

# Transformative Experience in Buddhism: A Qualitative Investigation

JOHN B. CHANCEY  
University of Oklahoma

JI HONG  
University of Oklahoma

BENJAMIN C. HEDDY  
University of Oklahoma

## Abstract

*The goal of our research was to explore Transformative Experience (TE) in Buddhist monks living in the monastic setting. Pugh (2011) defines TE as learning that enhances everyday experience, including three components 1) motivated use, 2) expansion of perception, 3) experiential value. Our research looked to extend previous TE research by examining TE outside of formal classroom environments to gain better insight on facilitating TE. Three Buddhist monks from the American southwest were interviewed. Additionally, the primary author collected observational data from attending a traditional Buddhist ceremony. Results revealed that the monks interviewed, experience TE through a specific practice of Buddhist teachings, metta, or loving-kindness. Metta is a Buddhist practice centered upon generating thoughts of good will towards all beings. Adaptations of metta for secular use in educational settings were discussed.*

*Keywords:* transfer, transformative learning, transformative experience

## Transformative Experience in Buddhism

Buddhism, considered both a religion and philosophy, was founded in India by Siddhartha Gautama, otherwise known as the Buddha, over 2000 years ago. Buddhism is built upon the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths. Those Noble Truths, according to the Buddha are; 1) life is suffering, 2) suffering derives from craving or desire, 3) there is a way to end suffering, and 4) that way is through the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path is divided into the following categories; 1) right understanding, 2) right thought, 3) right speech, 4) right action, 5) right livelihood, 6) right effort, 7) right mindfulness, and 8) right concentration. The Noble Eightfold Path is considered to be the moral code of conduct for Buddhists—both for laypeople and monks (Rahula, 1972). Buddhist monks are required to take a stricter code of conduct than lay people. This code of conduct is known in Buddhism as the Vinaya, consisting of 227 rules by which a monk must live (Buddha Dharma Education Association, 2008). Vinaya, for example, dictates how a monk obtains food (what is offered), what clothes to wear (robes of varying color), and where to live (simple shelters). This code also strictly prohibits certain behaviors such as sexual activity and engaging intoxicant substances. According to the UpaddhaSutta (Bhikku, 1997), the Buddha said that it is important for monks to pursue the Noble Eightfold Path through their interactions and teachings with the community. The Buddha said that these actions are the “whole of the holy life.”

Being a Buddhist monk requires a monk to not only study and teach the Buddha’s teachings to others, but also to live the Buddha’s teachings in their everyday life, truly experiencing the teachings

directly. Buddhist monks are responsible for living the teachings of the Buddha while also teaching them to their community, known as the Sangha. One particular practice that embodies all of the Buddha's teachings is the practice of *metta*, or loving-kindness towards all beings. Metta is one of the oldest teachings in Buddhism and is cultivated through direct practice and experience of the Buddha's teachings in the community (Buddhist Center, n.d.).

Based on the teachings of the Buddha, it could be argued that fully practicing these teachings requires a monk to undergo transformative experiences. Pugh (2011) defines transformative experiences (TE) as learning that expands everyday experience. Transformative experience (TE) is a holistic construct from educational psychology derived from the work of pragmatist John Dewey (Pugh, 2002). Using a transformative experience (TE) framework, this research aims to unpack a Buddhist monk's life orientation and wisdom, to extend previous TE research by examining this construct outside of a formal classroom environment and testing the limits of the theory in a non-educational setting, and consequently to provide useful educational implications that can be applied to various educational contexts.

Additionally, this research looks to break new ground in TE research by studying engagement of TE in a unique context, Buddhist monks in the monastic setting. Unlike previous TE research, participants of this qualitative investigation are not students in a formal learning environment, but rather, participants are both teaching and practicing the teachings of the Buddha in their community. Given the unique role of Buddhist monks as both teachers and practitioners of the Buddha's teachings, this research could facilitate deeper understanding of how TE is experienced by learners and educators alike.

