BREATHE to Understand ©

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"The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again…. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence"

(James, 1983, p. 401).

"Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved through understanding"

(Albert Einstein, 1930).

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Abstract

BREATHE is an acronym for Breathe, Reflect, Empathize, Accept, Thank, Hearten, Engage. The addition of Understand allows for a holistic approach to living a healthy and balanced life both inside and outside the classroom. This paper took form as a result of my personal, spiritual journey, as well as my teaching practice. I noticed that the majority of my students enjoyed experiential activities that included time and space for self-reflection, relaxation and meditation. I began looking for books, seminars, and workshops that explored these areas. Deepak Chopra, Jonathan Kabat-Zinn, Dan Siegel, Eckhart Tolle, et al. offer insights into the benefits of meditation and mindfulness as a vehicle for improved quality of life. His Holiness the Dalai Lama describes compassion as a basic human value that is separate from religious practices and beliefs. The positive effects of gratitude on a person's well-being have been studied by Dr. Robert Emmons and others. In addition, Charles A. Curran writes about the importance of understanding and its connection to our sense of belonging. SIT Graduate Institute's focus on reflective teaching practices is another piece of the puzzle that creates a holistic approach to life-long learning. Each chapter includes practical activities for EFL teachers to use in the classroom. The goal of this paper is to provide a framework for EFL teachers, students and anyone interested in lifelong learning to incorporate activities that enable all of us to BREATHE to Understand as a part of our daily lives.

Keywords: Meditation, Mindfulness, Reflection, Empathy, Compassion, Gratitude, Understanding, Cooperation, Acceptance, Well-being

"To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others"
(Robbins, 1991, p. 237).

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors:

Experiential Learning

Activities / Individual Activities / Group Activities

Learning Activities

Creative Activities

Learning Experience

Active Learning

Cooperative Learning

Teamwork / Cooperation / Collaboration

Classroom Environment

Cultural Awareness

Cultural Differences

Teaching Methods

Instructional Innovation

Student Experience

English as a Foreign Language / English for non-English speakers

English Language Learners

Interpersonal Communication

Reflection / Observation

Self-Expression

Self-Knowledge / Awareness / Mindfulness

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Introduction

"Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity"

(Thich Nhat Hanh, 2003, p. 5).

"Breath is the crux of human life. It is easy to take it for granted because most of us do it so automatically" (Swisa, 2013, p. 1). Remembering to breathe consciously became a pivotal moment in my teaching and spiritual practice. In this paper, the word "breathe" is used both as a starting point, and as an acronym, containing the following seven words: Breathe, Reflect, Empathize, Accept, Thank, Hearten, Engage. Understand is included as well because understanding is an essential component of a holistic approach to teaching, learning, and all interpersonal relationships. These eight words have become the focus for my life work as an educator in the EFL classroom and beyond. Each chapter includes at least one classroom activity that is suitable for all language levels. All activities may be modified depending on the needs of the learners and the learning environment. This chapter includes a brief activity that may be used at the beginning of every class to foster a sense of safety and trust in the classroom.

It was a conscious choice to use the verb form for each word rather than the noun form. Verbs represent action. It is my hope that this paper will encourage action on the part of the reader. However, because understanding these concepts is the precursor to action, both the noun forms, when discussing concepts, and the verb forms, when expressing action, are used throughout this paper. Because these concepts are inter-connected, certain topics may be discussed in more than one chapter.

The first chapter, "Breathe," provides the theme for this paper. It discusses the use of breath as an introduction to mindfulness and meditation. To breathe and to pay attention to your breathing is the first step in the process toward greater mindfulness. Paying attention to your

breath, without judgment, is the essence of mindfulness (Siegel, 2011, p. 83). This chapter discusses the benefits of meditation and provides a breath meditation recording that may be used in the EFL classroom.

The second chapter, "Reflect," combines the guiding principles of the Experiential Learning Cycle and the practice of self-reflection. These principles are important to learners as well as teachers. Greater awareness is an outgrowth of the reflective process (Barduhn, 1998, p. 63). Finding opportunities to integrate reflection into daily teaching practice enhances learning development. The chapter concludes with activities to practice reflective processes.

"Empathize" begins by comparing the concepts of empathy and compassion. While a brief discussion of empathy is included, the chapter primarily focuses on compassion, both self-compassion and compassion toward others. The connection between human suffering and compassion is explored. The language of compassion, based on Marshall Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication* (2003), is discussed in order to provide both a framework and appropriate language for expressing our feelings, needs and requests. Two activities are included at the end of the chapter: A guided meditation, suitable for classroom and personal use, as well as a follow-up activity practicing the use of nonviolent language.

Accepting ourselves and others with non-judgment increases a sense of trust and security in the classroom. As discussed in the chapter, "Breathe," non-judgment is part of practicing mindfulness. This chapter combines elements from the preceding chapters, particularly, mindfulness, non-judgment, and compassion because acceptance and forgiveness are positive outgrowths when these concepts are put into action.

Finding new ways to thank and appreciate the unique experiences in our lives, our surroundings, and those with whom we interact, leads to a greater sense of personal contentment.

It also strengthens the neuroplasticity in the brain (Borysenko, 2014). Teaching this to EFL students is a skill that promotes community and cooperation in the classroom. It also extends beyond the classroom and promotes personal health and well-being. The chapter includes ideas for incorporating gratitude and appreciation into the EFL classroom on a daily basis.

Generally, to hearten is defined as to "make more cheerful." Merriam-Webster (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hearten) includes "to give heart to" as another definition (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hearten). Both of these definitions are incorporated into this chapter. Bringing more joy and laughter into the classroom helps break down barriers among learners. From personal teaching experience, bringing more heart into the classroom creates a sense of safety, trust, cooperation, connection and community for all members of the class. Suggested icebreakers and other activities are included.

"Engage," in this chapter, is used to mean, participate or be involved. In my EFL classes, my hope is always that learners participate and are involved. Participation and involvement are part of the learning process and contribute to a sense of cooperation and community in the classroom. In a learning-centered classroom, when students engage fully, there is a synergy among the learners that builds over time, and strengthens the culture of collaboration in the classroom. This involvement and participation allows learners to experience our interconnectedness with each other, and expand to include all living beings and the natural world.

The chapter entitled "Understand" integrates all of the previous chapters with an approach to intercultural and interpersonal understanding. When we are mindful and fully present for another person, and we listen to their words with acceptance, non-judgment, and compassion, we begin to actively engage in the process of understanding. In *Understanding: An*

Essential Ingredient in Human Belonging (1978), Charles A. Curran talks about "a changed inner-view, arrived at through understanding" (p. 53). Understanding results when the listener participates in the dialogue and asks discerning questions that facilitate the process for the seeker to find solutions for themselves (*ibid.*, 55).

A stronger sense of community, collaboration and connection are formed when we transform the concepts of breath, reflection, empathy, acceptance, thankfulness, heart (and joy), engagement (and participation), and understanding, and turn them into the actions to breathe, reflect, empathize, accept, thank, hearten, engage, and understand. When we include all of these concepts and actions in the EFL classroom, we provide opportunities that enrich the lives of EFL educators and learners, promote a greater sense of community and cooperation, and hopefully lead us closer to a more peaceful world.

Daily Warm-up Activity

Creating a supportive environment in the classroom, where students feel safe to express themselves freely, is an important part of all classroom activities, and especially for the activities in this paper. For teachers who may need some help with this, I have included this warm-up activity. It may be used daily or as frequently as necessary. If time is extremely limited, consider just starting each class with Steps 1 through 5. This activity is appropriate for all language levels.

Goal:

Affective: to create a safe, trusting, supportive environment in the classroom.

Instructions:

1. Have students stand in a circle.
2. Explain to students that you want them to feel safe, supported, and comfortable in the classroom, and that you are going to start the class with a brief warm-up activity to promote feelings of well-being.
3. Ask students to take three deep breaths at their own pace.
4. Ask students to raise their hands, straight up over their heads while inhaling, and release their arms and stretch toward the ground while exhaling.
5. Repeat Step 3, three times.
6. If you have a short class and time is very limited, skip to Step 9.
7. If you have an additional five to ten minutes, have students sit in a comfortable position, either in a chair or on the floor. Ask them to close their eyes, take a deep breath, and relax.
8. Lead them in a brief guided meditation. Using the following script or a variation to your liking.

[Begin meditation]
Note: Pause after each part before continuing to allow students to take three deep breaths.

Take a deep breath. Let your body relax. If at any point you can't think of something, continuing taking deep breaths.

Think of one of your favorite places. Think about what it looks like, what it smells like, what it feels like, and what it sounds like. Take three deep breaths and enjoy the feeling of being in your favorite place.

Think of a time when you felt safe and secure. Feel that safety in your body. Take three deep breaths.

Now, think of something or someone that you are grateful for. It could be a person, place, or thing. Take three deep breaths.

Now think of something you are grateful for about yourself. Take three deep breaths.

Carry this feeling of relaxation and well-being with you throughout your day. Take three deep breaths.

Open your eyes when you are ready.
[End meditation]

9. Have students stand up and walk around the room, greet each person with a smile, and say a word, phrase, or sentence that includes a greeting, an expression of kindness or an expression gratitude to each classmate.
10. Have students sit down.
11. Continue with the regular scheduled class activities.

Chapter One: Breathe

"While it may be simple to practice mindfulness, it is not necessarily easy"

(Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 8).

We all know that the process of breathing, which includes inhaling and exhaling, is necessary for all human life. Yet, we don't spend very much time paying attention to our breath. This chapter uses breath to help focus on the present moment and pay attention while practicing meditation and mindfulness. As you read through this chapter, notice your breath as a first step in this process. This chapter also discusses the health benefits of meditation and includes a guided meditation that focuses on the breath.

Before we can focus on our breath, we need to understand a key obstacle to meditation, our thoughts and their connection to the human experience. Human life is made up of experiences. Each experience is a combination of actions, thoughts, emotional feelings, images, and physical sensations (Chopra, 2014). Our thoughts are the vehicles with which we find expression for our experiences. As a general rule, thoughts are about the past or the future (Chopra, 2004, p. 78). When considering a past experience, we reflect on what we did, what we felt (sensations), how we felt (feelings), what we saw, and what we thought about the experience. Similarly, when thinking about the future, we think about what we will do, what we will feel (sensations), how we will feel (feelings), what we will see, and what we will think about the experience. We rarely spend time focusing our attention on the present moment.

This focused attention on the present moment is the essence of meditation. Meditation is the process of focusing "your attention while … witnessing the thought forms that come and go in your mind" (Chopra, 2004, p. 78) with detachment and non-judgment. Finding an aid for

focused attention helps the process of meditation. The breath is readily accessible, and, therefore a good tool to use in meditation.

Chopra's use of the term "thought forms" provides a path toward detachment and non-judgment about our thoughts. If we consider thoughts as "forms," instead of intrinsic to our personal identity, then we can begin to detach from thoughts as they arise during meditation. Developing non-judgment and detachment when thoughts arise during meditation takes practice. By using breath as a focal point rather than thoughts, we begin the process of detachment.

Meditation has many health benefits. It reduces stress, thereby reducing the "stress hormones," like cortisol and adrenaline. The reduction of stress results in a strengthened immune system. Meditation helps your brain focus, learn, and grow.

> A recent study led by Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital found that after only eight weeks of meditation, participants experienced beneficial growth in the brain areas associated with memory, learning, empathy, self-awareness, and stress regulation (the insula, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex). In addition, the meditators reported decreased feelings of anxiety and greater feelings of calm. This study adds to the expanding body of research about the brain's amazing plasticity and ability to change habitual stress patterns (McGeever, 2011).

In addition, meditation increases the flow of oxygen in the body. Meditation decreases depression, anxiety, and insomnia by releasing serotonin and endorphins (https://chopra.com/ccl/why-meditate-0). As a result, meditation also promotes a more positive attitude. This, in turn, benefits interpersonal relationships. It also contributes to greater productivity in one's professional life and personal life (Seppälä, 2013).

The words meditation and mindfulness are often used interchangeably. Meditation may take many forms; there are walking meditations, sitting meditations, etc. An important outcome of meditation is improved mindfulness. Mindfulness means paying attention to our experiences, including our thoughts, sensations, feelings, and images while they are happening, without judgment and with acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Meditation practice is often a precursor to mindfulness because mindfulness becomes the way we demonstrate the practice of meditation in our daily lives.

One final thought to keep in mind: Meditation is often referred to as a "practice." Some may think of the word "practice" in terms of preparing for a performance or presentation. As educators, we often use the term "practice" to pertain to beliefs or methodologies. This is probably closer to the meaning of "practice" as it applies to meditation. Just as our teaching practices improve and change with time, so does our meditation practice. The more we do it, the more refined our practice becomes.

Breathe Classroom Activity

Breath Meditation

Introduction:

This meditation may be used personally and in the classroom. This meditation is based on the Stabilizing Attention meditation from the foundation course for Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (Negi, 2015). I have included the meditation in dialogue form below, so that you may record your own version. I have also included a link to vocaroo.com (http://vocaroo.com/i/s1KEfyOl61aU) if you prefer to listen to a prepared recording. (Vocaroo is a website that hosts audio recordings.) The dialogue is meant as a starting point. If any of the language feels awkward or uncomfortable, the teacher and/or meditator may change any of the language as desired.

This is a helpful introduction for new meditators, both in the privacy of your own home and in the EFL classroom. It is accessible to all English language learning levels. The language is intentionally easy to understand. I have used this meditation in the EFL classroom and students have responded favorably. This meditation may be used at any point in any class. It relaxes and calms students. It is a nice way to conclude a class (prior to a final reflection) so that students carry that sense of calm with them throughout the day.

Goal:

1. Language Skill: practice speaking and listening skills.
2. Language: learn new vocabulary.
3. Affective: increase mindfulness and learn a simple meditation that may be used regularly.

Instructions:

This meditation may be conducted as a listening activity for students utilizing the Pre, During, and Post (PDP) format. The PDP format is a commonly used format for listening activities. The Pre phase introduces students to the topic, including new vocabulary and introductory discussion of the topic. The During phase includes the actual listening portion. This may include listening to the recording more than once, assigning different tasks each time. In the Breath Meditation, the recording will only be played once. The Post phase is the opportunity to reflect on the activity, including the exploration of next steps.

Pre Phase:

1. In the Pre phase, introduce the concept of meditation. Find out which students have meditated and/or meditate regularly. Find out what they know about meditation. Find out if anyone is uncomfortable with the idea of meditation. (The idea of meditation as a religion might come up. If it does, explain the scientific benefits of meditation discussed on page 13.)
2. Introduce any new vocabulary, e.g., nostrils, diaphragm, non-judgment, mindfulness, third eye. Before beginning the meditation, ask the students to notice how they are feeling, physically and mentally. Ask them to share with a partner or with the class.

During Phase:

In the During phase, you may or may not find it helpful to play relaxing music in the background. Some people find music distracting; others find it a helpful way to "tune out" external noises. You may read or play the following:

[Begin Meditation]
This is a meditation that focuses on the breath.

Find a comfortable position. You may sit in a chair or on the floor. If you sit in a chair, try to keep your feet flat on the floor or in a cross-legged position. If you sit on the floor, you may sit on a pillow for comfort. Also, try to sit in a comfortable cross-legged position. Keep your back straight and shoulders broad. Place your hands in your lap or on your thighs, palms facing up, in a relaxed position.

