this way:

> We have been taught that there is no gap between nighttime and daytime, no gap between you and I. This means oneness. ... But if I say this people may think that I am emphasizing oneness. This is not so. We do not emphasize anything. All we want to do is to know things just as they are. If we know things as they are, there is nothing to point at; there is no way to grasp anything; there is nothing to grasp. (p. 120)

Emptiness

The thoughts and words about the interdependent nature of existence according to Buddhism are paradoxical, which can create a lot of confusion. In some ways this confusion is instructional, as the discomfort or disorientation that results expose problems that attend thinking conceptually rather than experientially. They are teachings that encourage and lead to paying attention. In another way they are ontological. This paradoxical nature of existence that follows in the wake of interdependence is the Buddhist teaching known as emptiness.

Jacobson (1988) provides a clear exposition of the meaning of emptiness. The present moment is a unique phenomenon, yet the present emerges out of the past. The present connects to or shares something with what has past. In this way, the past is part of or brought into the present. Yet, the present is not the past. The present itself adds something new in its union with the past. Jacobson wrote, "each event is both caused by the past and free from the past, free in the creativity that pervades the world" (p. 77). And it is this creativity that is mystery in Buddhism.

Emptiness is the principle that captures the Buddhist ontology and resulting epistemology given such mystery and paradox.

Consequentially, questions about reality and knowledge are presented as best addressed or approached through a contextual investigation of the on-going lived experience, an awakened state of being, bare attention. Truth is not found in the conceptual representations that are the mind's answers. Rather questions are advanced as the door to understanding, for questions direct, sharpen, and cultivate mindfulness.

Compassion

Buddhist teachers claim that mindfulness shaped through a practice of meditation, which exposes the interdependence of existence and thus its emptiness, leads ultimately to the development of compassion. Batchelor (1997) wrote, "compassion is the heart and soul of awakening. While meditation and reflection can make us more receptive to it. It cannot be contrived or manufactured" (p. 90). The Dalai Lama (1998) defined compassion as "a state of mind that is nonviolent, nonharming, and nonagressive. 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" (p. 114). Compassion in Buddhism is not necessarily about doing good, being loving, or acting charitable toward others. For good, love, and charity can be products of thinking, particularly if the evaluative "should" and "ought" are in the mix. Compassionate action that arises from thought is not necessarily devalued, but unless the thoughts are recognized they may create suffering. For example, feelings of dissatisfaction may follow given an expectation that the other for whom a good deed was given did not respond in the desired manner. In this tradition, compassion resists being reduced to a moral framework that may be imposed by a community on its individual members. Rather, compassion operates as a deliberate disposition to openness, acceptance, and gentleness acquired by individuals through mindfulness.

As an attitude, compassion is concerned with releasing rather than ending illusions or conditions of suffering (Beck, 1997). The development of attention does not in and of itself result in a reduction of life's hardships or difficulties. Simply stated, awareness does not stop hunger. Mindfulness diminishes that suffering which is added given worries about where or when the next meal will come, anguish about the quality of the last meal, and/or shame about the lack of control in providing meals. Indeed, such feelings can be far more difficult to bear than the actual hunger itself and if great enough cause paralysis, which impedes

an individual's ability to address the primary issues that are the cause of the food shortage.

Compassion enters into the picture as a disposition, developed through bare attention to the lived experience. For example, awareness reveals that others too experience hunger. Awareness exposes how the greed of others, such as their hoarding of resources contributes to the shortage of food. Awareness shows not only the greed of others, but more importantly the greed that resides within the self. Awareness stimulates both the desire to take the right action and the right action to take to end greed and hunger. A transformation brought about by openness, vulnerability, and compassion is forwarded in Buddhism. In changing, "our identification with mind and body is loosened and to some degree seen for what it is, we become more open to the concerns of others, even when we don't agree with them, even when we have to oppose them" (Beck, 1997, p. 113). Interdependence and emptiness lead to a quality of realness, of genuine concern for self and other without conditions or clauses. Indeed, compassion in Buddhism rests on the breakdown of the very dualism self and other.

The Dalai Lama (1998) identified the breakdown of this dualism of self and other when he wrote about compassion arising from an understanding of equality and commonality of humanity. His language of compassion incorporated that of respect for the fundamental rights of others rather than defense of an individual's subjective point of view. As such, Thurman (1998) discussed how compassion supports the development of policies that society "must adopt the principle that none of its interests as a collective is as important as its individuals' interest in development toward freedom and happiness" (p. 120). And Batchelor (1983) argued similarly for compassion providing for an authentic being-with-others in which the fullest actualization of each individual is recognized. It is on these tenets that Nhat Hanh's "engaged" Buddhism pivots.