A secondary justification for this research is the methodological choice of approach. To this date, research of TE has utilized mostly a positivist approach, relying primarily on quantitative data (Heddy, Sinatra, Seli, Taasobshirazi, & Mukhopadhyay, 2016; Pugh, Linnenbrink-Garcia, Koskey, Stewart, & Manzey, 2010a). While previous TE research has used elements of qualitative data, very little research in the area of TE has been purely qualitative in nature. By employing a qualitative approach, this study aims at developing deeper understanding and enriched description of TE from three Buddhist monks at a monastery in the American Southwest.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Transformative Experience**

Pugh (2011) defines transformative experience (TE) as learning that enhances everyday experience. More specifically, Pugh's definition of TE includes three components—motivated use, expansion of perception, and experiential value. The first component, motivated use occurs when a learner intentionally applies what they have learned into their everyday experience, (Pugh, 2002). An example of motivated use would be after a student learns the concept of gravity in their physics class they actively engage with this concept while watching basketball. This student might find the ideas of gravity so interesting that he or she begins a conversation to explain the principles of gravity to a parent or sibling while they are watching basketball. This student can explain why some players can jump higher than others, for example.

The second component of TE, expansion of perception, takes place when a learner uses their new ideas and concepts to see the world differently or in new ways. Using the previous example, after learning about gravity, the student watching basketball cannot help but to see the concept of gravity every time a player jumps to dunk the ball or block a shot. This student now views basketball as more than just athletics running and jumping, but a game that involves many of the principles learned in physics class, such as gravity, inertia, momentum, and others.

The third component, experiential value, occurs when learning is both useful and meaningful to the learner. The student in the aforementioned example may come to value the concept of gravity more because it changed how they watch basketball. Instead of watching the players jumping around randomly the student can now understand why some players jump higher than others. This could potentially allow the student to have a conversation with a friend or family member about the topic, thus providing some form of social value from learning.

Pugh (2004) used an interview with a middle school student who learned about inertia and force pairs in his science class to illustrate what each of the three TE components looks like. This middle school student applied the concepts of physics into his everyday life (motivated use) while making comments like “the ideas are worth learning” (experiential value) because “I can look at, like, when two cars crash into each other, I can look at that in a different way... Now I’m going to see things that I’m using to seeing in a different way” (expansion of perception) (p.8).

Heddy and Pugh (2015) place Transformative Experience along a continuum of Transformative Learning. Transformative Learning is the process of a deep, fundamental change in the way a person sees the world. Boyd (2009) defines Transformative Learning as an expansion of consciousness that originates from a fundamental shift in personality. The process of Transformative Learning is gradual, occurring in stages (Kitchenham, 2008) and can be facilitated through deep reflection on action (Minnes, Maybery, Soto, & Hargis, 2016; Peet, 2016). Additionally, Mezirow (2003) describes Transformative Learning as a process of fundamental change that takes place as a unique form of metacognitive reasoning achieved by adults. Colleges and universities are beginning to place more emphasis on instruction that is intended to be transformative in nature (Glisczinski, 2007). On the continuum of transformation, Transformative Experience is considered to be a smaller, micro change whereas Transformative Learning is considered to be a larger, macro change in perspective. Furthermore, environments can be modified and adapted to facilitate the processes of transformation (Fowler, Lazo, Turner & Hohenstein, 2015). However, research by Heddy and Pugh (2015) suggests that teaching for macro transformations achieved through Transformative Learning can be difficult, but learners might benefit from smaller scale TEs that accumulate to larger scale Transformative Learning over time.

Pugh and Bergin (2005) reviewed research on the impact of in-school experiences on out-of-school learning. Unfortunately, research into this topic was scant at the time. Their findings suggest that many students are not applying what they learn in class into their everyday lives. A solution to this problem, according to the authors is to provide instruction that teaches for TE.

There are many benefits associated when learners engage in TE. Previous research suggests that engaging in TE enhances the experience of positive academic emotions, (Heddy & Sinatra, 2013) such as interest (Heddy, Sinatra, Seli, Taasoobshirazi, & Mukhopadhyay, 2017). Additionally, TE promotes transfer (Pugh et al., 2010a) and conceptual change related to controversial topics in science such as natural selection (Pugh et al., 2010b) and biological evolution, (Heddy & Sinatra, 2013).