Gently close your eyes. Your gaze may be toward the floor or toward your third eye. (Your third eye is located about one inch above and between your eyes.)

Notice any tension you may feel in your body. Try to relax any areas of tension that you notice.

Now begin to notice your breath. As you breathe, try to release any disturbing thoughts or feelings. When you inhale, notice how the breath feels entering through the nostrils and then feel your diaphragm as it expands. Now exhale and release the breath. Notice how it feels when your diaphragm contracts and the air exits through your nostrils. Repeat this three times.

You may notice, as you try to pay attention to your breath, that thoughts enter into your mind during this meditation. You may worry that you are doing something wrong. Please know that this is natural. Thoughts will come and go. Allow them to come and go without blame or criticism or judgment. Simply observe that you had a thought and let it go. Allow yourself to return your focus to your breath.

If you find it challenging to focus on the flow of your breath, try to count evenly while you inhale and while you exhale, using the same count for both the inhale and exhale. This may be helpful.

Continue to focus on your breath. Continue to stay in the present moment with your breath.

Simply notice when thoughts arise, with acceptance, and without criticism and judgment, and return to the focus on your breath. Enjoy this opportunity to place your attention in the present moment by focusing on your breath.

Continue to focus on your breath. Gently allow thoughts to enter and leave without judgment or criticism.

We will now conclude this breath meditation. As you continue with your day, if possible, remember a moment of peace or non-judgment that you experienced during this meditation. We will conclude this meditation by sending peace, happiness, harmony, and healing to ourselves and everyone.
[End Meditation]

Post Phase:

The Post phase is the opportunity for reflection. Discussion may include any combination of writing, reading, speaking, and listening individually, in pairs, small groups, or with the whole class.

1. Here are some possible questions:
    a. Was this difficult? Easy? Why?
    b. Did you feel comfortable? Why or why not?
    c. What happened when you had thoughts?
    d. Do you feel different after meditating? Why or why not?
    e. What are the differences that you notice?
    f. Would you like to do this again? If students would like to do this again, consider making it part of the routine classroom activities.
2. As part of the post discussion, it might be helpful to review the benefits of meditation to their health and well-being. Review the health benefit discussion on page 13 in this chapter.

End of Lesson

Chapter Two: Reflect

"Reflection requires space and time…

Stillness and quieting the mind foster deep reflection" (Yeganeh, 2009, p. 17).

This chapter begins by exploring the meaning of "reflection" from two pedagogic perspectives. Dewey's explanation of reflection represents the more traditional pedagogic approach, whereas Schön's (1983) discussion of "reflection-in-action" provides a pathway to the Eastern concept of reflection and mindfulness (Tremmel, 1993, p. 443). The concept of awareness as it relates to mindfulness and reflection leads to an exploration of the Experiential Learning Cycle that differs from Lewin and Kolb (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). This chapter concludes with an activity for the EFL classroom that includes aspects of mindfulness and reflection.

When discussing reflection in pedagogical circles, there is often an emphasis on analysis and problem solving (Clift, 1990, p. 211). Dewey (2012) defines reflective thought as a "conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief based on a firm basis of reasons" (Dewey, p. 5). Dewey continues by saying that doubt must be present as part of the reflective process (*ibid.,* p. 8). He outlines the five steps of reflection as: (1) Identifying a difficulty; (2) Defining the difficulty; (3) Explaining the difficulty or exploring a possible solution; (4) Using reasoning to explore more thoroughly; (5) Forming a conclusion (*ibid.*, pp. 66-70). This description of the reflective process is challenging for me because I don't believe that the presence of a difficulty is necessary for reflection to occur. For me, the focus of the reflective process is observation of a past experience. Reflective observation may occur either in the presence or absence of conflict. A more complete discussion of the reflective process is included on pages 20 - 21.

In contrast to Dewey, Schön's "reflection-in-action" is a starting point for academicians to move from the more rational and analytical understanding of reflection posited by Dewey to a

concept of reflection that aligns more closely with mindfulness (Tremmel, 1993, p. 442). As with mindfulness, reflection-in-action focuses on paying attention to what is happening in the present moment. Schön uses the term "think on your feet" to describe this (Schön, 1983, p. 53). Thinking on your feet is a metaphor for thinking while doing.

Mindfulness and reflection have similarities and differences. Both involve paying attention. As mentioned in the previous chapter, mindfulness means paying attention to our experiences, including our thoughts, sensations, feelings, and images, while they are happening, i.e. in the *present* moment, without judgment and with acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). For me, "reflection" is the observation and description of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and images, as they relate to an experience that occurred in the *past*. While reflection generally happens *after* an experience, greater mindfulness *during* an experience deepens the reflective process. Awareness is the third part of the process. Awareness is the result of the insight and knowledge gained from reflecting upon an experience.

Mindfulness involves "doing" or action; one is paying attention in the present moment while participating in the act of "doing" something. Reflection involves "seeing" or observing; one is observing and describing what happened during the prior action. As a consequence of the insight and knowledge gained from "doing" and seeing," a new sense of "being" develops and evolves. This "being" or awareness is then integrated into future experiences.

In the figure below, I have modified David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) to reflect the connection between mindfulness (doing), reflection (seeing), and awareness (being) rather than Kolb's description of the ELC, "experiencing, reflection, thinking, and acting" (Yeganeh, 2009, p. 10). Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory has transformed the educational paradigm for learning by defining learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created

through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). The following figure creates a three-pronged version of the Experiential Learning Cycle: Doing (mindfulness) is closely aligned with Kolb's "experiencing;" Seeing (reflection) is similar to Kolb's explanation of "reflection," which is based on observation; Kolb's "thinking" and "acting" are combined into the singular concept of "being" (awareness). For simplicity, I have used the simple present form of each verb. Kolb has referred to the ELC as a cycle or "spiral" because there is an element of advancement and "transformation" in the process (Yeganeh, 2009, p. 15). Both cycle and spiral images are important in the Do-See-Be version as well because progression and advancement are integral to learning. As our mindful attention improves, our intellectual "muscle" that allows us to reflect and observe improves. In turn, we gain more awareness. Greater awareness, results in greater mindfulness, resulting in greater reflection, etc. The more we learn, the more we grow.

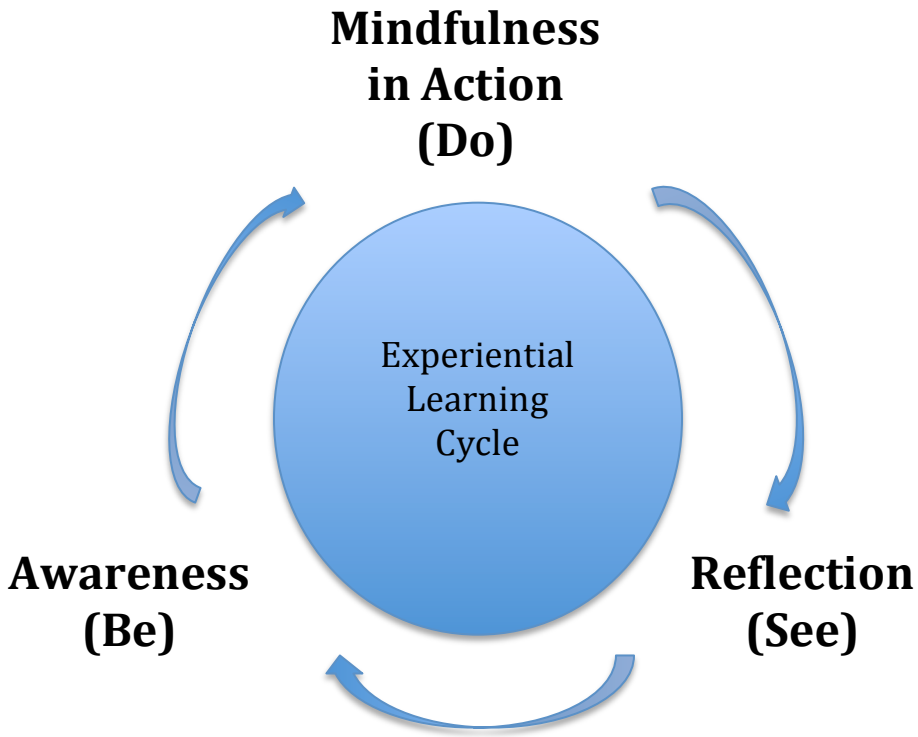

Figure 1. Experiential Learning Cycle by Maxine Swisa

In order to create meaningful reflection for ourselves and others, it is important for us to reflect in stillness. Stillness implies the absence of distractions. The absence of distractions affords the possibility for heightened focus during the reflective process. Lao Tzu said, "One cannot reflect in streaming water. Only those who know internal peace can give it to others" (Tzu, 604-531 B.C.). This quote describes the importance of stillness. It also offers two additional insights. First, it includes an aspect of reflection that has not yet been explicitly stated, i.e. reflection as an act of seeing ourselves. While this is not always necessary as part of the reflective process, personal reflection provides opportunities for personal growth, as well as intellectual growth. Secondly, Lao Tzu, in the *Tao Te Ching* often used references to nature. Nature is a great starting point for a reflection activity. It is included in the classroom activity on the following page.

This chapter has explored the interconnectedness of mindfulness, reflection and awareness. Dewey, Schön and Kolb have provided crucial perspectives on the reflective and learning processes. Dewey's focus is on the analytical reflective process. Schön's emphasis is on mindful, reflection-in-action. Kolb discusses the importance of experience, observation, thinking and acting. Reflection may be externally oriented, as is the case in the nature activity (pages 23 - 24) or it may be internally oriented as in the reflecting water activity (pages 25 – 26). The important thing is to continue to experience mindfully, observe reflectively, and continue on with growing awareness.

Reflect Classroom Activities

This reflection activity has three parts and may be divided into three lessons. The lesson may be modified for all English language levels. The combined reflection class accommodates multiple learning styles. Please remember that this activity may be modified depending on the individual needs of the learners and the learning environment.

Mindfulness (Do):

Goal:

1. Language skill: practice speaking and listening.
2. Language: use descriptive language.
3. Affective: develop mindfulness.

Instructions:

This activity begins with a walk in nature. This is helpful for kinesthetic, visual, and tactile learning. This is the mindful, "do" portion of the lesson trilogy.

1. Before beginning, review the concept of mindfulness with the learners, emphasizing the importance of paying attention, in the present moment, to everything they experience.
2. Hopefully, at the very least, there is a tree or a bush outside the classroom building. If there is, take your students outside and have them select one article of nature. If there isn't access to nature near by, bring in some leaves, twigs, flowers, etc. to class.
3. Once the students have an object, remind them to pay attention to as many details as they can about that object. Encourage them to use as many of the five senses as possible. (Taste may not be advisable depending on the object!) This activity may be done in pairs or small groups.

4. Once the students have spent enough time focusing on the object, have the groups share with each other everything they experienced.

While the primary focus is on "doing," this activity also includes reflection, similar to Schön's description of reflection-in-action because an important part of paying attention in this activity includes observation. Part of the observation process is the ability to express these observations either verbally or in writing.

Reflection (See):

Goal:

1. Language skills: practice writing, speaking, and listening.
2. Language: use descriptive language.
3. Affective: develop greater reflection and observation capabilities.

Instructions:

This lesson begins with an icebreaker and continues with a self-reflection activity.

I. Icebreaker: The Mirror Game.
   A. Students stand in two lines facing each other.
   B. Each person in one line has a partner in the other line.
   C. Both lines take turns leading the activity and following the activity.
   D. The leaders initiate movement or facial expression.
   E. The followers act as a mirror for the leaders.
   F. When the teacher says, "Freeze," both lines freeze and observe themselves and their partners carefully.
   G. They take a moment to share what they observe.

This icebreaker should be playful. It is a safe way to prepare for the second part of this activity that focuses on personal reflection.

II. Self-Reflection

A. The personal reflection begins by observing one's reflection in water. It is ideal if there is a pond near by. If that is not available, a pot with a black bottom filled with water may be used. (Depending on the size of the class, additional pots may be needed.)

B. Each student has one minute to *observe* as many things about themselves as possible. Encourage them to pay attention to any thoughts, feelings, images, and actions that they notice. Encourage them to be mindful.

C. The students then sit down and begin a process known as "freewriting" (Tremmel, 1993, p. 449). Freewriting involves writing down everything that comes to mind with no filter. If students seem confused, discuss the concept of "stream of consciousness." Encourage them to use that concept when writing. Tell the students that this is for their eyes only; they will not share this. Give them as much time as they need to complete this. It is important that they work in stillness and quiet.

This activity can be challenging for many reasons. Students don't know what to write. Students don't like what they write. Students don't like what they see. Encourage them to explore these challenges as part of their reflective observation.

D. When they are done, ask them to use a different color pen or pencil, and to circle anything that they wrote that was judgmental.

E. Ask them to notice how of much of the writing is covered in circles.

F. Then, ask them to use a third color writing utensil and see if they able to either rephrase the judgmental comments in a way that is more accepting or complement the judgment with a more accepting comment. For example, “messy hair” might be replaced with “uncombed hair.”

G. Conclude this activity with a closing circle and have each student share a non-judgmental observation about themselves.

Awareness (Be):

Goal:

1. Language skills: practice writing, speaking, and listening.
2. Language: use descriptive language.
3. Affective: develop insight into our actions and observations.

Instructions:

The third activity focuses on awareness. It is a synthesis of the insight and knowledge gained from the two previous activities.

1. Review the previous activities with the class.
2. Have students share something that they learned about themselves or others. On the board, write, “What did I learn about myself? How have these activities changed me? How will I use the insights I gained in the future?” Give students time to think about these questions.
3. Have students discuss with a partner.
4. Have students jot down the most important insight (s).
5. In closing, have students share one insight with the class.

End Lesson

Chapter Three: Empathize

"The essence of compassion is a desire to alleviate the suffering of others and to promote their well-being. This is the spiritual principle from which all other positive inner values emerge"

(His Holiness The Dalai Lama, 2012, p. xi).

This chapter primarily explores compassion. Empathy is discussed first, because there is often some confusion regarding the difference between empathy and compassion. The *Cognitively-Based Compassion Training* (2015) in Atlanta, provided me with a great deal of insight into the relationship between empathy, compassion, suffering, and the human desire for happiness and well-being. The connection between these is discussed. In addition, both self-compassion and compassion towards others are examined. Marshall Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication* (2003), provides a process for expressing our feelings and needs, as well as the language to do this. There are two class activities included at the end of the chapter. The first is a self-compassion meditation activity for the EFL classroom. The second is a follow-up lesson based on Marshall Rosenberg's work.

Empathy involves an emotional resonance with another person's experience (Dalai Lama, 2012, p. 55). Empathy is the ability to feel and understand another person's emotional state (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy). "Seeing from another person's point of view: We sense the other's intentions and imagine what an event means in his or her mind" (Siegel, 2011, p. 28). Empathy allows us to "feel" what another person is feeling based on our ability to recall prior experiences that include similar emotions (*ibid.*). These may be positive or negative feelings. We can empathically experience the joy a mother feels at the sight of her newborn baby, even if the infant is unknown to us. Likewise, we can empathically experience sorrow when we hear of the loss of a stranger's loved one.