Nhat Hanh's (1998) published journal reveals the author's effort to understand and help villagers who were trapped in the crossfire and brutality that was the Vietnam War. A witness to horrible wrongs, Nhat Hanh describes what he thought and how he acted in the experiences that influenced his views for peaceful, compassionate, struggle in facing violence and oppression. He wrote:

> We make happiness and suffering into an enormous struggle ... black mud and white snow are neither ugly nor beautiful, when we can see them without discrimination or duality, then we begin to

grasp Great Compassion. In the eyes of Great Compassion, there is neither left nor right, friend nor enemy, close nor far. Don't think that Great Compassion is lifeless. ... Nothing can disturb Great Compassion. (pp. 209-211)

Nhat Hanh's words "nothing can disturb Great Compassion" refer to freedom found in compassionate living, which grows out of the simple, moment-to-moment practice of paying attention. Freedom is not something to be gained, earned, or won but accepted in whatever guise or form life happens to be. Buddhism advances a philosophy and practice of freedom that emerges from a trusting, authentic, and compassionate being in community that is ever present.

Through examination of these four dharma principles the simple, idealistic, and exclusive qualities of sangha that were conveyed at the beginning of the section cease being plausible interpretations for the Buddhist model of community. The Buddhist perspective on community is neither romantic nor does it posit community as perfect, whole, and good. Rather its teachings advance the active, complex, and changing qualities argued for in critical scholarship (Bushnell, 2001). But just as important, the teachings of attention, interdependence, emptiness, and compassion compellingly counter many of the concerns and challenges present in reform literature. The article now turns to a discussion of the implications of Buddhist thought for improving the theory and practice of community for educational reform.

Insights From Buddhism for School Improvement

Buddhist teachings confront many of the assumptions, arguments, and advice advanced in the educational reform literature. For starters, the loss of community is an assumption that is so well established in the literature and the perception of American schools, neighborhoods, and corporations that to challenge it would seem rather naïve. Yet, this is to some extent the position taken by Buddhist philosophers. Buddhism usurps the perspective of community lost and opens other possibilities than that ensuing from its loss.

Relaxing Community Lost

Nhat Hanh's (1994) statement, "every Sangha has its problems. It is natural. ... An imperfect one is good enough" (p. 8) and the discussed dharma principles relax the notion of community lost. Specifically, the Buddhist teachings of attention and interdependence articulate the

position that the lengthy list of deficiencies about society and the places where people learn, live, and work do not of themselves establish the loss of community. It is a perceiver who attributes this meaning to observed conditions. Buddhism does not so much take issue with the accuracy of information about current social and educational problems pointed at by those who seek to initiate community reform, but with the numerous evaluative deductions about what such information signifies.

In addition, compounding the negative assessment of observed circumstances is the idea of loss in community lost. The present state of affairs is viewed as worse and/or getting worse than that of the past. For example, there is a perception in schools that student disrespect, parent under-involvement, and teacher burn-out have reached all time highs. The threat manifested in such appraisal can be seen as contributing to the flight or fight response evident in the increased support for private education and entrenched embattlement over schools in public discourse. In contrast, Buddhism considers the past an interpretation of that which occurred previously. Accurate on some counts, but usually inaccurate on many others Buddhist teachings recommend caution in giving credence to any particular conceptualization of the past. Their position aligns with data suggesting education has long struggled with many of the concerns voiced by current reformers (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Buddhist teachers warn that all too often the seeds of discomfort and distrust that are sown through holding onto inaccurate perception, distort as they grow the experience of the present. Illusions become real not because they are real, but because they are made real. Given such tendency, teachings in Buddhism promote the practice of meditation as the vehicle for developing bare attention.

Bare attention affords an opening; it suspends those deductions of doubt and danger to the self cast by the threat of loss. Indeed, Buddhist teachers argue meditation strengthens the capacity for trust and the disposition of compassion. It is not that meditation posses no threat to the self, for it does. Buddhist teachers can be frequently heard to proclaim that there is no self. Often such statements are part of or transition to discussions about interdependence and emptiness. Their concerns involve unpacking and appraising problems inherent in the conceptual as opposed to experiential understanding of reality. In particular, individuals can expend much effort to protect the self. Attention to experience makes evident the degree and manner to which thoughts, feelings, and actions are impaired by inattention, ego, and fear. Mediation makes perceivable the deficiencies and deceptiveness of

the conceptual understanding of self. As mindfulness is strengthened the limitations imposed by fear and desire for control give way to the spaciousness bequeathed by love and commitment to compassionate action. Anxiety transforms into courage. In short, Buddhism nurtures the kind of fortitude necessary for transforming education absent in much of the reform literature.