While the construct of TE is derived from the historical works of pragmatist John Dewey (Pugh, 2011), TE is a relatively new construct in the field of Educational Psychology. To date, TE research has been limited to primarily understanding the impact of teaching for TE on constructs derived from course materials, such as physics and biology. No research in TE has directly explored the impact of TE on constructs related to abstract ideas such as morals and ethics. This qualitative research study sought to expand the conceptual understanding of TE by exploring the construct in a novel setting with a unique sample of participants, such as Buddhist monks living in a monastic setting.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided this research is:

- How do Buddhist monks experience Transformative Experience?

This research is also guided by the following sub questions:

- How have Buddhist monks noticed the teachings of the Buddha in their everyday lives (motivated use)?
- How have the Buddha’s teachings changed the way they see the world (expansion of perception)?
- In what ways is their new world view as a Buddhist monk valuable to them (experiential value)?

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

In order to unpack this unique and complex phenomena, this study employed a general qualitative

approach. Qualitative research is beneficial when the target phenomena under investigation is complex and multi-layered (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2013). This is because qualitative inquiry takes a holistic approach to collect data in a natural setting, embraces context contexts as a key component to generate meaning, and focuses on unpacking experiences and perspectives of each participant with much depth and details. It is used when a complex understanding of phenomena is needed. This study employed semi-structured interviews with our monks along with direct observation of a traditional Buddhist ceremony lead by the participants.

### **Participants**

Utilizing a purposeful, criterion sampling (Creswell, 2013), we recruited participants who have membership as a Buddhist monk at a Buddhist monastery in the American Southwest. The three participants in this study were all male Theravada Buddhist monks from a Buddhist monastery located in the Southwest region of the United States. Below is a brief profile of each participating monk in this study:

*BhanteRahula* – 62 years of age, novice monk with three years as a monk at the time of his interview. BhanteRahula was in the process of becoming a higher ordained Buddhist monk at the time of interview recording. Has since become a higher ordained monk after traveling to Austin, Texas. American born.

*Stewart Wiggins* – 29 years of age, novice monk with three years as a monk at the time of interview recording. Stewart Wiggins was in the process of a becoming higher ordained Buddhist monk. Has since become a higher ordained monk after traveling to Sri Lanka. American born.

*Noble* – 39 years of age, senior monk at the Southwest Buddhist Center. Born in Sri Lanka. Immigrated to the United States at 27 years old. 28 years' experience as a monk.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted for each participant approximately one hour on average. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in verbatim. The primary researcher also collected observation data by visiting the monastery during a traditional Theravada Buddhist ceremony lasting for two hours. Data were analyzed inductively by identifying commonalities and differences across three interviews through line-by-line coding, categorizing and thematizing to detect salient patterns, and theorizing to develop possible explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shank, 2002).

### **Trustworthiness**

Several steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. First, we did member checks to establish credibility of data analysis. To begin with, interviews were recorded by both the researcher and the participating monks. One of the monks, Stewart Wiggins, is currently developing a book on his understandings of the Buddha's teachings so he was interested in recording his responses as possible topics to write about later. After transcribing each interview, each monk was provided with digital and printed copies of the transcripts to review. Second, participants were given the opportunity to discuss their perceptions and thoughts about the process of the interview after reviewing the transcript. Lastly, researchers of this study conducted data analysis triangulation by checking accuracy and credibility of each other's coding and categorizing outcomes.

### **Findings**

Findings were organized around three themes; aligned with three sub-research questions; motivated use, expansion of perception, and experiential value. Each theme is described in detail below.

### **Motivated Use**

Each monk individually described how they actively used the teaching of loving-kindness in their everyday life. The usage of this particular teaching varies. In some cases, metta is practiced in thought or in attitude such as when BhanteRahula described how he thinks about the metta practice:

“So when I think of that particular teaching I think of it pivotally for myself in terms of the compassion that I should carry within myself and learn and relearn every day. I think of suffering and how suffering is a part of the world we live in.”