While empathy pertains to either positive or negative emotional experiences, compassion is generally focused on difficulties that another person is experiencing. Compassion extends beyond "feeling" for another person's emotional state, and includes "a desire to *do* something to relieve the hardships of others" (Dalai Lama, 2012, p. 55). In his book, *Beyond Religion* (2012), His Holiness The Dalai Lama, attempts to transcend religious values to focus on a broader perspective, i.e. a secular view of human values that includes compassion as a basic *human* value (*ibid.*, p. xiv). Nonetheless, it is clear that his beliefs stem from Buddhist beliefs, specifically, the Four Noble Truths. Because there is no mention of "God" in the Four Noble Truths, it is easier to translate these concepts into secular terms than it might be with Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. The Four Noble Truths state:

1. The truth of suffering; i.e. suffering exists.
2. The truth of the cause of suffering, i.e. there is a cause for suffering.
3. The truth of freedom from suffering; i.e. there is an end to suffering.
4. The truth of the way to eliminate suffering; i.e. there is a way to end suffering (http://www.buddhanet.net/fundbud4.htm).

These four statements provide a guide to daily living that extends beyond Buddhist practice.

The first Noble Truth; i.e. the presence of suffering in life, has profound implications for all human interactions. When we acknowledge that all human beings experience some degree of "suffering" or discomfort, we begin to understand the meaning of compassion. As mentioned in the opening quote by His Holiness The Dalai Lama, compassion is the desire to relieve the suffering of others and to promote their well-being. When the desire to relieve suffering and promote well-being is directed inward, it is the beginning of self-compassion and is discussed on the following page.

The second Noble Truth discusses the cause of suffering, principally desire (http://www.buddhanet.net/fundbud4.htm). Desire is a cause of suffering because it is impossible to satisfy all of our wants. Desire originates in our thoughts. We think about something that we want, which, in turn, causes discomfort because we don't have it. A cycle of frustration, anger, or worry may follow; all of these emotions perpetuate our distress.

The third Noble Truth says that there is an end to suffering (http://www.buddhanet.net/fundbud4.htm). The end is achieved through death or "enlightenment." In secular terms, death is the end to suffering because as long as we are alive, we will experience some degree of suffering. Having said that, the fourth Noble Truth states that the way to end suffering is through mindfulness and meditation (*ibid.*). If we experience greater mindfulness and meditate more, we have the possibility to experience less suffering. As we become more aware and less judgmental of our thoughts and our suffering, we begin to experience a greater sense of well-being. This, in turn, allows for a greater sense of compassion. In order to be truly compassionate of others, we must begin with self-compassion.

Self-compassion begins first by acknowledging any discomfort that we may feel. Often we are not even aware of our discomfort. Meditation can help to raise our awareness because we tend to be more mindful of our thoughts and feelings during meditation. The next step is to notice our discomfort. As a general rule, this happens when thoughts and feelings arise regarding an unfulfilled desire for something (Negi, 2015). At this time, we have an opportunity to remind ourselves of our preference for happiness and well-being rather than discomfort. When we gain awareness of our desire to reduce discomfort, while practicing non-judgment, we begin to understand the nature of self-compassion. By acknowledging that our ultimate goal is to seek fulfillment and happiness, we begin to remind ourselves to place our attention on this goal (*ibid.*,

2015) and to avoid discomfort. In this way, we are able to practice self-compassion. Once we are able to practice self-compassion, it becomes easier to practice compassion toward others. We are able to do this when we realize that all human beings also want to reduce their suffering and increase their sense of well-being.

After understanding the nature of compassion, it is important to discuss the language of compassion as well. Marshall Rosenberg (2003) is one of the pioneers in this effort. In his book, *Nonviolent Communication* (NVC), he provides a framework for interacting with others and sharing observations, feelings, needs and requests without blame or criticism, using non-judgmental language (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 6) where individuals assume personal responsibility for these feelings, needs and requests. These are explained as: "The concrete actions we *observe* that affect our well-being. How we *feel* in relation to what we observe. The *needs*, values, desires, etc. that create our feelings. The concrete actions we *request* in order to enrich our lives" (*ibid*., p. 7). The NVC process is about expressing honestly and receiving compassionately using the four factors mentioned, i.e. observations, feelings, needs, and requests (*ibid*., p. 7). If we are able to express ourselves honestly and receive feedback without blame, criticism, or self-judgment, we may begin to experience greater well-being.

When discussing observations, Rosenberg mentions the importance of separating observation from evaluation (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 30). Evaluation often involves an opinion or judgment. For example, there is a difference between these two statements, "Doug procrastinates," and "Doug only studies for exams the night before" (*ibid.*, p. 30). The first is an evaluation because the language used implies a criticism of Doug's approach to studying. The second is an observation because there is no value judgment, just the observation describing when Doug studies for exams.

Rosenberg continues by discussing vocabulary to express genuine feelings for when our needs are being met and when they are not being met. Examples of words that express feelings when our needs are being met include, "appreciative, calm, comfortable, delighted, encouraged, fulfilled, happy" (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 44). Examples of words that express feelings when are needs are not being met include, "afraid, angry, disappointed, discouraged, hesitant, troubled, uncomfortable" (*ibid*., pp. 46-47). When we use nonviolent language to honestly express our feelings, it is important to remember that there are no "right" or "wrong" feelings. Practicing mindfulness helps this process because it allows us to remove the elements of judgment or criticism. When we are mindful of our feelings, we allow ourselves the freedom to express them with clarity.

The next factor that Rosenberg discusses is the necessity to express our needs without blaming or criticizing ourselves or others (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 50). As discussed earlier, all human beings share the basic need for well-being. Some words that may be used to express these needs include, "creativity, acceptance, appreciation, love, respect, trust, warmth, peace" (*ibid*., pp. 54-55). It is important to express our needs without blaming or criticizing others for not meeting them. An example of the former is "It's so annoying that you're always late." The first obstacle in the statement is the use of the word "always." This immediately implies criticism and puts the person on the defensive. A statement that would exemplify Rosenberg's process is, "I feel frustrated when you come late to pick me up because I need to get to work on time." In this statement, the speaker takes responsibility for his/her own feelings. It includes the observation that the listener arrived late without blaming that person. It concludes by expressing what the speaker needs. Once again, mindfulness facilitates the process because we are better equipped to express our needs with clarity and non-judgment.

The final step in the NVC process is to request what we want using "clear, positive, concrete, language" (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 70). It is also important to request what we want without making the other person feel defensive or inadequate. A statement such as, "I need you to understand me" is unclear. However, if we say, "Please tell me what you heard me say" allows the listener to respond to a specific request (*ibid.*, p. 88). This provides an atmosphere for discussion that may lead to greater understanding.

Combining Rosenberg's language of compassion with the practice of compassion in human relationships is the pathway to greater well-being for ourselves and others. When we begin to practice self-compassion by paying attention to our thoughts, feelings and sensations, as well as the language we use to express them, we can then extend the practice of compassion toward others as we are able to realize that all human beings want to reduce their suffering and increase their sense of well-being. This broader perspective allows us to "widen our circle of compassion" (Einstein, 1950) to include more and more people, ultimately, practicing this compassion toward everyone we meet.

Empathize Class Activities

I have included two activities for this chapter. The first is a class activity that focuses on self-compassion. The second is based on Marshall Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication* (2003).

Lesson One: Self-Compassion Meditation

The self-compassion activity is suitable for all language learning levels. These are suggested activities and may be modified to meet the needs of your students. This meditation activity may follow the Pre, During, and Post (PDP) format. The PDP format is a commonly used format for listening activities. The Pre phase introduces students to the topic, including new vocabulary and introductory discussion of the topic. The During phase includes the actual listening portion. This may include listening to the recording more than once, assigning different tasks each time. In the Self-Compassion Mediation, the recording will only be played once. The Post phase is the opportunity to reflect on the activity, including the exploration of next steps. This meditation is also based on the *Cognitively-Based Compassion Training* (CBCT*).*

Goals:

1. Language skill: practice listening and speaking.
2. Affective: practice meditation, greater awareness, reflect on compassion.

Instructions:

Pre-Phase

1. Begin by writing the word "compassion" on the board. Ask students what the word means. If the word "empathy" is mentioned, discuss the differences.

2. Review the definitions of mindfulness and meditation. Make sure to include the concepts of paying attention and being accepting. Ask students what they remember about the previous meditation activity, particularly posture and breath.
3. Discuss any other vocabulary that may be needed such as aspiration, expectation, inadequacy, perspective.
4. Tell them that this is a meditation on self-compassion.

During Phase

If you decide to read this meditation yourself, it may be nice to play soothing, meditation music while reading. I have included a recording of the meditation as well (http://vocaroo.com/i/s1xkqVQB6Gzv).

[Begin meditation]

This meditation focuses on self-compassion. We will pay attention to the sources of our personal discomfort, we will work to overcome them, and we will work to create a deeper sense of personal well-being.

Find a comfortable position. Keep your back straight and shoulders broad. Place your hands in your lap or on your thighs, palms facing up, in a relaxed position. Gently close your eyes. Notice any tension you may feel in your body. Take three slow breaths. As you exhale, release any tension you may be feeling from your body.

Take a moment to remember a time when you felt nurtured, safe, and warm. As you reflect on these feelings, think about the value of embodying these qualities so that you may continue to feel that same sense of nurturance, safety and warmth for yourself and others.

Continue feeling a sense of safety while focusing on your breathing. Practice being present and pay attention to the inhalation and exhalation of your breath. Notice any thoughts, feelings and sensations that you may experience. Allow them to come and go without blame or criticism or judgment. Simply observe that you had a thought and let it go. Allow yourself to return your focus to your breath.

Let's think about our deepest fundamental aspirations for happiness and well-being and our wish to avoid dissatisfaction and unhappiness and how these are the foundation for all of our thoughts, hopes, and expectations.

Take a moment to look within our current experiences and reflect on the aspects that are troubling to us; the things that challenge our happiness and contribute to the suffering that we want to avoid. We might experience this as fear, loss, criticism, or lack of recognition. We may feel frustration or worry about not getting things we want such as material or professional success, status, praise or respect. We may also feel badly about our own inadequacy or imperfection.

After noticing some of the reasons we struggle, let's take a few moments to reflect on them from a broader perspective seeing that such events, losses, failures, illnesses and other limitations happen not only to us, but to every human life.

Let's reflect on how each of these situations is the result of many causes and conditions over which no one has full control. See if this shift in perspective allows for accepting these imperfections and difficulties with a greater sense of kindness toward ourselves and allows for lessening attitudes of harsh judgment and blame.

How much of our unhappiness results from us being overly focused on our desires for material gain, social and professional status and praise and recognition from others? Reflect on how none of these can be truly lasting or permanent. Once we feel that we have accepted the reality of change and impermanence, let's take a few moments to allow this reality to sink in more deeply.

During this meditation, you may notice a greater sense of ease that arises when we align our expectations with the reality of this world. Note how shifting these inner perspectives, can lead to a noticeable difference in relief, comfort, and inner peace.

Let's set our intention to begin to release ourselves from suffering and focus on our aspiration for well-being and happiness.

Let's conclude this meditation by dedicating it to the well-being and happiness of every living being on this earth.

Post Phase

The Post phase is the opportunity for reflection. Discussion may include any combination of writing, reading, speaking, and listening individually, in pairs, small groups, or with the whole class.

1. This is an opportunity for students to reflect on this meditation. If you have done the breath meditation with your class, ask them a few questions about the two experiences. Here are some suggestions.
    a. Was this the same as the breath meditation? Why or why not?
    b. What did you like about this meditation?
    c. What was challenging?
    d. Did you experience any thoughts of discomfort?
    e. What happened when you had thoughts?
    f. Do you feel different after meditating? Why or why not?
    g. Do you feel more compassionate toward yourself? Toward others? Why or why not?
2. If you are not in a circle, ask your students to stand or sit in a circle. Go around the circle and ask students to share one thing they learned.
3. Conclude this activity with a one word reflection. Ask each student to say one word (or sentence) about how they feel.

End Lesson One: Compassion Meditation

Lesson Two: The Language of Compassion

This lesson is based on Marshall Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication* (2003). It is important as the facilitator to have access to this book in order to conduct this lesson. The book provides a process for nonviolent communication (NVC). This activity explores this

process in more depth. This lesson is most appropriate for intermediate level language learners and above.

Goal:

1. Language: increase vocabulary for compassionate communication.
2. Language skill: improve communication skills.
3. Affective: develop greater awareness of the importance of the words we use when communicating feelings, needs and requests.

Instructions:

1 Introduce the concepts of nonviolent communication as discussed in Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication*, and on pages 30 - 32 in this paper.

2 Review language and vocabulary that promotes compassionate communication. Some of this information is listed on pages 209-210 in Rosenberg's book and included in Appendix A.

3 Have students work in pairs. Give them a moment to think of a person with whom they have experienced some difficulty or conflict.

4 Have each student describe the situation to their partner.

5 Have the pairs role play each situation two times.

   a. The first time will be using language that they might have actually used in the situation, or, might have been used in the past.

   b. The second time will be using the words and language that Rosenberg suggests. Students will practice expressing their observations, feelings, needs,

and requests and listen to their partner's observations, feelings, needs, and requests without blame or criticism.

6 Have students reflect on the role play activities with their partner. What differences did they notice between the two instances? Was it challenging to use or think of the appropriate nonviolent language?

7 To wrap up, students will come together as a class and reflect on the experience. Some possible questions include:

   a. What were some of the challenges you found when using compassionate language?
   b. Which specific language would you use?
   c. Would you like to incorporate this language into class activities?
   d. Any other thoughts or ideas that you have?
   e. In conclusion, share one thing you learned from this activity.

End Compassionate Communication Lesson

Chapter Four: Accept

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change"

(Niebuhr, 1987, p. 251).

While researching for this chapter, I came upon the *Serenity Prayer* by Rudolph Niebuhr (1892 – 1971). Accepting our challenges with "serenity" (Niebuhr, 1987) is not easy. To accept requires the practice of mindfulness, non-judgment, the absence of blame and criticism, and the ability to forgive ourselves and other people. In addition, the language for nonviolent communication is an important skill for expressing acceptance, non-judgment, and forgiveness. Non-judgment precedes acceptance and acceptance precedes forgiveness. When we are able to integrate all of this into our daily thoughts, feelings, sensations, and actions, we are able to experience life with greater serenity and inner peace. A classroom activity is included to augment the personal exploration of non-judgment, acceptance, and forgiveness.

The first step toward acceptance is non-judgment. Before we can truly embrace the practice of non-judgment, we need to understand the nature of judgment. All human beings spend a great deal of time evaluating whether some thing is good or bad. This is the essence of judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 55). Rosenberg expands on the concept of judgment by discussing "moralistic judgments" and "value judgments" (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 15 – 17). "Moralistic judgments imply wrongness or badness on the part of people who don't act in harmony with our values" (*ibid.,* p. 15). "Value judgments" are the

> qualities we value in life; for example, we might value honesty, freedom, or peace….. We make *moralistic* judgments of people who fail to support our value judgments; for example. 'Violence is bad. People who kill others are evil.' Had we been raised speaking a language that facilitated the expression of compassion, we would have learned to

> articulate our needs and values directly, rather than to insinuate wrongness when they have not been met. For example, instead of 'Violence is bad,' we might say, 'I am fearful of the use of violence to resolve conflicts; I value the resolution of human conflicts through other means' (*ibid.,* p. 17).