Simplification of the Quest for Community

The opening up to alternative possibilities is also important as Bellah et. al. (1985) wrote, "one of the reasons it is hard to envision a way out of the impasses of modernity is the degree to which modernity conditions our consciousness" (p. 277). The authority individualism possesses in the modernist framework is identified as needing revision. In working to break free of these cultural assumptions the authors probe into troubling aspects of the metaphor that treats life as a race in which individuals compete. Bellah and colleagues, as many others who advocate the quest for community replace the goals of individualism with those of communitarianism. For whoever heard of a quest without a goal or intended outcome? Yet this is exactly what Buddhist teachings advance.

In Buddhism the language of goals is either absent or soundly rejected. Beck (1997) wrote, "we all hope to change, to get somewhere! That in itself is the basic fallacy" (p. 24) because as she stated elsewhere, "the problem is that nothing actually works. We begin to discover that the promise we hold out to ourselves – that somehow, somewhere, our thirst will be quenched – is never kept" (1993, p. 46). Buddhist teachings are explicit about the trouble goals, assumptions, expectations, judgments, opinions, desires, definitions, etc., can cause. Goals are not real, they are only illusions. Rejecting goals as vehicles for change, Buddhism advances a simplified process for transformation.

The simplification of the change process looks like this, "we don't cook in order to have food to eat. We don't wash dishes to have clean dishes. We cook to cook, and we wash to wash dishes" (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 131). It is a teaching that parallels Dewey's (1959) philosophy that education "is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (p. 22). Many educators continue to struggle with what this idea means for their practice. Buddhism illuminates the meaning and illustrates the application of such philosophy. The simplification can be seen in Zen Buddhist training where masters ask koans or riddles of their novices to test the level of their students' understanding. Instructions are given to

students not to think about their answer or try to provide a correct answer. Historically, masters hit novices when responses were perceived as violating this teaching. Their lesson has a point. There is no right answer, there is only right now (Sunim, 1999). The strike of the cane was thought to bring the trainee's attention to the present.

For educators such teachings warn that the measure and intent of our school policies and procedures can easily become shadowed by goals imposed for example by accountability standards, administrative agendas, and even behavior management plans. Policies have been adopted that require student learning outcomes to follow state determined curriculum mandates. The sequencing of curriculum objectives by grade level enforce notions of uniformity in pace and progression of learning. And an eye must be kept to intended outcomes that will be measured by periodically administered standardized tests. Challenging students to perform at higher standards through the adopted curriculum has become the mantra of educational reformers. In the cause of preparing students to perform at higher levels the emphasis of classroom activities only too easily shifts from content instruction to test preparation (McNeil, 2000).

Embracing the goal of community is no less problematic. Oxley (1997), for example, provided a list of five processes for building community to assist educators who would pursue this quest in their school: sharing decision making, collaborative planning, active learning, collaborative mentoring, and developing social support. Starratt (1996) and Little and McLaughlin (1993) argued, however, that there is no definitive list, recipe to follow, or prescriptive set of practices for building community. The words of Little and McLaughlin are instructive:

> The common points of departure here are not structural or programmatic conceptions of the good school, but students' experiences of their schooling and teachers' orientations to their students and their subjects. It is only the close attention to teachers' and students' perspectives that the local meaning of specific strategies can be assessed. (p. 189)

Buddhism embraces and enriches the understanding and importance of their assertion. Although the words "attention to" and "thinking about" can easily be substituted in the above phase, their meanings are not synonymous.

Thinking about teachers' and students' perspectives reinforces what tends to be looked at and it "isn't ourselves, but everything else. ... We're looking *out there* all the time, and not at ourselves" (Beck, 1997, p. 25).

The instructions pertaining to meditation anchor inquiry in the present moment and to the observer's point of view. Palmer (2000) laments the neglect of experiential understanding by leaders that can be observed in organizations today. He wrote such omission, "leaves too many individuals and institutions in the dark" (p. 91). The practice of mediation when administrating, teaching, or learning involves attending to the experience by distinguishing it from what gets added to the experience through goals, assumptions, expectations, judgments, opinions, desires, definitions, and so on. This labeling and sorting out the experience from what is added to the experience is the hard work of meditation. Meditation is the vehicle of change and its transformation hinges on the cultivation of mindfulness. Meditation is a transformative practice without the purpose of being transforming.