This particular quote reflects that loving-kindness is a teaching of Buddhism that requires active and daily practice in order to be more compassionate towards other beings. This is further illustrated by Noble’s reflections on his own practice with the Buddha’s teachings on loving-kindness: “So daily I practice breathing and loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is my favorite. So I practice a lot.”

Metta is a vital practice of being a Buddhist monk. This experience of practicing metta illustrates the behavioral component of TE, motivated use (Pugh, 2011). The Buddhist monks interviewed are highly motivated to practice the teachings of loving-kindness because of the value they have brought to their own lives. Each monk interviewed actively uses this specific teaching in their everyday experiences as a Buddhist monk as described by Stewart Wiggens:

“But I think the most impactful teachings in my life are the teachings on metta, or good will. Learning to wish well for myself. Thinking thought may I be well, happy, and peaceful. Developing a universal heart of loving-kindness. So that there is no room in my heart for ill-will or resentment.”

The motivated use component of the metta practice can also be seen directly in how the monks interact with their supporting community.

The primary author also attended the Vesak ceremony at the Southwest Buddhist Center. Vesak is a celebration of the Buddha’s birthday. The celebration itself does not have to take place on the Buddha’s birthday, but typically on the first full moon of the month of May. The ceremony showed how metta is symbolized and practiced in various components of rituals.

When the primary author arrived at the ceremony there were 20 to 30 participants already in attendance. All of the attendees were Sri Lankan, nationally and culturally. The ceremony was conducted almost entirely in the Pali language and presented by Noble, who speaks fluent Pali. While the primary author does not speak Pali, he inquired with Stewart Wiggens and BhanteRahula about the contents of the ceremony. He was told by both monks that the ceremony would be focused on the importance of practicing and observing the Buddha’s teachings, especially the practice of metta. The ceremony began with chanting followed by a lecture on the importance of observing the precepts established by the Buddha. The ceremony was a celebration of the Buddha’s birthday, but also a time for members of the community to renew their precepts (Rahula, 1972) and provide service to the community.

At one point in the ceremony, the room cleared out except for one member of the Sri Lankan community, a young girl. She remained while Noble and her continued to chant. As they chanted, Noble began to wrap a thin, white piece of string around the girl’s wrist. This is symbolic of taking the five Buddhist precepts of not killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, consuming intoxicants, or lying (Rahula, 1972). The five precepts are a physical manifestation of the metta practice. They are intended to cultivate a mind of loving-kindness for oneself and all other beings.

The primary author also noticed that the male attendees were the ones taking care of preparing the ceremony, including preparing and distributing food to the monks and other attendees. He asked BhanteRahula about this observation and was told that these attendees have chosen to take more precepts on this day as part of their service to the Buddhist community. This service by the male devotees is considered to be an outward form of the metta practice towards oneself and towards the larger Buddhist community.

### **Expansion of Perception**

Each monk also described how the practice of loving-kindness expanded their perception, specifically in terms of being compassionate towards all beings. This specific variable of TE was apparent in Stewart Wiggins' description of how he is able to see relationships different because of the loving-kindness practice:

“We hear about mindfulness and developing concentration, [in doing] this practice of metta. I tore down a lot of walls within myself, a lot of old resentment and anger towards myself and my situation and family (laughs). But because it was so transformative it's become very valuable to me.”

From this quote it appears that Stewart Wiggins has experienced a change in his perception of how he views himself and his loved ones. The loving-kindness practice has expanded his perception towards being more compassionate towards all beings, including himself and loved ones. This change in perspective on compassion is consistent with Pugh's (2002) operational definition of expansion of perception, a change in the way a learner thinks or talks about a concept. But this change in perspective did not happen overnight.

Similar findings were found in BhanteRahula's recollections on how meditations of compassion, such as loving-kindness meditation, have on his perceptions of being present with others:

“I am now emotionally centered and present. The teaching of being present to another is one of the byproducts I think of meditation. It helps you to really be fully engaged with someone and to understand someone directly the way they present at the moment. And that helps you to understand and to be compassionate. Maybe sometimes you would not understand what they believe in. Or how they look at it, especially their experience. But you can be compassionate. And you can share in terms of (pause) maybe insights or not. Maybe you just simply have to be there with them. And that provides enough in terms of the opportunity in teaching another value in Buddhism.”