When we think and speak in morally judgmental terms, we create barriers between ourselves and other people.

Behaviors and language that often go hand in hand with judgment are blame and criticism. Blame involves placing the responsibility on someone when something bad happens (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blame). This often includes using judgmental language. When we hear this type of negative language, we may internalize that judgment and blame ourselves. Conversely, we may blame the other person for being rude, selfish, inconsiderate, etc. (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 49-50). We may even blame ourselves *and* the other person. Blame is a way to escape responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, or actions by saying things like, "I messed up. I can't do anything right" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 196). If the blame is placed on the other person, the statement would be, "You messed up. You can't do anything right." Whereas blame places the responsibility for an action on someone, criticism, expresses disapproval (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/criticism) of a person's actions or character traits. An example of criticism might be, "You're irresponsible," or "I'm irresponsible." Both blame and criticism involve negative forms of language and judgments, and both create barriers among the participants when communicating, even if the negativity is self-directed.

Now that the concepts of judgment, blame and criticism have been discussed, it is time to focus on the use of nonjudgmental language as part of daily communication, especially when

expressing thoughts, feelings, needs, and requests. Being mindful of our thoughts and feelings is a first step in this process. As mentioned in Chapter One, mindfulness is paying attention to our experiences, including our thoughts, sensations, feelings, and images while they are happening, without judgment and with acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). It is important to note that judging things is part of being human (*ibid.*, p. 56). However, it is also important to remember to notice it without getting emotionally involved in that judgment. "A non-judging orientation…. means that we can act with greater clarity in our own lives, and be more balanced, more effective, and more ethical in our activities" (*ibid.,* p. 57). When we become more mindful, we gain clarity regarding our thoughts, feelings, and needs. As we gain clarity, we are able to incorporate this into our interactions with ourselves and other people by using non-judgmental language that is free of blame and criticism. When we use language that expresses our personal feelings and needs while not condemning others for their feelings and needs, we begin an important step toward communicating in a non-judgmental manner. This paves the way for compassionate communication and greater understanding.

Marshall Rosenberg (2003) provides some examples of non-judgmental language, free of blame and criticism. For example, expressing our feelings and needs to a friend when s/he cancels plans, might include language like: "I felt disappointed when you didn't come over, because I wanted to talk over some things that were bothering me" (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 50). The speaker takes ownership for her/his feelings and explains why s/he feels that way. A helpful template to use, based on Rosenberg's example, when expressing feelings and needs is: I feel ___ _____ because I needed (or wanted) _____. The speaker is not judging her/himself or the other person, s/he is clearly describing her/his feelings and needs. By taking responsibility for our own feelings and needs, we remove the burden of blame

from the recipient. This type of non-judgmental language allows both parties to communicate openly and honestly.

Once we are mindful of our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and needs and are able to express them nonjudgmentally, we are then ready to explore the process of accepting ourselves and other people. When we mindfully pay attention in the present moment without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4), we are setting the stage for acceptance to occur. The essence of acceptance is going with the flow. This means letting go of preconceived ideas or expectations of what "should" happen and accepting what is actually happening as it unfolds (*ibid.,* p. 53). "Letting go is only possible if we can bring awareness and acceptance to the nitty-gritty of just how stuck we can get" (*ibid.,* p. 54). Acceptance and awareness allow us to acknowledge our challenges as part of our existence without resisting them. We are able to pay attention in the present moment and notice that we are experiencing a difficult situation, without judgment.

> Accept --- then act. Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not against it. Make it your friend and ally, not your enemy. This will miraculously transform your whole life (Tolle, 1999, p. 29).

When we accept whatever comes our way, as if we had "chosen it" (Tolle, 1999, p. 29) we are empowering ourselves to make peace with challenges or difficulties that arise. This is the idea behind the "serenity" of acceptance. We accept that all is as it is meant to be at this present moment.

Once we are able to accept life experiences as they occur and go with the flow of life, we are ready to forgive. Acceptance plants the seeds from which the flower of forgiveness blooms. Letting go is an important part of forgiveness, just as it is for acceptance. Letting go allows us to release old feelings and experiences of negativity. "Forgiveness is ….a movement to let go of the

pain, the resentment, the outrage that you have carried as a burden for so long" (Kornfield, 1993, p. 284). We don't have to condone the action in order to forgive. We forgive in order to release ourselves from the "burden" of carrying negative feelings toward ourselves or other people. True forgiveness can free us from holding on to bad feelings that weigh us down (Swisa, 2013, p. 49). In this way, forgiveness is an act of liberation; it lightens our emotional load. Forgiveness is one of the greatest kindnesses we can bestow upon ourselves (Swisa, p. 50). When we accept that all of us have made mistakes, and, consequently let go of our internal sources of disapproval and judgment, we are able to truly forgive, and release ourselves from the emotional weight that carrying anger, frustration, etc. entails.

When we are able to transform judgment, blame, and criticism into non-judgment, acceptance and forgiveness, we are able to live with greater inner peace. Mindfulness is an important part of this process and allows us to practice non-judgment. Going with the flow allows us to accept the present moment as it happens. Releasing stored feelings of negativity allows us to experience the joyful gift of forgiveness. As we remember to pay attention and practice mindfulness, we are able to find the language of compassion, which, in turn, leads to non-judgment, acceptance, and forgiveness for ourselves and other people, and, ultimately, greater peace, serenity, and well-being for all.

Accept Class Activities

I have included two activities for this chapter. The first is a class activity that focuses on non-judgment and acceptance. The second focuses on forgiveness.

Activity One: Non-Judgment and Acceptance

This activity is suitable for intermediate levels and above. It is taken from Deepak Chopra's book, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* (1994). These are suggested activities and may be modified according to the needs of your students. This is best done at the beginning of class, so that students can practice paying attention to their language usage and thoughts during class, and possibly extend the exercise for longer than one class period.

Goals:

1. Language skills: practice writing using the language of nonviolent communication.
2. Language: introduce new vocabulary.
3. Affective: practice mindfulness, non-judgment, and acceptance.

Instructions:

Introduction

1. Discuss new vocabulary: judgment, blame, criticism, non-judgment, acceptance, go with the flow, let go
2. Pair practice or small groups: Ask students to discuss a recent experience that involved any of the vocabulary in #1.

Acceptance Activity

1. Write on the board: "Today, I will practice acceptance. I will accept people, situations, circumstances, and events as they occur. I accept things as they are at this moment, not as I wish they were. I will remind myself of this throughout the day" (Chopra, 1994, p. 63).
2. Ask students to write this in their journal (preferably) or notebook.
3. Pair practice: Ask students to discuss what they understand this to mean.
4. Class activity: Share some ideas with the entire class to make sure the students understand this message.
5. Pair practice: Ask one student to talk about an experience in the past day that was difficult to accept. Have the other student listen for judgmental language, blame or criticism. Discuss any observations. Switch.
6. Class activity: Discuss any observations, including use of language, thoughts, and feelings with the class.
7. Ask students to carry around the quote from #1 until the next class. Remind them to be mindful and pay attention to at least one time that they have difficulty accepting a given situation or person and were able to turn the situation around, accept it, and go with the flow.
8. Ask students to describe the experience and write about it in their journals.
9. Remind them to bring the journals to the next class. Follow up and discuss the experiences in the next class.

Closing Activity

Closing circle: have students reflect on this activity. Was it easy? Difficult? Do they find it easy to accept situations as they arise? Why or why not? What is one thing they learned?

End Acceptance Activity

Activity Two: Forgiveness Confetti

This activity is suitable for all language levels. These are suggested activities and may be modified according to the needs of your students.

Goals:

i. Language: introduce new vocabulary.
ii. Language skill: practice expressing feelings.
iii. Affective: introduce the importance of forgiveness.

Instructions:

Introduction

1. Discuss new vocabulary: forgiveness, resentment, acceptance, let go
2. Small group discussion: Why is forgiveness important?
3. Class discussion: Share some insights with the class.

Forgiveness Activity

1. Put on some relaxing background music.
2. Erase anything that might be on the board and write one word: FORGIVENESS.
3. Hand out colorful strips of paper.

4. Tell students that what they write during this activity is for their eyes only. Tell students to use one strip of paper for each instance. Ask them to briefly describe a person or situation that they would like to forgive.
5. When students are done writing, have them read their strips of paper, to themselves, and think about how it feels to forgive that person or situation.
6. When they are ready, have them tear up each strip into tiny pieces.
7. Once all students are done, play festive, positive music, like *Let It Go* by Idina Menzel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSFlvxnbgk) or *Best Day of My Life* by American Authors (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y66j_BUCBMY).
8. Have students throw the tiny pieces of paper in the air like confetti and focus on forgiveness while dancing, singing and moving to the music.

Closing Activity

Closing circle: Have students reflect on this activity. Was it easy to forgive? Difficult? What is one word to describe how you're feeling right now?

End Forgiveness Activity

Chapter Five: Thank

"It's not happiness that makes us grateful, it's gratefulness that makes us happy"

(David Steindl-Rast, 2013).

To thank others and express gratitude to others are important steps that lead to a happier existence. Gratitude promotes greater health and well-being, which in turn, leads to greater happiness. This chapter will explore the benefits of gratitude for our physical health, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships based on research by Robert Emmons, PhD, Professor of Psychology at University of California, Davis. Due to the neuroplasticity of our brain, even when we don't naturally feel grateful, we are able to re-wire our brain by "exercising" the gratitude muscle and training ourselves to experience more gratitude in our lives (Siegel, 2011, p. 39). Some suggestions to help cultivate gratitude are included as well as a gratitude activity for the EFL classroom.

Robert Emmons, PhD, Professor of Psychology at University of California, Davis is one of the foremost authorities on the benefits of gratitude. He has been studying the effects of gratitude for over a decade. He has released findings about the benefits of gratitude (Emmons, 2010, www.greatergood.com), particularly as it relates to physical health, psychological well-being, and interpersonal relationships.

Feeling grateful improves our physical health in several ways. Dr. Emmons remarked in an interview with Elizabeth Heubeck, on www.webmd.com (2006), that, "Grateful people take better care of themselves and engage in more protective health behaviors like regular exercise, a healthy diet, and regular physical examinations" (Heubeck, 2006). Gratitude helps people manage stress better. When stress levels are lower, stress hormone levels are reduced. This, in turn, results in a strengthened immune system. Lower stress levels also contribute to lower blood

pressure and better sleep patterns. Grateful people also tend to be more optimistic. Because of a more positive mental outlook, they have better results combatting health issues (Emmons, 2010). In addition, when facing adversity or trauma, "if people have a grateful disposition, they'll recover more quickly. I believe gratitude gives people a perspective from which they can interpret negative life events and help them guard against post-traumatic stress and lasting anxiety" (Emmons, 2010). If those health benefits aren't enough, positive emotions may add up to seven years to your life (Emmons, 2013)!

On a psychological level, gratefulness contributes to the ability to experience other positive emotions such as joy, happiness, and pleasure (Emmons, 2010). Grateful people experience fewer negative emotions like anger, jealousy and envy (*ibid.*). As a result of experiencing less jealousy, for example, they have greater self-esteem because they aren't negatively comparing themselves with other people (*ibid.*). Gratitude increases feelings of happiness and decreases depression. Grateful people also tend to be more compassionate and less aggressive because they are able to appreciate the positive in situations (*ibid.*).

Some of the most significant benefits for practicing gratitude are social benefits. Emmons (2010) describes gratitude as having two parts:

> First, it's an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we've received. This doesn't mean that life is perfect; it doesn't ignore complaints, burdens, and hassles. But when we look at life as a whole, gratitude encourages us to identify some amount of goodness in our life…. The second part of gratitude is figuring out where that goodness comes from. We recognize the sources of this goodness as being outside of ourselves. It didn't stem from anything we necessarily did ourselves…. I think true gratitude involves a humble dependence on others: We

acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you're of a spiritual mindset—gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives.

Grateful people tend to be more forgiving and compassionate (Emmons, 2010). Grateful people feel a greater bond with other people. As a result, their interpersonal relationships tend to be more satisfying.

Amy Morin wrote an article for *Forbes Magazine* (2014) discussing the social benefits of gratitude. She wrote that people are more likely to want to be friendly with you when you remember to thank them and express appreciation for something that they did (*ibid.*). Remembering to acknowledge and thank people for little acts of kindness is a gift you give yourself and the other person. You feel better when you remember to thank someone and they feel better because they feel recognized. These are some of the positive social benefits we reap when we express gratitude to ourselves and other people.

This all sounds very good for people who tend to be positive, optimistic and grateful. What if we don't naturally gravitate to experiencing this positive emotion? Being mindful, without judgment, of how you generally experience life may actually turn into a starting point for practicing gratitude. The brain has the ability to change neural connections based on different experiences, thoughts, emotions; this ability is known as neuroplasticity. "We can recruit the power of neuroplasticity to repair damaged connections and create new, more satisfying patterns in our everyday lives" (Siegel, 2011, p. 44). Therefore, when we change the way we think or feel about people, experiences, etc., we are able to re-wire our brain and change the way our brain responds to those experiences. Neuroplasticity of the brain is a powerful capability that allows us to heal, grow, and evolve.

Now that we understand that we are able to teach ourselves new ways of responding to experiences and train our brain to be more grateful, a few suggestions by Robert Emmons (2010) to cultivate gratitude are included in this paragraph and the following paragraph. Emmons' first recommendation is to keep a gratitude journal. Take a few moments each day to think of something you are grateful for and write it down. It can be a personal accomplishment or an act of kindness you received, or something you experienced. Joan Borysenko, PhD. (2014) mentioned that if you think of just one new and different thing each day to be grateful for, you are exercising the neuroplasticity in your brain and re-wiring your brain to experience more gratitude.

Secondly, Emmons says that making a *promise* to yourself to practice gratitude increases the likelihood of actually doing it (Emmons, 2010). He suggests writing a note somewhere that says something like, "I promise to practice gratitude every day" (*ibid.*). Seeing this message serves as a constant reminder and reinforces the practice. He also suggests paying attention to your five senses. "Through our senses, we gain an appreciation of what it means to be human and of what an incredible miracle it is to be alive. Seen through the lens of gratitude, the human body is not only a miraculous construction, but also a gift" (*ibid.)*. Some examples of opportunities to express gratitude when using our senses may include: smelling a fragrant flower, touching a soft pillow, or enjoying the taste of a delicious piece of fresh fruit.

On a personal note, I followed these practices and took them one step further. I created a website called www.gratefuloptimism.com and I posted a daily affirmation of gratitude for one year. I included photographs to enhance the affirmation of gratitude. Looking back, I am grateful that I took the time and energy to create this website. People still thank me for this gift. The beauty of expressing gratitude is that once you start, it becomes easier and easier, and, it feels

really good. If you write down just one thing that you are grateful for every day, at the end of one month, you will have 30 things that you are grateful for, and after one year, you will have 365 documented instances of gratitude (Swisa, 2013, pp. 35-36).

Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) discusses an additional approach for practicing gratitude. This approach involves expanding our circle of gratitude. This begins by feeling grateful for our caregivers and loved ones. We then include appreciation for people who have been helpful to us in others ways, like our teachers and other mentors. We continue to expand this circle to include benefits we have received from strangers whether knowingly or unknowingly (Negi, 2015). If we think about everything that we experience in an ordinary day, we begin to realize the thousands of people who have contributed to our well-being. How many people helped put a roof over our head? There were contractors, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, city inspectors, etc. How many people help provide electricity and water to our residence? How many people contribute to the infrastructure of our town or city including roads, snow removal, garbage removal? How many people contributed to providing the food we eat? When we begin to consider the "intended or unintended kindness of others" (Negi, 2015), we have thousands of reasons to be grateful.

In conclusion, I would like to share some thoughts by David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine Monk who has spoken publicly about how gratitude enriches our lives. The particular talk used in this chapter is from a TEDtalk given in 2013, entitled *Want To Be Happy? Be Grateful*. Steindl-Rast calls gratitude "a real gift" (https://www.ted.com/talks/david_steindl_rast_want_to_be_happy_be_grateful#t-134986). Gratitude isn't something that we can buy; it's something that we are given by a person or an experience. We can live gratefully "by experiencing, by becoming aware that every moment….

is a gift…. Open all your senses for this wonderful richness that is given to us. There is no end to it, and that is what life is all about, to enjoy what is given to us" (*ibid.*). This is the beauty and magic of gratitude; it is an infinite source of positive emotion and positive energy. The more we appreciate our lives, the better we feel. The better we feel, the better those with whom we interact will feel. The better those with whom we interact feel, the better those with whom they interact will feel, etc. When we begin to understand the tremendous impact that expressing a little gratitude and appreciation may have on another person, we begin to understand the ease with which we can make a positive difference in this world. We are giving ourselves and everyone we encounter, a gift that leads them toward better physical health, better psychological health, and better interpersonal relationships.

Thank Activity

The Gratitude Lesson

This lesson is appropriate for all levels of language learners. This can be taught as one lesson. However, it is best when students are able to spend a few minutes in each class focusing on gratitude so that it becomes an ongoing part of class and their lives.

Note: I would like to thank Jenny Lake Sanborn, TESOL Colleague and friend, for her creative suggestions and input regarding this activity.

Goal:

1. Language: increase descriptive vocabulary for gratitude and appreciation.
2. Language skill: improve writing, reading, listening and speaking skills.
3. Affective: understand the benefits of gratitude and incorporate that practice into their lives.

Instructions:

1. Introduce the concept of gratitude. Write the word GRATITUDE on the board. Give students an opportunity to come up to the board and write one word that comes to mind that they associate with gratitude.
2. Discuss the words that students wrote on the board including any new vocabulary.
3. Ask students to share with a partner if they practice gratitude regularly. Why or why not?
4. Show the TEDtalk by Louie Schwartzberg (2011) entitled *Nature. Beauty. Gratitude* (http://www.ted.com/talks/louie_schwartzberg_nature_beauty_gratitude?language=en)
5. Divide into pairs or small groups to share impressions about the video.
6. Share impressions with the class.
7. Discuss the benefits of practicing gratitude.

8. If possible, give each student a gift of a small journal. If that isn't possible, ask students to designate a part of their notebook and make it a gratitude journal.
9. Tell students that they will write down one new and different thing that are grateful for every day for one month.
10. After the students have the journal, you might decide to begin, or end, each class by asking students to share one thought of gratitude.
11. After students have at least ten entries, students will create a gratitude mobile. The materials needed are flexible, and may include: colorful index cards (or card stock cut into smaller pieces), scissors, glue, colored markers, clothing hangers, magazines (for decoration, if desired) and string, yarn or ribbon.
12. Students will write each thought of gratitude on separate index cards. They can decorate the cards with glitter, pictures, drawings, etc. They will create a mobile with the cards by connecting the cards, using a piece of string or ribbon, to a clothing hanger.
13. If possible, students can hang the mobiles in the classroom. If that isn't possible, students may take them home as a gratitude reminder.

Closing reflection

1. In closing, ask students if they liked activity. Why or why not?
2. Ask students if they think practicing gratitude is beneficial. Why or why not?
3. Ask students if they would like to continue expressing gratitude on an ongoing basis.
4. Have students stand in a circle and share an expression of gratitude.

End Gratitude Lesson

Chapter Six: Hearten

"Let us always meet each other with a smile for a smile is the beginning of love"

(Mother Teresa, 1910-1997).

Merriam-Webster defines "hearten" as "to cause someone to feel more cheerful or hopeful" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hearten). Merriam-Webster includes "to give heart to" as a definition (*ibid.*) for the word "hearten." When we give our heart to something, we put a lot of feeling and effort into it. The heart is often used as the symbol for love. When we put a lot of effort into something and add love, we have a lot of positive energy flowing. Love is the ultimate positive feeling. Compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude, discussed in previous chapters, are emotions that express the positive feeling of love for ourselves and other people. A more inclusive meaning of "hearten," which incorporates both definitions, while including love, is to give from our hearts with love in all our endeavors, and to contribute to the well-being of others. Contributing to the well-being of others includes promoting love, joy, laughter, and happiness. When we practice this as part of our daily lives, we are incorporating "heart" into everything we experience. This is the essence of love. This is also the essence of this chapter. A loving-kindness meditation activity for the EFL classroom is included at the end of the chapter.

Opening our hearts is the key to giving and receiving love. The Greeks spoke of four different kinds of love. The first type of love, *philia*, is affectionate love, such as the love of friends (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_words_for_love). Most of us are comfortable with affectionate love, especially because there is an element of choice involved. i.e. we *choose* our friends. Consequently, it is natural to feel love and affection for our friends and wish them happiness and well-being. The second type of love, *eros*, is passionate love, such as the love

between two intimate partners. This type of love may transcend to a non-physical level of love as well (*ibid.)*. The third type of love, *storge*, is familial love, such as the love of parents for children and vice versa (*ibid.)*. Although we may experience negative feelings toward our family, there is generally an underlying feeling of unconditional love for our family, or at least, some members of our family. I would also include the love of animals, especially pets, in this category because most of us feel a sense of unconditional love for our pets. The last type of love, *agape*, is universal love, such as the love between a divine presence and humans, and may be expressed through good will and benevolence (*ibid.*). While this may not be completely in keeping with the original Greek definition, I would include the love of nature and self-love in this category of universal love. Self-love is expressed through compassion, acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude for ourselves, as discussed in previous chapters. Universal love is an all-encompassing love and therefore includes the other three types of love within it. Universal love is the heart-opening love that allows us to love everyone, including ourselves, with non-judgment, compassion, acceptance, and forgiveness.

As with other topics we've explored in the paper, self-love is not always easy. As a matter of fact, many of us may find self-love the most challenging of all; yet, it is essential to our health and well-being. Robert Holden, Ph.D., author of *Loveability* (2013), wrote that "the quality of your relationship with yourself determines your relationship with everything else" (Holden, 2013 p. 45). Holden defines self-love as "a loving attitude from which positive actions arise that benefit you and others" (*ibid.,* p. 49). A basic fear for many of us is "I'm not loveable" or "I'm not enough" (*ibid*., p. 73). "Whenever you don't feel loveable it's because you are judging yourself" (*ibid.*, p. 55). Holden goes on to say that "the essence of who we are is always loveable" (*ibid.*, p. 122). Holden's statements coincide with many of the topics we have

discussed thus far. By practicing mindfulness and paying attention, without judgment, we treat ourselves with compassion, acceptance, and forgiveness, and begin the heart-opening journey toward self-love. Once we are able to open our hearts with non-judgment, compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude in the expression of self-love, we are able to expand this love to include others. This is the moment when we are able to give from our heart and experience the positive emotion of giving and receiving love.

One way to give and receive love and hearten the lives of others is through the experience of joy. Joy is an emotion that promotes physical and emotional well-being. Laughter is one way to experience joy. The physical and psychological effects are similar to the effects of gratitude. Dr. Lee Berk, of Loma Linda School of Medicine has spent years researching the positive effects of laughter. He has concluded that, "Laughter is the best medicine." He discussed his findings in three interviews with Sanjay Gupta of CNN and others, available on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt0QrmATtfk). Like gratitude, laughter decreases stress hormones, which improves our immune system. Furthermore, laughter increases our endorphin levels, especially when we do this for 30 minutes, three or four times week (*ibid.*). Endorphins are sometimes called the "happy" hormone and often associated with exercise. Dr. Berk performed a laughter study with heart attack patients who were divided into two groups, one that watched comedies for thirty minutes every day for one year and one that did not. After one year, only 8% of the group that practiced laughter regularly suffered from a second heart attack. 42% of the non-laughter group suffered a second heart attack (*ibid.)*. However, Berk noted that humor that is demeaning or derogatory, doesn't elicit the same positive benefits (*ibid.*). Some examples of humor that is supportive and positive include movies by Mel Brooks, such as *Young Frankenstein* (1974), movies by Monty Python, such as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

(1975)*, Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion* (1997), *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980), *Trading Places* (1983), Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), *Patch Adams* (1998), to name a few. Some television shows that are positively funny include *The Big Bang Theory* (2007 -), *Saturday Night Live* (1975 -), and *Seinfeld* (1989 – 1998). If none of these are appealing, search for other shows on the Internet. Although I haven't included an activity at the end of the chapter on laughter, an EFL activity might use one or more of these movies and television shows as an opportunity to explore the many health benefits of laughter and humor, while practicing speaking and listening.

Dr. Madan Kataria (2011), a physician and the founder of Laughter Yoga, has discovered additional benefits. Laughter Yoga combines laughter exercises with yoga breathing. Like other physical exercise, laughter yoga increases the net supply of oxygen to the body and the brain, which makes us feel more energetic. Furthermore, the body is not able to distinguish between real laughter and fake laughter, so our body reaps the same physical and emotional benefits. Equally as important as the physical health benefits, laughter yoga provides emotional and social benefits as well. Regular laughter contributes to a more positive attitude and outlook. Dr. Kataria concludes by saying that laughing with people creates positive social connections, which in turn, improve the quality of relationships with other people. This, in turn, reduces defensiveness and breaks down social and emotional barriers among people (*ibid.)*. When our defenses are lower, and we feel better, our hearts are more open to the positive aspects of life, including love.

The concept of universal love includes all of the other aspects of love and positive emotions within it. While practicing mindfulness and non-judgment, and remembering the importance of compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude, we are paving the way for a happier, more joyful life for ourselves and other people. Deepak Chopra said, "Love is what we

are in our essence, and the more we feel in our hearts, the more it will be brought to us" (2014). With that in our minds and our hearts, let's all think about opportunities to change our negative emotions into the positive emotions we truly want to embrace and make our lives and the lives of all people, more loving, more peaceful and more joyful.

"All you need is love" (Lennon-McCartney, 1967).

Hearten Activity

The loving-kindness meditation is suitable for all language learning levels, although more vocabulary preparation may be needed with beginning language learners. These are suggested activities and may be modified for the needs of your students. This meditation activity may follow the Pre, During, and Post (PDP) format. The PDP format is a commonly used format for listening activities. The Pre phase introduces students to the topic, including new vocabulary and introductory discussion of the topic. The During phase includes the actual listening portion. This may include listening to the recording more than once, assigning different tasks each time. In the Loving-Kindness Meditation, the recording will only be played once. The Post phase is the opportunity to reflect on the activity, including the exploration of next steps.

This meditation is based on a combination of the loving-kindness meditation of Sharon Salzberg, author of *Lovingkindness* (1995) and Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path With Heart* (1993). Sharon Salzberg has a guided loving-kindness mediation on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3uLqt69VyI.

Goals:

1. Language: introduce new vocabulary.
2. Language skill: practice listening and speaking.
3. Affective: practice meditation, greater awareness, reflect on loving-kindness.

Instructions:

Pre-Phase

1. Begin by writing the word “loving-kindness” on the board. Ask students what the word means. What feelings do they associate with this concept?

2. Review the definitions of mindfulness and meditation. Make sure to include the concepts of paying attention, being compassionate, and being accepting. Ask students what they remember about the previous meditation activity, particularly posture and breath.
3. Discuss any other vocabulary that may be needed such as benefactor, interconnectedness.
4. In pairs, ask students to think about and discuss the following four phrases.
    a. May I be filled with loving-kindness.
    b. May I be happy.
    c. May I be healthy.
    d. May I be peaceful.
5. Tell them that these four phrases will be used in this meditation and that this is a meditation on loving-kindness.

During Phase

I have included a recording of the meditation as well

(http://vocaroo.com/i/s1eIxx4piew1).

[Begin meditation]

This meditation focuses on loving-kindness. We will pay attention to opening our hearts so that we may create a deeper sense of personal well-being and love for ourselves and for all beings.

Find a comfortable position. Keep your back straight and shoulders broad. Place your hands in your lap or on your thighs, palms facing up, in a relaxed position. Gently close your eyes. Notice any tension you may feel in your body. Take three slow breaths. As you exhale, release any tension you may be feeling in your body. And relax.

We begin by feeling loving-kindness toward ourselves. Think of one thing you like about yourself, a particular quality, some part of yourself that you have respect for, or something good that you've done. Perhaps it's a time that you've been generous, or you've been careful, or you've been honest, anything that you can think of.

If you can't think of anything that you've done or that you like about yourself, simply rest your mind and think about your wish to be happy. You, like all beings, simply want to be happy.

As you continue with this meditation, remember to take slow deep breaths, inhale and exhale.

The traditional phrases used in the loving-kindness meditation are:

May I be filled with loving-kindness.
May I be happy.
May I be healthy.
May I be peaceful.

Use these phrases or whatever phrases are most meaningful to you.
Let each phrase emerge from your heart and simply connect with it without trying to force any special feeling or make anything special happen.

May I be filled with loving-kindness.
May I be happy.
May I be healthy.
May I be peaceful.

Develop a rhythm that feels good to you. Take your time. Give yourself space. Let the phrases emerge naturally while you continue taking slow deep breaths.

The next expansion of our loving-kindness includes someone who has been good to us, helped us, taken care of us, been generous to us….. someone who is inspiring to us and has taught us to be loving and compassionate. This person is known as the benefactor in the traditional loving-kindness meditation.

If someone comes to mind, try to visualize them by seeing an image of them in your mind or maybe say their name silently to yourself. Get a feeling for them as though they were here in front of you.

Remember the good that they've done for you and their good qualities. Begin offering them loving-kindness through the phrases we mentioned earlier.

May you be filled with loving-kindness.
May you be happy.
May you be healthy.

May you be peaceful.

If there is no one who comes to mind as a benefactor, simply continue with yourself, to focus on yourself and give the feeling of loving-kindness to yourself while we remember to take slow deep breaths.

We further open our hearts to include a friend. If you think of a friend, visualize them by seeing an image of them in your mind or saying their name silently to yourself.
Bring them here and include them in this meditation of friendship and loving-kindness.
Try to wish for them just what you have wished for yourself. Remember that this person also just wants to be happy.

May you be filled with loving-kindness.
May you be happy.
May you be healthy.
May you be peaceful.

And we continue to take slow deep breaths.

We now expand our circle of loving-kindness to include all people everywhere. We think about and appreciate the interconnectedness of all life. We send this message of universal loving-kindness to all life.

May all beings be filled with loving-kindness.
May all beings be happy.
May all beings be healthy.
May all beings be peaceful.

And we continue to take slow deep breaths, inhale and exhale.