The counsel in Buddhism offered to educators is to pay attention rather than to chase after the goals or illusions that are part of building community or any of the other reform agenda found in schools today. It is direction that fits with Allen and Dillman's (1994) opinion about building community. They suggest that community cannot be contrived, as instituted reforms for building community may lack authenticity. Indeed, Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) identified contrived collegiality as occurring for teachers they observed engaged in a mandated professional development community. In their study, the benefits of professional development were thwarted for participating teachers given its imposition and suspected intention of teacher control by administrators. In many districts, differences are observed in the values and beliefs held by teachers and administrators, and/or educators and families.

The dilemma for those who advance the quest for community is that shared core values, one of the defining criteria of community (Wilkinson, 1991), cannot be imposed with any degree of authenticity on members of a group, organization, or community. And those who express concerns with community's moral order highlight this problem (Bushnell, 2001; Friedman, 1990; Stone, 1993; Young, 1986). In short, meditation as a transformative practice can be seen to impede the development of weaknesses evident in educational reform such as displaced, inauthentic, and coercive goals.

Freedom, Compassion, and Engagement
in Community

Schools are places where the diversity that exists in society comes together. Historically, schools were explicit instruments for the cultural assimilation of immigrant, poor, and minority children (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The legitimacy of schooling for such purposes has been largely undermined given the scrutiny of research and debate in philosophy about the outcome, process, and merit of such education. Educators can no longer suppress uncontested or with much confidence the values, beliefs, and preferences that differ from those of the majority. The questions for reformers pertain to how to understand and implement social responsibility in educational organizations while protecting individual freedom. How can community reform with its attendant moral framework be instituted without trespassing or negating difference?

Shields and Seltzer (1997) offered their theory of community of difference to address the very issue of shared core values and diversity. They wrote,

> We have found no recipe for creating community. But we have found that we cannot decontextualize the process. Rather, we have suggested that educators need to take seriously the charge to explore a concept of community as a moral endeavor based on dialogical processes that would help members of the school community to identify underlying differences and commonalities of belief. (p. 435)

This conceptualization of community's inclusive quality convincingly speaks to the problem of shared core values. But it does not go far enough. The process they offered is one that implies answers can be arrived at through identification of underlying differences and commonalities in values. In contrast, Buddhism teachings suggest that the problem hinges on answers, for answers that are similar to and different from those held by a community threaten both the freedom of individuals as well as their engagement in community.

Western philosophy has struggled to resolve the tension between individualism and communitarianism. And the argument that a choice must be made between the individual and the community has only recently been rejected (Starratt, 1996). Yet Buddhism has long recognized problems in dualistic logic and forwards the position that the danger in this case lies not with the primacy of the individual or the community, but in the identification of an answer (Nhat Hanh, 1998).

The language of Buddhism about the primacy of experience calls into question the selection of answers. Answers as attempts to define what is real, capture only fragments of the process that is reality. What is holistic is separated into parts. Confining, solidifying, and isolating answers are potential prisons if the key of attention is lost. The direction to suspend belief or possessing confidence in answers offered in the teachings of attention, interdependence, and emptiness advance a philosophy of freedom. And Buddhist teachings interlock this notion of freedom with that of compassion.

The knitting of freedom and compassion into a seamless philosophy is particularly meaningful for current discourse on educational reform. Sergiovanni (1994), Starratt (1996), and Merz and Furman (1997) use language emphasizing the moral nature of community and frame the kind of morality to be nurtured in schools. All draw upon an ethic of care forwarded by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), the foundational theorists for this ethic, to support the quest for community in schools. Starratt (1996) wrote of the ethic that it "honors the dignity of each person and desires to see that person enjoy a fully human life" (p. 163). Further, the ethic of care recognizes that human wholeness is found in relationship. Both of these notions resemble teachings found in Buddhism on compassion.

The connection of freedom and compassion offered in Buddhist teachings, however, address a weakness in the ethic of care. Greene (1988) identified this concern when she stated, "it is relevant to our concern that neither Noddings nor Gilligan deals with the conception of freedom" (p. 85). Greene articulates the need to develop a philosophy that forwards both freedom and an ethic of care. The writings of Buddhist teachers offer such philosophy and do so in the context of community. It is a philosophy made possible given the principles of interdependence and emptiness which refute the validity of any conceptualization of compassion for use in community oriented reform. Buddhism rejects any privileged moral framework for compassion. Buddhist teachers are firm that the conceptual boundary differentiating compassion from non-compassion is unstable, artificial, and potentially harmful. As such, Buddhism shifts the basis of its understanding of compassion from the conceptual to the experiential through the teaching of attention. Meditation facilitates or accesses the freedom contained in the paradox that is individual rights and community responsibilities. The practice of meditation acts as its own counter weight so to speak.