A change in perception like the one described above takes time and a tremendous amount of practice to develop. This is evident in the following quote by BhanteRahula when describing his change of perspective over time as a Buddhist monk:

“It was gradual. It wasn't the epiphany. Or the lightbulb going on in one's head. It was a gradual understanding of how things fall into place. And how things and events and experiences and insights and elements of teaching, elements of daily life, elements of the lived experience of being a monk, the elements of reading and following a daily pattern that provides the platform for understanding. And the platform is very gradual. For me and my experience very gradual.”

This quote on a shift of perception falls in line with the Transformative Experience-Transformative Learning continuum outlined by Heddy and Pugh (2015). According to these authors, small scale moments of TE gradually can lead to larger transformations in perspective that can be defined as Transformative Learning. The monks interviewed for this paper have a daily practice of metta towards themselves and their community. Each day provides an opportunity to grow and develop that practice further as described by Noble,

“We practice morning and evening. We have discussions and we read together sometimes. And we share our knowledge sometimes and we have monthly and every other month meetings with other monks who are living close to us...”

## Experiential Value

When describing the practice of loving-kindness, each monk described the value they perceived in this specific practice in Buddhism. This was apparent in Noble's description of the benefits associated with practicing loving-kindness:

“Take loving-kindness. So if you practice loving-kindness there are 11 benefits. So those benefits you can get most of the benefits in front of you. You can sleep well. You can wake up well. You can you never dream so bad dreams. If you dream you dream good dreams. So you never harm to humans. You never harm to anyone. You are dear to humans. You are dear to non-humans and you can get concentrated mind and you can get good physical and mental health.”

This quote illustrates the specific benefits that are associated with practicing loving-kindness as a Buddhist monk and how they can be achieved. Noble's experience is similar to how Pugh (2002) operationally defines experiential value. Pugh (2002) describes experiential value as finding a concept interesting and worth learning because of the value it brings. From this quote it seems obvious that the Buddha's teachings of loving-kindness are interesting to Noble because of the value they bring to him, in this case there are 11 specific benefits associated with practicing loving-kindness.

Additionally, the Buddha's teachings on loving-kindness appear to provide Buddhist monks with a framework for interacting with others, their Buddhist community of devotees or otherwise. This was reflected in a quote by BhanteRahula:

“Well I do like the story of the Karaniya, which is what was taught by the Buddha in terms of teaching loving-kindness. That particular story because it is an important value that is not (pause) often acted enough in contemporary society. Um, we have so, so many opportunities of interaction. Of being with people and sometimes we don't spend enough time being compassionate with others especially in not only listening and in also providing support or in also helping someone alleviate whatever their suffering is by simply being with them.”

## Discussion

### Summary of Results

The goal for this qualitative investigation was to understand the nature of transformative experience (TE) in Buddhist monks living in a monastic setting. According to Pugh (2011), TE is defined as learning that enhances the everyday experience of a learner. This definition of TE also includes three components critical for experiencing TE; 1) motivated use 2) expansion of perception and 3) experiential value. In order for a learning experience to be considered TE, it must meet each of these three criteria.

To understand the relationship between TE and the principles of Buddhism we conducted semi-structured interviews with three Buddhist monks from a monastery in the American southwest. Results revealed that the Buddhist monks interviewed are experiencing TE directly through their practice of the Buddha's teachings on *metta*, or loving-kindness. *Metta* is a specific Buddhist practice centered upon thinking and thoughts of good will towards the self and extending that good will to all other beings in the universe.