When you're ready, gently open your eyes as we continue to be open to the power of loving-kindness throughout the day.

[End meditation]

Post Phase

The Post phase is the opportunity for reflection. Discussion may include any combination of writing, reading, speaking, and listening individually, in pairs, small groups, or with the whole class. The questions on the following page may help facilitate the discussion.

1. This is an opportunity to for students to reflect on this meditation. Ask them a few questions about this experience. Here are some suggestions.
    a. What did you like about this meditation?
    b. What was challenging?
    c. Did you experience any thoughts of discomfort?
    d. How was this meditation different from the breath meditation or the self-compassion meditation?
    e. Do you feel differently after this meditation? Why or why not?
    f. Do you feel more loving-kindness toward yourself? Toward others? Why or why not?
2. If you are not in a circle, ask your students to stand or sit in a circle.
    a. Go around the circle and ask students to share one thing that they discovered that they like about themselves or someone they know.
    b. Close by asking how they are feeling at this moment.

End Lesson: Loving-kindness Meditation

Closing activity:

If it feels appropriate, it might be nice to end the class with a song that contributes to feelings of loving-kindness like Stevie Wonder's *I Just Called To Say I Love You* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwOU3bnuU0k) and allow students to sing and dance and spread the feeling of loving-kindness and add some good cheer.

Chapter Seven: Engage

"Interconnectedness is a fundamental principle of nature" (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 208).

Now that we have explored many positive emotions, it is time to integrate them into all aspects of our lives, including our relationships with others and with nature, and realize the depth and breadth of our interconnectedness. To "engage" means to be involved or participate. Participation and mindfulness are closely related. When we participate in any activity with mindfulness, we begin to experience our connection with ourselves, our surroundings, and other people on a deeper level. According to Dr. Daniel Siegel, human beings are "equipped with a mammalian limbic region of the brain" (Siegel, 2011, p. 17). The limbic area of the brain is the reason that humans and other mammals form emotional attachments with one another (*ibid.*). Because of this, human beings are "hardwired to connect with one another" (*ibid.*). Forming connections with others, therefore, is an integral part of our existence. When we begin to feel self-love and other positive emotions, we are able to extend these emotions to others and feel a true connection with other people. We are then able to begin to expand those connections and experience the interconnectedness of all things. Realizing this sense of interconnectedness reduces our feelings of separateness and aloneness, and increases our feelings of well-being and happiness (*ibid.*, p. 259). Our sense of interconnectedness is augmented as our awareness expands. Expanded awareness results from engaging in mindfulness and acts of kindness. Engaging in mindfulness and acts of kindness promote feelings of happiness and well-being. The EFL classroom is a wonderful microcosm to explore our interconnectedness. Activities to enhance this exploration are included.

Awareness of our interconnectedness is expressed through mindfulness and acts of kindness. As previously discussed, mindfulness is paying attention in the present moment,

without judgment and with acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). As with all experiences, engaging in the practice of mindfulness is an essential step toward experiencing our interconnectedness. When we interact with non-judgment and acceptance, we are opening the door to experience all interactions with a greater sense of well-being and happiness. Acts of kindness include all acts that promote a sense of well-being in ourselves, other people, and our environment. Acts of kindness include topics previously discussed such as compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude. Acts of generosity also contribute to our greater sense of happiness, well-being and interconnectedness.

Practicing random acts of kindness and generosity positively affect our level of happiness. In a study conducted by Sonja Lyubomirski, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at University of California, Riverside et al. conducted research on the "factors that determine our level of happiness" (http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/happiness_for_a_lifetime). They found that 10% of our happiness is based on life circumstances and 50% is based on our genetic inclination for happiness. The other 40% is based on our "behavior and daily activities" (*ibid.*). If 40% of our level of happiness is based on our behavior, then Lyubomirski hypothesized that we have the ability to consciously affect our level of happiness.

> In one of these studies, we asked college students to do five acts of kindness per week over a period of six weeks. Each week, we asked one group of students to do all five of their acts of kindness in one day; another group of students could spread out their acts of kindness over the entire week. And a third group of students (a control group) didn't do anything at all (*ibid.*).

This study found that the students who performed five acts of kindness in a single day exhibited the greatest boost to their personal happiness (*ibid.*). One reason for this may be that we feel

better about ourselves when we consider ourselves to be kind and generous (*ibid.*). This may promote a pattern of kindness and generosity that permeates other interpersonal interactions as well, thereby expanding the circle of kindness. When we feel better about ourselves, we treat others with more kindness, compassion, acceptance, etc. They, in turn, may begin to model this behavior with others, and so on, and so on.

There have been other studies that demonstrate the positive effects of generosity on our health and well-being. "In a 2006 study, Jorge Moll and colleagues at the National Institute of Health found that when people give to charities, it activates regions of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection, and trust, creating a 'warm glow' effect. Scientists discovered that altruistic behavior releases endorphins in the brain, producing the positive feeling known as the 'helper's high'" (Moll, 2006, p. 15623). The "helper's high" is that heightened sense of well-being we feel after helping another person or cause. The "helper's high" also promotes the perpetuation of generosity; we want to continue to find opportunities to experience feeling good by being generous.

As with other positive emotions, giving to others has positive effects on our health. Doug Oman, University of California at Berkeley, discovered that elderly people who volunteered for "two or more organizations, were 44% less likely to die over a five-year period than those who didn't volunteer" (Oman, 1999, p. 301). Being generous has been shown to reduce stress as well (Marsh & Suttie, 2010, http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/5_ways_giving_is_good_for_you). "In a 2006 study by Rachel Piferi of Johns Hopkins University and Kathleen Lawler of the University of Tennessee, people who provided social support to others had lower blood pressure than participants who didn't, suggesting a direct physiological benefit to those who give of

themselves" (*ibid*.). Stephen Post, Professor of Medicine at University of New York at Stony Brook, concluded that giving to others also promotes a greater sense of cooperation and connectedness (Post, 2005, p. 70). The study of positive psychology has determined that feeling connected to something beyond our "personal self" makes us feel better about ourselves (Siegel, 2011, p. 259). As discussed previously, positive social interactions also contribute to our physical and emotional health. Being kind and generous encourages us to perceive other people more positively (Marsh and Suttie, 2010). This, in turn, contributes to our sense of well-being because we are focusing on positive aspects, rather than negative aspects of our interpersonal connections. In addition, when we realize that our acts of generosity help others, we are more apt to perpetuate the practice. Not surprisingly, giving also "evokes gratitude" (Marsh and Suttie, 2010). The act of giving and receiving promotes feelings of gratitude in both the giver and the recipient (*ibid.*) because it demonstrates our connection with others. Many of the benefits of gratitude have been discussed in Chapter Five, particularly as it relates to physical health, psychological well-being, and interpersonal relationships.

Any discussion of our interconnectedness must also include our interconnectedness with our ecosystem. Daniel Goleman, Ph.D., has applied his theories of social and emotional intelligence to include ecological intelligence (Goleman et al., 2013, http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_ways_to_develop_ecoliteracy). "While social and emotional intelligence extend students' abilities to see from another's perspective, empathize, and show concern, ecological intelligence applies these capacities to an understanding of natural systems and melds cognitive skills with empathy for all of life" (*ibid.*). Goleman et al. have developed an "ecoliteracy" program to raise awareness of our interconnectedness and interdependence through education. "Ecoliteracy" integrates emotional,

social, and ecological intelligence into educational practices. When children begin to feel a greater connection with our ecosystem, they begin to understand the intricacy of our web of interconnectedness. Goleman et al. discuss several ways to cultivate our "ecoliteracy" in the classroom and beyond (*ibid.*). The first involves expanding our feeling of compassion to include our natural environment. One way to do this is to grow plants or vegetables in the classroom (*ibid.*). In this way, students gain an appreciation for the effort involved in sustaining plant life. The second way involves realizing that, in order for our planet to thrive, we must work together as a community. By studying the behavior of plants and animals, students begin to understand the interconnectedness of people and communities as well (*ibid.*). Using the local community as a starting point for this exploration provides a framework that demonstrates immediacy and relevance to student. The third way is to "make the invisible visible" (*ibid.*). The Internet provides countless opportunities for students to see areas of the world that they might not normally see. This helps students widen their circle of compassion to include more people, places, flora, and fauna (*ibid.*). The more students connect with other people and ecosystems, the more they understand the depth and breadth of our interconnectedness. The last way is to view nature as our teacher *(ibid.*). Nature demonstrates the "complex" interdependency of all organisms. Goleman et al. recommend studying the local ecosystem as a starting point for understanding our interconnectedness (*ibid.*). The local ecosystem provides a framework that is immediately accessible to students. While Goleman's focus is not specifically on personal well-being, based on the previous discussion of acts of kindness and generosity, it would seem logical that practicing compassion toward our ecosystem and our community also result in a greater sense of personal well-being.

We have discussed how helping others and feeling connected to others positively affects our emotional and physical health and well-being. In his book, *Mindsight* (2012), Daniel Siegel discusses the "Triangle of Well-Being" that integrates "relationships, mind, and brain" to form this sense of well-being (Siegel, 2011, p. 267).

> The *Triangle of Well-Being* reveals three aspects of our lives. *Relationships, Mind,* and *Brain* form three mutually influencing points of the *Triangle of Well-Being*. *Relationships* are how energy and information is shared as we connect and communicate with one another. *Brain* refers to the physical mechanism through which this energy and information flows. *Mind* is a process that regulates the flow of energy and information. Rather than dividing our lives into three separate parts, the Triangle actually represents three dimensions of one system of energy and information flow (Siegel, 2011, p. 267).

When our mind, brain, and relationships are integrated and working together, "well-being" ensues (*ibid.*). For example, the type of " integration" that leads to well-being might occur as a result of an interaction with a loved one. When are able to connect with that loved one in a way that feels positive to both ourselves and the other person, we experience a sense of well-being. These are moments when our thoughts, actions, and relationships work together and "flow", resulting in a greater sense of well-being.

Practicing mindfulness and performing acts of kindness for others are opportunities to perpetuate these moments of well-being and integrate them into our daily lives. As mentioned earlier, the limbic area of the brain "hardwires" humans to connect with others (Siegel, 2011, p. 17). Therefore, it seems logical that when we experience greater awareness and mindfulness of our interconnectedness, we experience a greater sense of well-being. The Cycle of Well-Being on the following page illustrates the connections that lead to a greater sense of well-being. The

Cycle of Well-Being results from heightened awareness as we engage in positive actions and feelings of connection. In the Cycle of Well-Being, these elements are interconnected and interrelated. Awareness is present and part of everything we experience. Awareness is our state of *being*. Awareness raises the quality of our actions and increases the realization of the intricacies of our interconnectedness. Actions, such as mindfulness and acts of kindness, are what we *do* to promote interconnectedness and raise our level of awareness. Interconnectedness becomes more apparent, i.e. *seen*, as a result of our actions and heightened awareness. Awareness, actions and interconnectedness work together to promote feelings of happiness and well-being. Figure 2 illustrates this interrelated cycle of well-being.

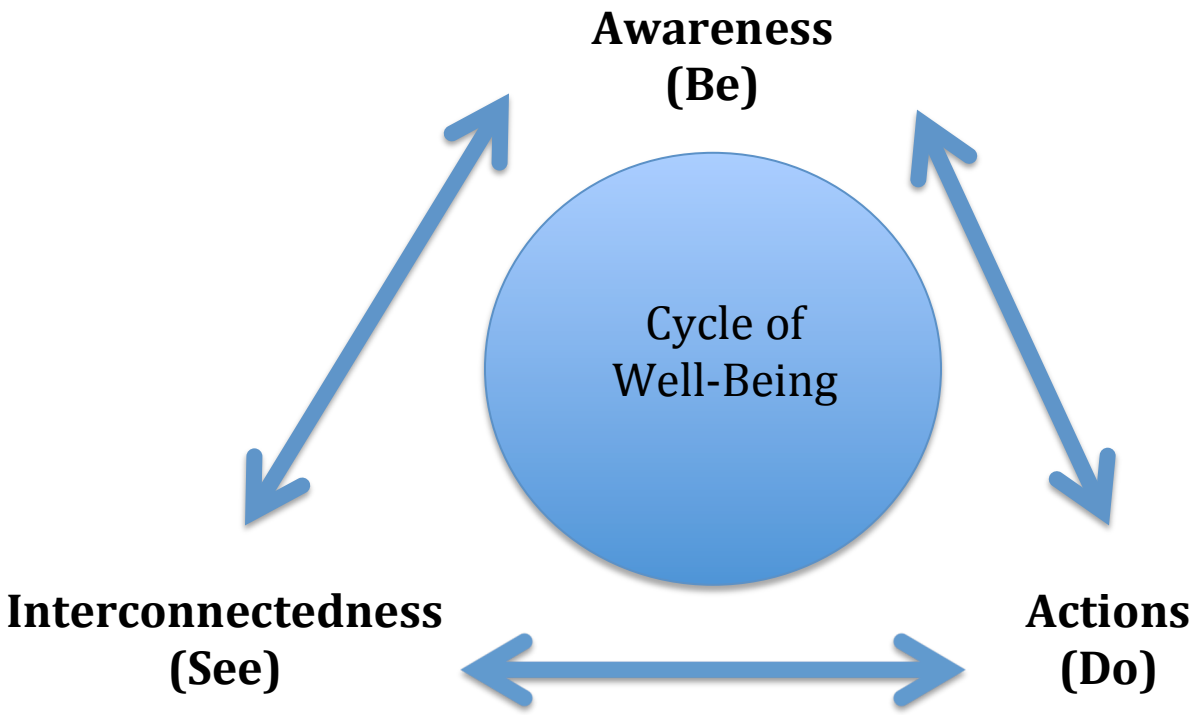

Figure 2. Cycle of Well-Being by Maxine Swisa

All feelings, actions, and sensations that promote well-being in ourselves and others contribute to both our individual and our collective sense of well-being and interconnectedness. Feeling compassion for others connects us to one another because we are mindful of the universal reality that we all want to alleviate our suffering and experience more joy in our lives. Accepting each situation as it is connects us to one another because we interact with greater ease, greater mindfulness, and greater non-judgment. Forgiveness connects us to one another because, as we let go of negative emotions, we are able to break down barriers and allow for more meaningful interpersonal relationships. Gratitude connects us to one another because, as we appreciate our lives more, we are able to share that appreciation with others. Generosity connects us to one another because when we give of ourselves, we experience the positive effects of that generosity on our lives and the lives of others. These are all elements of universal love. When we engage in these acts of kindness with love, we expand the circle of our interconnectedness, and continue the journey toward greater health, well-being, happiness, and wholeness for ourselves, all living beings, and the planet.

Engage Activities

This activity has three parts: an opening icebreaker, the main activity, and a closing, reflective activity. All three lessons are suitable for all English language levels. All three lessons revolve around experiencing our interconnectedness. The lessons may be done separately, if time is limited. As with all activities, these are suggestions. Feel free to modify them according to your students' needs.

Goals:

1. Language: learn new vocabulary.
2. Language skill: practice listening and speaking.
3. Affective: understand our interconnectedness with each other and the natural world.