Buddhism makes problematic the purposive, normative, and prescriptive school community reform that can be found advocated in the literature. The teachings on attention, interdependency, and emptiness redirect the perspective of those who seek school community as educational reform away from that of trying to attain some desirable situation or attempting to enforce some predetermined values. It turns the focus of improvement to that of the present and away from the traditional direction of change in the future posited in reform initiatives. Buddhist teachings counsel educators to develop mindfulness. In assisting those involved in education to develop their attention to experience, the practice of meditation is front and center.

Homework that did not get completed, students who arrive to class late, and irritable comments made by colleagues provide several examples of opportunities to bring the mind to the present rather than the evaluative inferences and deductions that often follow such events. To be mindfully engaged in the interaction with a student who is violating norms of respect is to listen and observe for understanding. Maybe the student is angry about tension and fighting at home. Or maybe the student feels threatened by the difficulty of the content being taught. Awareness reduces the influence that assumptions, overgeneralizations, ego, misinformation, and first impressions have for understanding the student. The labeling of this student as disrespectful only takes into account one dimension of the student. The perspective taken on the student becomes solidified, limited, and prescribed. In contrast, there is freedom in experiencing rather than the conceptualizing of the student. Attention prevents minor events from ballooning into much bigger issues. And awareness unpacks the large and frequently unmanageable issues into the smaller moment-to-moment experiences. Being in the present, the interconnectedness between what is evaluated as good and what is judged as bad is observed. A shift in perspective follows. Interaction is initiated from a position more akin to appreciation and acceptance rather than the reactive stance of intolerance. Insight is also gained through paying attention that reveals commonalities between the educator and student, stimulating compassion. A particular moral framework of compassion is not what is advanced, rather it is compassionate action based on an authentic being-with-this-other.

The practice of meditation is transforming, yet it is not anything that resembles or contains the promises of utopia. The teaching is simple, "we do our best to transform the Sangha by transforming

ourselves into a positive element of the Sangha, accepting the Sangha, and building on it" (Nhat Hanh, 1994, p. 8). The transformation of school community is no different. The promotion of freedom, compassion, and engagement for individuals in community without the problems inherent in the loss of and quest for community, is significant and identifies a notable contribution of Buddhist teachings to school community as educational reform.

Conclusion

The discussion began by identifying the need for exploring other models of community, other traditions, for their philosophical and practical application to current discourse on school community. This inquiry into Buddhism delineates alternative ways of approaching and constructing community than that found in much of the literature. Indeed, Buddhism is found to robustly address much of the tension and many of the concerns present in the current debate on community. Specifically, Buddhist teachings relax the notion of the loss of community. The notion of community loss seems to intensify feelings of anxiety about schools and neighborhoods, the places where children, parents, teachers, and administrators work, live, learn, and play with no real effect or apparent value except to justify the quest for community. Likewise the quest for community is simplified by Buddhist teachings. The practice of meditation is presented as the transformative vehicle, protecting and respecting both the individual and community. The dualistic treatment of the individual and community is eased in Buddhism's ontology. Indeed, rather than focusing on transforming schools according to some desired program of educational reform, such as achieving a particular kind of school community, the importance of experiencing, trusting, and caring emerge as the primary components of social action for educators in schools. The nature of social engagement erected on this foundation is of an authentic and compassionate being in the present, and translates into education for freedom.

Much more could be written about Buddhism and a philosophy of education for freedom. Greene's (1988) call of education for freedom, "We may have reached a moment in our history when teaching and learning, if they are to happen meaningfully, must happen on the verge. Confronting a void, confronting nothingness, we may be able to empower the young to create and re-create a common world" (p. 23), may be investigated and appreciated for its connections to Buddhist teachings

on attention, interdependence, emptiness, and compassion. There is need for a closer examination of the linkages between education for freedom and Buddhism.

In conclusion, the teachings and principles within Buddhism assist and forward the theory and practice of school community as educational reform. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes for educators, or anyone involved in education for that matter, the importance of simply experiencing the joys and sorrows involved in being part of the lives of children and adults who come to school seeking food, safety, employment, socialization, learning, and so forth, or maybe nothing at all. The policies, procedures, and practices of educating children in schools to be instituted given Buddhist teachings will be concerned with paying attention, being compassionate, experiencing freedom, and living together with others rather than some hoped for but never achieved vision of success. Interestingly, Buddhist philosophy reveals the importance of a non-reform approach to school community – for there is nothing to obtain, nowhere to go, no answers – just experience in all of its fullness. And such non-reform might just be significant to bringing about the transformation of education sought by current reforms.

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