From the data collected, we contend that the Buddhist monks interviewed for this research experienced TE in Buddhism directly in their experiences of practicing the Buddha's teachings on loving-kindness. Based upon their rich descriptions of life before and after becoming a Buddhist monk and engaging in the metta practice, one could make the argument that each monk interviewed has demonstrated transformative experience from this specific teaching. Each monk in their interview expressed examples of each component of TE through the metta practice: motivated use by directly using and thinking about the metta practice in their everyday lives, expansion of perception through a new understanding of suffering, and experiential value in their descriptions of this particular Buddhist practice. This not did not happen overnight, but rather was a gradual change that took place with a daily practice of

metta in personal conduct and interactions with community at-large. Perhaps these results suggest that from these TE experiences, monks who continuously practice loving-kindness over time are engaging in more large-scale transformative learning (Heddy & Pugh, 2015).

Each monk's description of continuously practicing loving-kindness is similar to how Heddy and Pugh (2015) demonstrated that using small scale transformative events like TE can be used to generate larger scale life transformations, known as transformative learning. This is what appears to be taking place with the monks interviewed. They appear to be experiencing small, subtle changes each day in their practice of loving-kindness that has overtime, lead to larger scale changes in the way they perceive the world. It is the accumulation of an entire process of living fully engaged in the Buddha's teachings, specifically the loving-kindness teachings that is transformative. The monks have benefited from these changes and clearly demonstrate value in the teaching of loving-kindness.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Based on the qualitative data obtained from conducting semi-structured interviews and direct observations with three Buddhist monks at the Southwest Buddhist Center, our research found evidence of transformative experience (TE) occurring within the Buddhist monastic setting. More specifically, we found evidence of TE from each monk's independent descriptions and understanding of the *metta* practice prescribed by the Buddha. These results imply that TE can potentially be found outside of commonly studied settings like schools and classrooms.

Theoretically speaking, these findings could potentially expand the conceptual definition of TE to include experiences that occur outside of such traditional learning environments. Previous research by Pugh and Bergin (2005) expressed the difficulty in studying learning that takes place during out-of-school experiences. Studying learning that takes place in non-traditional settings such as a Buddhist monastery provides potential evidence that TE can take place in out-of-school experiences when the content being learned is salient, meaningful, and relevant to the learner.

The results of our research add to the evidence that TE promotes transfer in learning, the process in which learning in one setting influences learning in a different context or setting, (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Goldstone & Day, 2012; Perkins & Salmon, 1994; Schwartz, Bransford, & Sears, 2005). Previous TE research has shown that TE promotes far transfer, a type of transfer in which the transfer context significantly varies from the learning context (Barnett & Ceci, 2002; Detterman, 1993; Heddy, Sinatra, Seli, Taasoobshirazi, & Mukhopadhyay, 2017; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). A form of far transfer appears to be taking place with the Buddhist monks interviewed for this research. Each monk independently described examples of learning the practice of metta within the context of their monastic duties, but have gone on to apply, or transfer this particular teaching into all aspects of their day-to-day living. Investigating engagement in transfer in new contexts can provide useful information for more traditional educational contexts.

Finally, our findings suggest that TE can occur with the learning of moral and ethical concepts, such as the metta practice. To our knowledge, our study is the first research study to explore the relationship between TE and such constructs. To date, researchers have explored TE with biology, psychology, and social studies concepts. Investigating new topics and contexts in which TE can be facilitated is useful for expanding TE research to new settings, which can provide rich learning in those new contexts, while increasing our understanding of the usefulness of TE as well. Future research exploring the topic of TE should consider studying TE with new constructs and new contexts.

### **Practical Implications**

In addition to the theoretical implications of this qualitative research, there are also important practical implications worth considering. Each monk appears to have experienced TE through their practice of metta, or loving-kindness. While this is a practice learned from studying the Buddha's teachings, secular forms of loving-kindness meditations have been adapted for clinical populations (Rosch, 2015), as well as educational settings (Roeser & Pinela, 2014).



Incorporating elements of self-compassion training into their instructional practices may prove beneficial to educators. Research by Neff and Dahm (2015) suggests that practicing self-compassion, such as the metta practice, is linked with increases in motivation for positive lifestyle changes, coping with stress, and improvements in interpersonal relationships. By including elements of self-compassion into their instruction, educators move beyond the curriculum and begin to promote a more holistic sense of well-being by teaching values, ethics and morals (Zajonc, 2016). Based on the results of our research, engaging in Transformative Experiences appears to be an effective vehicle for promoting transfer of those same concepts of morals, ethics, values, and compassion to learners' everyday lives.