Lesson One: Human Knot

This activity is an icebreaker. After you give the instructions, it is up to the participants to untwist the knot through communication, cooperation, and teamwork. Students need to stand very close to each other, so it is important that participants feel comfortable with this. If any students are not comfortable holding hands and touching, or they have any disabilities that make participating difficult, there are two additional roles that may be included. The first is that of instructor. The instructor tells the participants what to try when the participants are not sure what to do. It is probably best to have only one instructor. The second is that of observer. There may be as many observers as needed. The observers watch the process and discuss their observations at the end.

1. If there are any observers, provide them with some items to notice. You might want to hand these questions out so that they can write down some key thoughts. Some sample questions might be:
    a. Pay attention to the language that people are using. Are they communicating in English or their native language?
    b. Is one person giving instructions or are multiple people giving instructions?
    c. What happens when they don't know what to do?
    d. Was the mood of the group cooperative?
    e. Were they having fun?
    f. Did they seem to be frustrated?
    g. Any overall observations about the process. Did it go smoothly? What was challenging?
2. Ask the remaining students to stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. The optimal number of participants in one circle is 8 to 12. If the class has 16 or more participants, it may be helpful to create two circles. If there are two circles, make sure there is plenty of space for both circles.
3. Remind students that they need to communicate in English only. (It might be helpful to write that on the board as well.)
4. Ask students to shake and hold hands with someone in the circle who isn't standing next to them. Tell them to continue to hold on to that hand. DON'T LET GO.
5. Ask participants to shake hands with a different person, using their other hand, and continue holding on to that hand with someone who isn't standing next to them. Tell them to continue to hold on to that hand as well. DON'T LET GO.

6. Remind participants that they need to keep holding on to each other's hands. DON'T LET GO.
7. Now, let them know that the goal is to unravel themselves and end up in a circle.
8. To achieve this goal, participants may need to step over, under, and around arms, legs, and bodies.
9. Let students solve this puzzle on their own. If there is an instructor for the activity, remind them that they can help.
10. This is a very participatory activity.
11. Sometimes participants may want to try a second time if they had difficulties. If time permits, feel free to let them try again.
12. When they are done, ask them to reflect on the activity.
    a. First, ask the observers to share what they noticed.
    b. What did they like about the activity?
    c. What was important during the activity?
    d. Did they have to work together?
    e. What did this activity demonstrate about working together?
    f. What did they learn?

End Lesson One

Lesson Two: The Interconnectedness of Everything

This activity demonstrates the depth and breadth of our interconnectedness, and how we experience that in our daily lives.

Instructions:

1. Write the word “interconnectedness” on the board.
2. Ask students to talk to their neighbor about what this means.
3. Discuss as a class.
4. Review the meanings of mindfulness and non-judgment with the class.
5. Write the word “brainstorm” on the board.
6. Ask students to talk to their neighbor about what this word means.
7. Discuss as a class. Remind participants that brainstorming involves a free flow of ideas, with no judgment and no censoring. Everything is acceptable.
8. Divide the class into small groups of 4 or 5.
9. Give each group a different topic to explore. Write a different topic on each index card. Hand one index card to each group. Here are a few examples of topics:
    a. T-shirt
    b. Bicycle
    c. Apple
    d. Book
    e. Computer
    f. Table
10. Remind students to be mindful during the activity.

11. Ask each group to brainstorm and think about every person, place, object, animal, plant, etc. that has been involved in getting that item to you.
12. Tell them to write their ideas on a large sheet of paper or newsprint.
13. After a few minutes of brainstorming, have them work together to create a visual (like a diagram or collage) that depicts all the people, places, objects, etc. that were involved in getting that item to you.
14. Depending on time, you might have each group present their findings to the rest of the class. If time is short, students can travel as a group and view each other's work.
15. After students have had a chance to view each other's work, have them sit in a circle for the closing reflection.
    a. Ask students to share something that they noticed during this activity. This could be a thought, feeling, interaction, etc.
    b. Ask students if it was difficult to think of who and what might have been involved in getting that item to them.
    c. Ask students, "How many people, things, etc. were involved in getting that item to you?"
    d. Ask students to discuss what this activity demonstrates about our interconnectedness.
    e. Ask students how that makes them feel.
    f. Close by going around the circle and have each participant share something they learned from this activity.

End Lesson Two: The Interconnectedness of Everything

Lesson Three: The Interconnectedness of our Class

This is a nice closing activity. It can be used to conclude this unit on interconnectedness, or it can also be used as a closing activity at the end of a semester, or any time there is the need for closure that promotes a sense of connection.

1. Bring a ball of yarn or string to class.
2. Have students stand in a circle.
3. Take the end of the yarn and hold on to it.
4. Roll the ball of yarn across the floor and have another participant hold on to the yarn so that the strand of yarn feels slightly taut between you and that participant.
5. Have the student roll the ball of yarn to another participant and make sure that the strand of yarn feels slightly taut between those two participants.
6. Continue until all of the participants are holding on to the yarn.
7. Remind participants to continue to hold on to the yarn.
8. Have all the participants lightly pull on the yarn and ask them what they notice.
9. Ask students what they think this yarn represents.
10. Ask students to share a way that they feel connected to other members of the class.
11. Ask each participant to share something they are grateful for.

End Lesson Three: The Interconnectedness of our Class

Understand

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood" (Covey, 1989, p. 237)

We have discussed the value of mindfulness, non-judgment, acceptance, gratitude, and generosity. There is one additional ingredient that is necessary for positive interpersonal relationships. That ingredient is understanding. Understanding is another lens through which we experience connections with people. There are two aspects of understanding that will be discussed in this chapter. The first involves direct, individual understanding, i.e. understanding that happens when we are interacting with another person in a dialogue. The second involves cultural understanding, i.e. understanding that happens when we are seeking to understand how culture influences our values and customs. The use of language is essential in order to communicate effectively with the goal to understand in both of these instances. Listening with mindfulness and non-judgment is always very important, especially when interacting with one other person in a dialogue. Active listening techniques help facilitate this process. Some active listening guidelines and techniques are included in this chapter as well. Two EFL activities are included in this chapter; the first activity focuses on individual understanding, using active listening techniques, and the other focuses on cultural understanding.

Listening is an important skill when communicating with another person in order to understand their point of view. Listening to understand is a skill that needs to be learned and practiced in order to develop and improve (Curran, 1978, p. 65). In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective* People (1989), Stephen Covey discusses "empathic listening" and the four "developmental stages" associated with it (Covey, 1989, p. 248). The first stage is to listen to the speaker and to "mimic" back what the listener hears (*ibid*., p. 248). In this stage, the listener repeats back what the speaker said, more or less verbatim. In the second stage, the listener

"rephrases" what the speaker said (*ibid*., p. 249). Covey refers to these first two levels as focused solely on the verbal level of communication (*ibid.*). In the third stage, the listener begins to listen for the "feeling" that the speaker is conveying (*ibid.*). The fourth stage is where the listener is able to both rephrase and reflect back the feeling of the speaker. The fourth stage of empathic listening is where the listener is able to "understand their paradigm…. understand how they feel" (Covey, 1989, p.240). This is a moment when the listener is able to listen and accurately convey the speaker's intention, including their emotions, without interjecting their own personal opinions or values. This is a moment when the speaker feels understood.

Like Covey, Charles A. Curran views listening for understanding as a skill that develops with time and experience. In Curran's book, *Understanding: An Essential Ingredient in Human Belonging* (1986), Curran discusses the type of communication necessary to experience understanding. He focuses on the importance of listening with non-judgment and acceptance on the listener's part so that the speaker feels safe to explore their thoughts and actions (*ibid.,* p.52). The "sole concern" of the listener is responding accurately to the truth of the speaker's "inner world, as [the speaker] sees it" (*ibid.*, p. 54) without interjecting their own personal values (*ibid.,* p. 59). When this is done in a manner that is helpful to the speaker, the speaker feels understood. This sense of being understood is what might be referred to as an "ah-ha" moment, a moment of clarity and greater awareness for the speaker, resulting in a changed "inner view" for that individual (*ibid.,* p. 53). This may be a "transformational" moment for the speaker (Covey, 1989, p. 251) because they feel heard, acknowledged, and accepted for whom they are.

There is certain language when using empathic listening techniques that promotes greater understanding. These empathic listening techniques are commonly referred to as active listening techniques. Active listening involves focused listening while practicing mindfulness, non-

judgment and empathy. Active listening uses statements like, “What I hear you saying…” This is a way for the listener to rephrase what the speaker said to make sure that the listener understood the speaker. “Can you explain …. a little more?” is a way for the listener to ask for clarification. In general, asking questions for clarification lets the speaker know that the listener is trying to understand. “That sounds challenging” (replace with any adjective that describes feelings and emotions) is a way for the listener to demonstrate empathy. By asking questions like these and demonstrating empathy, the listener serves as a mirror for the speaker by reflecting back what the listener hears. The listener is not trying to solve the speaker’s problem or give advice (Curran, 1986, p. 50); the listener is trying to help the speaker gain greater insight and awareness into themselves and their situation. Another important aspect of appropriate language when listening to understand is to keep the topic focused on the speaker. In his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective* People (1989), Stephen Covey mentions that even though we spend a great deal of our time communicating with other people, only 10% of that communication is verbal (Covey, 1989, p. 241). This means that verbal communication is only a small part of what we communicate when interacting with someone. The majority of our communication is based on nonverbal language, such as body language. Consequently, focused attention on the speaker is important. This includes maintaining eye contact and not doing other things while listening to the speaker. It also means that it is extremely important that we make sure that our verbal communication is as meaningful as possible. Using appropriate language when actively listening facilitates the process.

Paying attention to language usage is also important when exploring cultural understanding. In his book, *Teaching Culture* (2001), Patrick Moran defines culture as “the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with

a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts" (*ibid.*, p. 24). An important word in this definition is "shared." Culture is based on the ways that these "shared" connections are carried out among people. "Products" are items that are produced such as tools, clothing, and buildings. Products also include educational systems, politics, and religion (*ibid.*, p. 25). "Practices" consist of language, both verbal and nonverbal, and other forms of communication. (*ibid.*). "Perspectives" are the "worldview," including beliefs and values (*ibid.*). "Social contexts" include groups or "communities" like "gender, race, socioeconomic class" (*ibid.*). Lastly, "Persons" are the individuals that "embody" the culture (*ibid.*). Language is an important component of each of these. Moran states that "language is a product of the culture" (Moran, 2001, p. 35). Every culture uses words, phrases, and idioms in unique ways that portray various aspects of their culture. When we look more closely at language usage, we learn more about the culture. Moran mentions the French use of "tu" and "vous" to "establish roles and maintain relationships" (*ibid.*, p. 35). The United States places importance on punctuality and success that is expressed through idioms such as "the early bird catches the worm."

Once we have identified the components of culture, we are able to explore elements that lead to greater cultural understanding. For the SIT Intercultural Communication for Language Teachers class in April 2014, I developed a three-week curriculum exploring the topic of cultural understanding. I simplified Moran's framework and reduced his five components of culture: products, practices, perspectives, communities, and people, to three components: customs, communities, and communication. I taught the curriculum to a group of university students from Costa Rica. The students were divided into three groups and discussed each component. Some customs that they included were religious holidays, food, family traditions, and sports events.

Communities included religious groups, educational groups, sports groups, and social groups. The communication component included methods of communication such as the Internet, mobile phones, etc. These three concepts became the basis for the cultural inquiry that compared similarities and differences across cultures. The students kept a daily journal where they documented three similarities and three differences between their home culture and the American culture. Students participated in other activities, such as creating a collage that documented cultural similarities and differences. The use of language was an important part of this inquiry. We discussed English idioms and compared them to idioms in their native language. Students observed and reflected using all four skills. Through this process, students learned about themselves, their culture, and American culture. At the end of the three weeks, students analyzed the data and answered the following question: "What do we learn by examining cultural similarities and differences?" The students' response to that question was, "we learn open-mindedness, respect, and understanding." My personal hope is that understanding cultural similarities and differences leads to greater tolerance, and hopefully, one day, peace in the world.

Using language as the vehicle for cultural and interpersonal exploration requires mindfulness. Mindfulness and understanding have many common qualities. As with mindfulness, understanding is a skill that improves with practice. As with mindfulness, greater awareness is a result of greater understanding. Like mindfulness, practicing non-judgment is an important part of understanding. When we communicate with non-judgment, we open the door for greater acceptance. Active listening skills are beneficial as part of this process. When a person feels understood and doesn't feel judged, "he comes into a more harmonious relationship with himself through greater self-acceptance" (Curran, 1986, p. 60). Once a person feels greater self-acceptance, s/he is able to widen the circle of acceptance to include others. Jack Kornfield

elaborates by saying, “In deep self-acceptance grows a compassionate understanding” (Kornfield, 1993, p. 312). When we create opportunities to practice greater acceptance and compassionate understanding, both culturally and interpersonally, we pave the way toward a more cooperative, peaceful existence.

“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved through understanding”

(Albert Einstein, 1930).

Understand Activities

There are two lessons included. The first lesson is suitable for intermediate English language level and above. The second lesson is suitable for all English language levels. The first lesson is to practice "empathic listening" (Covey, 1989, p. 248). The second lesson explores cultural understanding. The lessons may be done separately. As with all activities, these are suggestions. Feel free to modify them according to your students' needs.

Goals:

1. Language: learn new vocabulary.
2. Language skill: practice listening and speaking.
3. Affective: gain greater interpersonal and cultural understanding.

Lesson One: Interpersonal Understanding

This is a lesson that focuses on communication especially through speaking and listening.

1. Introduce key vocabulary and concepts such as understanding, active listening, acceptance, non-judgment, rephrasing, and empathy.
2. Ask students what they know about active listening. As discussed on pages 81 – 82 of this paper, remind them of some of the important concepts of active listening such as reflecting the speaker's ideas back to the speaker. The listener is not trying to solve the speaker's problem or give advice; they are trying to help the speaker gain greater insight and awareness into themselves and their situation. What statement might they use or questions might they ask that demonstrate active listening? Some examples are on page 82 of this paper.

a. "What I hear you saying….."

b. "Can you explain … a little more?"

c. "That sounds……" (fill in the blank with an emotion)

3. Divide the class into groups of three.
4. Tell students that each person will have an opportunity to be a speaker, a listener, and an observer.
5. Give students a moment to think of a challenging situation that they are currently experiencing or have recently experienced. Let them know that they will be sharing this situation with their group so it is important that they choose something that they are comfortable sharing.
6. Ask each group to decide who would like to speak about their situation.
7. Then ask them to decide would like to listen. Remind the listener that this time is for the speaker. Remind them to practice active listening. Remind them that it is important to listen with non-judgment, ask for clarification, rephrase and practice empathy.
8. The third person will be the observer. The observer's role is to pay attention to the dialogue. Is the listener practicing mindfulness and non-judgment? Is the listener rephrasing and showing empathy? Does the speaker feel understood? What does the observer notice about non-verbal cues like body language, energy level and intonation?
9. After 10 – 15 minutes, the three participants will spend a few minutes sharing what it was like for each of them. The speaker shares first, the listener shares second, and the observer shares last.

   a. For the speaker: What did it feel like to talk about the situation? Did the speaker feel understood?
   b. For the listener: What did it feel like to listen?
   c. For the observer: What did you observe? Refer to the questions in number 8.
   d. What were some of the challenges for each person?