Additionally, after recording each interview and reviewing the transcripts numerous times one could make the argument that the TE experienced by the Buddhist monks interviewed took place from reading Buddhist texts in which some were written over 2000 years ago. These Buddhist monks appear to have experienced TE from their reading, understanding, and directly practicing the Buddha's texts in their everyday experiences. This leads to the possibility that classroom texts could be modified to facilitate TE. Previous research by Heddy, Nelson, Husman, and Goldman (2016) suggests that TE can be facilitated in online/distance learning settings through Use, Change, Value discussions. Given this research and the current understanding of how to facilitate TE, perhaps textual materials can be designed for the purpose of facilitating TE.

### Limitations

Our research exploring the phenomena of Transformative Experience with Buddhist monks is not without limitations. Results of our qualitative investigation suggest that our participants experienced TE through the Buddha's teachings on metta, or loving-kindness. However, generalizing these results is limited because we only interviewed and observed three Buddhist monks from a specific community. We did not achieve saturation in our data collection. This is the first study to explore the topic of TE with such a unique population. Future research exploring this topic will need to examine these questions with a larger, more diverse sample of Buddhist monks.

### Conclusion

Our research goal was to understand the nature of transformative experience (TE) in Buddhist monks living in a monastic setting. We interviewed three Buddhist monks from a monastery in the American Southwest. In addition to semi-structured interviews, the first author of this study also collected field observation notes from attending a traditional Buddhist ceremony. Our analysis of the transcribed interviews and field notes revealed that each monk experienced transformative experience through their individual practice of the Buddha's teachings on metta, or loving-kindness. The metta practice is one practice in which each monk independently described that meets the criteria for TE; 1) Motivated use 2) Expansion of perception and 3) Experiential value. Results suggest that Buddhist teachings, specifically the practice of loving-kindness, explained through the TE framework can be applied into various educational settings. Previous research by Roeser and Pinela (2014) suggest that secular forms of loving-kindness practices can be adapted for the classroom, potentially helping students develop not academically, but socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

### References

- Anderson, J. R., Reder, L. M., & Simon, H. A. (1996). Situated learning and education. *Educational researcher*, 25(4), 5-11.
- Barnett, S. M., & Ceci, S. J. (2002). When and where do we apply what we learn?: A taxonomy for far transfer. *Psychological bulletin*, 128(4), 612.
- Bhikku, T. (1997). UpaddhaSutta: Half (of the holy life) Retrieve from: <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn45/sn45.002.than.html>

- Boyd, B. L. (2009). Using a case study to develop the transformational teaching theory. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 7(3), 50-59.
- Buddha Dharma Education Association. (2008). The Buddhist world: Lay Buddhist's guide to the monk's rules. Retrieved from <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/layguide.htm>
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Detterman, D. K. (1993). The case for the prosecution: Transfer as an epiphenomenon. *Transfer on trial: Intelligence, cognition, and instruction* (pp. 1-24).
- Fowler, D., Lazo, M., Turner, J., & Hohenstein, J. (2015). Facilitating program, faculty, and student transformation: A framework for curriculum redesign. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 3(1), 59-73.
- Glisczinski, D. J. (2007). Transformative higher education: A meaningful degree of understanding. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 5(4), 317-328.
- Goldstone, R. L., & Day, S. B. (2012). Introduction to "new conceptualizations of transfer of learning". *Educational Psychologist*, 47(3), 149-152.
- Heddy, B. C., & Pugh, K. J. (2015). Bigger is not always better: Should educators aim for big transformative learning events or small transformative experiences. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 3(1), 52-58.
- Heddy, B. C., Muto-Nelson, K. G., Husman, J., & Goldman, J. (2016). Teaching for transformative experience in online engineering courses. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. Denver, CO.
- Heddy, B., & Sinatra, G. (2013). Transforming misconceptions: Transformative Experience to promote positive affect and conceptual change in students learning about biological evolution. *Science Education*
- Heddy, B., Sinatra, G., Seli, H., Taasobshirazi, G., & Mukhopadhyay, A. (2017). Making learning meaningful: Facilitating interest development and transfer in at-risk college students. *Educational Psychology*
- Kitchenham, A. (2008). The evolution of John Mezirow's transformative learning theory. *Journal of transformative education*, 6(2), 104-123.
- Loving-Kindness Meditation: The Buddhist Centre. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/loving-kindness-meditation>
- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of transformative education*, 1(1), 58-63.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, M.A., (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.