10. Repeat steps 6 through 9 until each participant has had an opportunity to practice all three roles.
11. When each member has spoken, listened, and observed, ask them to share with each other a few highlights.
12. For a closing reflection bring the class together in a circle.
    a. Ask students to share anything that was special about this activity.
    b. Ask them to share how they might use this in their daily lives.
    c. If the speaker felt understood, ask how it felt to be understood.
    d. Ask them why it is important to feel understood.
    e. Ask them to share something they learned.

End Interpersonal Understanding Lesson

Lesson Two: Cultural Collage

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to explore cultural similarities and differences using visual aids as a tool. They will present their collage to the rest of the class when everyone is finished. This lesson works particularly in a multi-cultural class and/or a class that is taking place away from the students' home country.

1. Write the word “culture” on the board and ask students what the word means. Include words like “customs”, “communities”, and “communication” in the definition.
2. Create a mind map with the students documenting various aspects of culture. (A mind map is a visual representation of concepts and how they relate to a central idea.) This might include subgroups and specific examples of the three concepts mentioned in #1.
3. Ask students to discuss, in small groups, aspects of their culture that are important to them.
4. Ask students to discuss, in the same small groups, aspects of their host culture that they have noticed. Note: If this class takes place in the students’ home country, replace “host culture” with American culture or another culture.
5. Put out materials for a collage, such as construction paper, scissors, glue, magazines, markers, etc.
6. Ask students to divide the paper in half.
7. Let them know that they are going to make a collage.
8. Explain that one half of the collage will depict the similarities that they observed, both culturally and personally. The other half will depict differences that they observed, both culturally and personally. Encourage participants to include personal observations as well as cultural observations.
9. Let students know that they will be sharing their collages with the rest of the class. Note: It is nice to play music in English in the background while students work. Feel free to let students make requests. YouTube.com is a wonderful resource for this.
10. When students are done, sit in a circle and ask students to share their collages.

11. Conclude this lesson with a closing reflection.
    a. What did you learn about culture?
    b. What did you learn about each other?
    c. Is it helpful to explore cultural similarities and differences? Why or why not?

End Cultural Collage Lesson

Conclusion

"Plant the seeds of peace, joy, and understanding in yourself in order to facilitate the work of transformation in the depths of your consciousness" (Hanh, 1991. p. 128).

BREATHE to Understand is a guide for living a happier, more mindful life. The principles discussed: mindfulness, non-judgment, compassion, acceptance, gratitude, generosity, love, joy, and understanding, are applicable both inside and outside the classroom. It is my hope that the practice of these principles leads to a more integrated and holistic approach to teaching and to life. When we bring these practices into our classroom, our students feel safe to explore and learn without judgment, blame, or criticism. This is true when we apply these principles to our personal lives as well. When everything we do and every person we encounter is experienced through the lens of non-judgment and mindful attention, we are on a path to greater well-being and inner peace.

Breath is the starting point to mindfulness. When we remember to breathe consciously, we become aware of our body. When we become aware of our body, we begin to pay attention. When we pay attention, without judgment, we are practicing mindfulness. Meditation is a good place to begin the practice of mindfulness. It provides the time and space for quiet, observant reflection. With time, we are able to extend those moments of mindfulness beyond meditation into our daily lives. As we practice mindfulness more and more, we begin to notice the moments when we are not being mindful and those moments of judgment become fewer and fewer.

Reflection is part of the process that promotes greater mindfulness and awareness. Reflection is a process of observation. When we observe our thoughts, actions, sensations, and feelings with mindfulness and non-judgment, we become aware of the underlying reasons for

those thoughts, actions, sensations and feelings. This, in turn, leads us on the path toward continual growth and improvement.

Empathy is our emotional connection to others. Compassion is working with these connections in order to help others. Compassion is the foundation for integrating acts of kindness into our lives and the lives of others. Once we realize that all human beings experience suffering and all human beings want to be happy, we have uncovered the common bond that connects all of us to each other. The ultimate goal of our existence, then, is to alleviate suffering for ourselves and others, and to contribute to our well-being and the well-being of others. Mindfulness and reflection are important components here as well. As we pay attention without judgment and observe suffering, we begin to explore ways to diminish that suffering and increase well-being.

Acceptance also requires the practice of mindfulness and non-judgment. In addition, it requires the absence of blame and criticism. "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change" (Niebuhr, 1987, p. 251). When we are able to accept situations as they are, and not as we wish them to be, free from judgment, we are able to feel more peaceful. When we feel more peaceful, we are able to release feelings of negativity. This, ultimately, "allows us to experience the joyful gift of forgiveness" (p. 38).

Thankfulness is another type of gift; it is a gift to ourselves and to the recipient. When we practice gratitude regularly in our lives, our physical, emotional, and social well-being improve. We *feel* better about ourselves when we remember to be grateful. Observing the natural world is a good place to start to look for reasons to be grateful. Each day is different than the previous day, even if those differences are quite subtle. Gratitude can be cultivated, even when gratitude doesn't come naturally to us. If we think of just one new thing each day to be grateful for, we train our brain to look for *more* instances of gratitude in our lives (Borysenko, 2014). This is the

miracle of the neuroplasticity of our brains. For those of us who may be having trouble thinking of anything to be grateful for, neuroplasticity is a good reason to feel grateful!

As part of my practice of gratitude, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to three people who have been helpful, supportive, and loving throughout this process. First, I would like to express my gratitude to Susan Barduhn, Professor and Chair, MA TESOL Low Residency Program, at SIT Graduate Institute. She has been a "teacher" for me in the fullest sense of the word. She has offered me guidance and encouragement throughout my studies at SIT Graduate Institute. Her insights have helped me grow both personally and professionally. Next, I would like to thank my friend and co-heart, Kristine Menn. Kristine and I became friends on the first day of class and our friendship has blossomed ever since. The concept of BREATHE originated during the summer of 2014 as Kristine and I prepared a joint presentation for the Sandanona Conference at SIT Graduate Institute. I did not know at that time that it would turn into the basis for this paper as a reflection of my life's work. Lastly, I would like to thank my dear friend and colleague, Jenny Lake Sanborn. Jenny and I have spent many hours walking and talking about this paper and life. She helped me work through many of the activities in this paper, including the gratitude mobile, the human knot, the yarn activity, and others. I would like to give my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Susan, Kristine, and Jenny. I am extremely grateful that they are all a part of my life.

Hearten brings joy and love into the world. When we give from our hearts with love and joy, we are contributing to the well-being of ourselves and others. Love is the universal emotion from which all other positive emotions arise. These positive emotions include non-judgment, compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, and generosity. "When we practice [these positive emotions] as part of our daily lives, we are incorporating 'heart' into everything we

experience. This is the essence of love" (p. 51) and, I hope, this has been the essence of this paper as well.

Engaging with others is about connection. Humans are "hardwired" to connect with one another as a result of the limbic region of our brain (Siegel, 2011, p. 17). We live in an interconnected world. This interconnectedness extends beyond our human relationships into the natural world. When we realize this, we realize how our actions also extend far beyond ourselves. When we perform acts of kindness, we contribute positively to the health and well-being of ourselves, all human beings, and the planet.

Understanding is the final contribution to our web of well-being. It integrates mindfulness, non-judgment, acceptance, compassion, and awareness to create a deeper level of connection. The key to understanding is communication. This communication isn't about being "right" or "wrong" or giving advice; this communication is about listening and being present for another person. The communication is about mindfulness and giving our undivided attention to another person in order to help them to help themselves. Understanding may be extended beyond individual interpersonal relationships to include groups, cultures, and countries. When we explore our relationships with the goal of understanding, we move toward achieving greater harmony and peace.

A natural outgrowth of experiencing life with mindfulness, non-judgment, compassion, acceptance, gratitude, generosity, love, and understanding is a feeling of well-being. True well-being brings with it a sense of equanimity and inner peace. This becomes a part of everything we do. Our students feel our non-judgment, compassion, acceptance and love, which create more of the same as well as a sense of safety and comfort in the classroom. Our friends and family feel it and respond more openly. Our colleagues feel it and work more cooperatively. I leave you with

one last meditation that promotes a feeling of equanimity. I wish you all the absence of suffering, in all its guises, and the presence of love, balance and inner peace in your life.

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one" (Lennon, 1971).

Equanimity Meditation

This meditation is adopted from Jack Kornfield's "Meditation on Equanimity" from his book *A Path With Heart* (1993, p. 331). This meditation may be used for all English language levels. However, word usage and vocabulary may need to be simplified. As with all activities, feel free to modify for your students' (and your) needs.

Goals:

Language: learn new vocabulary.

Language skills: practice listening and speaking.

Affective: experience a sense of peacefulness.

Instructions:

This meditation may be conducted as a listening activity for students utilizing the Pre, During, and Post (PDP) format. The PDP format is a commonly used format for listening activities. The Pre phase introduces students to the topic, including new vocabulary and introductory discussion of the topic. The During phase includes the actual listening portion. This may include listening to the recording more than once, assigning different tasks each time. In this Equanimity Meditation, the recording will only be played once. The Post phase is the opportunity to reflect on the activity, including the exploration of next steps.

Pre Phase:

1. Write the word "equanimity" on the board.
2. Ask students what the word means.
3. Ask for synonyms, such as balance, peace, tranquility, quiet, calm.
4. Ask them to share with a partner a time when they felt peaceful.

5. See if anyone would like to share with the class.
6. If you have done *Self-Compassion Meditation* on pages 33 - 36 or the *Loving-kindness Meditation* on pages 61 – 65 with your class, review those meditations before moving on to the *Equanimity Meditation*.
    a. What do you remember about the meditations?
    b. What was the main theme of the meditations?
    c. What was important for you about the meditations?
    d. Where is our third eye? What does it represent?
    e. How did you feel before the meditations?
    f. How did you feel after the meditations?
7. Before beginning this meditation, ask the students to notice how they are feeling, physically and mentally. Ask them to share with a partner or with the class.

During Phase:

In the During phase, you may read or play a recording of the following. The recording of this meditation is available at vocaroo, http://vocaroo.com/i/s1WK6y9WKJIw.

[Begin Meditation]

This is a meditation that focuses on equanimity. Equanimity is a feeling of peacefulness. Equanimity gives us time and space for quiet meditation. Equanimity allows us to open our hearts and let loving-kindness flow from within.

Find a comfortable position. You may sit in a chair or on the floor. If you sit in a chair, try to keep your feet flat on the floor or in a cross-legged position. If you sit on the floor, you may sit on a pillow for comfort. Also, try to sit in a comfortable cross-legged position. Keep your back straight and shoulders broad. Place your hands in your lap or on your thighs, palms facing up, in a relaxed position.

Gently close your eyes. Your gaze may be toward the floor or toward your third eye. (Your third eye is located about one inch above and between your eyes.)

Notice any tension you may feel in your body. Try to relax any areas of tension that you notice.

Now begin to notice your breath. As you breathe, try to release any disturbing thoughts or feelings. When you inhale, notice how the breath feels entering through the nostrils and then feel your diaphragm as it expands. Now exhale and release the breath. Notice how it feels when your diaphragm contracts and the air exits through your nostrils. Repeat this three times.

When thoughts arise, simply notice them with acceptance, and without criticism and judgment, and return to the focus on your breath. Enjoy this opportunity to sit quietly.

When we feel equanimity, we feel peaceful. Equanimity can be practiced and learned just as we have been practicing non-judgment, compassion and loving-kindness. We all have lessons to learn and, while we may try to help, there may times that we cannot change things. We all must learn in our own way and on our own path.

Now begin to reflect on the benefit of a mind that has balance and equanimity. Think about what a gift it can be to bring a peaceful heart to the world around you. Let your self feel an inner sense of balance and ease. As you do this, continue to take deep, slow breaths.

Begin repeating the phrase to yourself:
May I be balanced and at peace.
May I be balanced and at peace.
May I be balanced and at peace.

Part of achieving a sense of equanimity is realizing that not everything is in our control. As we acknowledge this, repeat the phrase to yourself:
May I learn to see the rising and passing of all nature and life with equanimity and balance.
May I learn to see the rising and passing of all nature and life with equanimity and balance.
May I learn to see the rising and passing of all nature and life with equanimity and balance.

We must all learn in our own way and on our own path.
Repeat the phrase to yourself:
May I be open and balanced and peaceful.
May I be open and balanced and peaceful.
May I be open and balanced and peaceful.

Even when we are kind and compassionate, there may be circumstances and events that we cannot change. However, we may continue to bring compassion into the world.
Repeat the phrase to yourself:
May I bring compassion and equanimity into the events of the world.
May I bring compassion and equanimity into the events of the world.
May I bring compassion and equanimity into the events of the world.

In closing, repeat this phrase
May I be balanced and at peace.
May I be balanced and at peace.
May I be balanced and at peace.

We will now conclude this equanimity meditation. As you continue with your day, if possible, remember a moment of peace or equanimity that you experienced during this meditation. As you go through the day repeat the phrase, "May I be balanced and at peace."

We will conclude this meditation by sending peace, balance, equanimity, compassion, healing, happiness, and love to ourselves and everyone.

[End Meditation]

Post Phase:

The Post phase is the opportunity for reflection. Discussion may include any combination of writing, reading, speaking, and listening individually, in pairs, small groups, or with the whole class.

1. Here are some possible questions:
    a. What did you think of this meditation?
    b. Were you comfortable with the phrases that you repeated?
    c. What happened when you had thoughts?
    d. Do you feel different after meditating? Why or why not?
    e. What are the differences that you notice?
    f. Is equanimity important to you? Why or why not?
2. Have participants stand or sit in a circle and ask them to share how they are feeling.

End of Equanimity Meditation

Appendix

Important concepts and vocabulary from *Nonviolent Communication* (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 209-210).

The Four-Part Nonviolent Communication Process

Clearly expressing how *I am* without blaming or criticizing.

Listening to how *you are* without hearing blame or criticism.

Observations:

What I/you observe (see, hear, remember, imagine, free from my evaluations) that does or does not contribute to my/your well-being.

"*When I/you (see, hear) ….*"

Feelings

How I/you feel (emotion or sensation rather than thought) in relation to what I/you observe:

"I/you feel ...."

Needs

What I/you need or value that causes my feelings:

"... because I/you need/value ...."

Requests:

Clearly requesting that which would enrich my/your life without demanding:

The concrete actions I/you would like taken:

"Would you be willing to……"

Some Basic Feelings We All Have

When needs are fulfilled:

amazed comfortable confident eager energetic fulfilled glad hopeful inspired intrigued joyous moved optimistic proud relieved stimulated surprised thankful touched trustful

When needs are not fulfilled:

angry annoyed concerned confused disappointed discouraged distressed embarrassed frustrated helpless hopeless impatient irritated lonely nervous overwhelmed puzzled reluctant sad uncomfortable

Some Basic Needs We All Have

Autonomy: Choosing dreams/goals/values

Choosing plans for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values

Celebration: Celebrating the creation of life and dreams fulfilled

Celebrating losses of loved ones, dreams, etc.

Integrity: Authenticity Creativity Meaning Self-Worth

Interdependence: Acceptance Appreciation Closeness Community

Contribution to the enrichment of life Emotional safety Love

Honesty Respect Support Understanding Trust

Physical Nurturance: Air Food Water Movement Exercise Rest Protection

Play: Fun Laughter

Spiritual Communion: Beauty Harmony Inspiration Order Peace

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