- Minnes, M., Mayberry, J., Soto, M., & Hargis, J. (2018). Practice makes deeper? Regular reflective writing during engineering internships. *Journal of Transformative Learning, 4*(2).
- Neff, K. D., & Dahm, K. A. (2015). Self-compassion: What it is, what it does, and how it relates to mindfulness. In *Handbook of mindfulness and self-regulation* (pp. 121-137). Springer, New York, NY
- Peet, M. R. (2016). Transforming students' beliefs: Developing employability skills and generative identities through the Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process. *Journal of Transformative Learning, 3*(2), 15-36.
- Perkins, d. N., & Salomon, G. (1994). Transfer of learning. In T. Husen & T. N. Postlethwait (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (2nd ed., Vol. 11, pp. 6452–6457). Oxford: Pergamon Press
- Pugh, K. (2002). Teaching for transformative experiences in science: An investigation of the effectiveness of two instructional elements. *Teachers College Record, 104*(6), 1101-1137.
- Pugh, K. (2004). Newton's Laws beyond the classroom walls. *Science Education, 88*, 182-196.
- Pugh, K. (2011). Transformative Experience: An integrative construct in the spirit of Deweyan Pragmatism. *Educational Psychologist, 46*(2), 107-121.
- Pugh, K. J., & Bergin, D. A. (2005). The effect of schooling on students' out-of-school experience. *Educational Researcher, 34*(9), 15-23.
- Pugh, K., Linnenbrink-Garcia, L., Koskey, K., Stewart, V., & Manzey, C. (2010a). Transformative Experience: A study of deep engagement in Science. *Science Education, 94*, 1-28.
- Pugh, K. J., Linnenbrink-Garcia, E. A., Koskey, K. L. K., Stewart, V. C., & Manzey, C. (2010b). Teaching for transformative experiences and conceptual change: A case study and evaluation of a high school biology teacher's experience. *Cognition and Instruction, 28*, 273-316.
- Rahula, W. (1972). *What the Buddha Taught*.
- Rosch, E. (2015). The emperor's clothes: A look behind the Western mindfulness mystique. In *Handbook of mindfulness and self-regulation* (pp. 271-292). Springer, New York, NY.
- Roeser, R. W., & Pinela, C. (2014). Mindfulness and compassion training in adolescence: A developmental contemplative science perspective. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2014*(142), 9-30.
- Salomon, G., & Perkins, D. N. (1989). Rocky roads to transfer: Rethinking mechanism of a neglected phenomenon. *Educational psychologist, 24*(2), 113-142.
- Schwartz, D. L., Bransford, J. D., & Sears, D. (2005). Efficiency and innovation in transfer. *Transfer of learning from a modern multidisciplinary perspective*, 1-51.
- Shank, G. D. (2002). *Qualitative research: A personal skills approach*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Tracy, S.K. (2013) *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Zajonc, A. (2016). Contemplation in education. In *Handbook of Mindfulness in Education* (pp. 17-28). Springer New York.

*Author's Note:* John Brandon Chancey is a fourth year doctoral student in educational psychology at the University of Oklahoma. His research interests are contemplation practices in educational settings, transformative learning, and conceptual change. Ji Y Hong is an associate professor and program area coordinator at the University of Oklahoma. Benjamin C. Heddy is an assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma.

*Citation:* Chancey, J., Hong, J. Heddy, B., (2019). Transformative experience in Buddhism: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, (6)2, 27-38.