
Assisting 101

Intention, Attention & Skill

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Assisting 101

Intention, Attention & Skill

OVERVIEW

“No printed word, nor spoken plea can teach young minds what they should be. Not all the books on all the shelves – but what the teachers are themselves.” Rudyard Kipling

Delving into ethics within yoga requires each of us to intimately examine our personal beliefs and values. Upon closer investigation we recognize that our beliefs and values are consistently in flux and under significant influence from other sources. How then do we tend to the needs of others whose values, world views and experiences and expectations are different from our own? In this module we will look not only at our own deeply embedded ethical values, but at the ethical values at the very core of the yoga tradition and those within our society and social setting. By examining the numerous ways in which we are supported both by our ourselves and our communities, we may be inspired to think and act more openly towards others on both a personal and a professional level. This also requires that we have a solid foundation in, and understanding of the mechanics and principles of alignment, so that we can understand how to assist, adjust, demonstrate and properly explain the yoga asanas in a manner that meets the needs of each student in the moment.

Topics include:

- Ethics as they relate to yoga
- Demonstrating asana
- Assisting and adjusting
- Methods of assisting/adjusting asana

Objectives

Upon completion of this module you should be able to:

- Examine codes of conduct in yoga, other professions and in society.
- Examine your personal ethics and integrate and/or expand them to include yoga.
- Learn how to skillfully demonstrate asana.
- Clarify the differences between assisting and adjusting, and the appropriate times to offer this information to students.
- Clarify the methods of assisting asana.
- Learn how and when to skillfully assist and adjust students in their practice.
- Know how to demonstrate and explain the actions and intentions of the key asanas.

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INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt, as teachers of yoga we will come face to face with some of our most challenging circumstances. As challenging as those moments may appear we will also face moments of pure inspiration. By opening our eyes and hearts to both aspects, we see that the ethics that yoga offers are the foundation from which we progress. In this module we will look at ethics as seen in yoga and expand these philosophies to include how we interact with one another - and more importantly, how we as teachers come into contact with our students. As teachers we are in a privileged position with our students and may play many roles at different times to stimulate their development. It is therefore important to understand how our own personal values and experiences in practice can influence how we teach and approach students. Of equal importance is developing your own personal method for assisting, adjusting, demonstrating and explaining poses in a way that can move a student deeper into the experience of what a yoga pose may offer him or her.

ETHICS WITHIN YOGA

Published author and teacher, Donna Farhi describes ethics as, "The realization of our complete interdependence with all beings and all living things". This implies that the role we take on as yoga teachers carries with it immense responsibility to act as leaders within our communities. By taking on this responsibility and incorporating ethics within our teaching, not only do we nourish our personal practice, but we challenge our willingness to let go of it. This in turn sets us on an intimate journey of discovering our interconnectivity.

To educate ourselves on the topic of ethics within yoga let us first examine what already exists from yoga's historical and current standpoints. Each offers an abundance of information aimed at inspiring all students to gain more from their practice and thus reconnect to the entirety of their lives.

PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS

In Raja Yoga, observance of the abstinences, or yamas, helps us to attain a healthy mind and body. As Hatha Yoga is the yoga for attaining control over the body, the yamas, together with the niyamas, are its essential first two steps. Patanjali states that it is not enough to observe them for their individual ends (conquering oneself); one must follow them without a desire for any end goals (detachment).

Remember we may not succeed when we strive to live up to these precepts. No one is perfect, yet we still dedicate our efforts as Yoga teachers to work as diligently on the yamas and niyamas as we do on the other limbs.

1) Yamas: how we are in the world; with our students, friends, family and community

- Ahimsa - non-harming, nonviolence
- Satya - honesty, truthfulness
- Asteya - not taking what is not freely given
- Brahmacharya - wise use of energy, including sexual/creative energy
- Aparigraha - not being acquisitive; not accumulating what is not essential

2) Niyamas: who we are with ourselves; how we gain personal insight to be better teachers

- Saucha - purification/clarity; of body and thought
- Santosa - contentment
- Tapas - discipline; patience
- Svadhyaya - self-study; contemplation
- Isvara-pranidhana - devotion; dedication to awareness

CODE OF ETHICS

This particular code of ethics has been conceived by George Feurstein, one of yoga's most reputable sources. This list is considered comprehensive and concise and can be used as inspiration as you strive to evolve as a teacher of yoga.

- Yoga teachers understand and appreciate that teaching Yoga is a noble and ennobling endeavor that aligns them with a long line of honorable teachers.
- Yoga teachers are committed to practicing Yoga as a way of life, which includes adopting the fundamental moral principles of Yoga and making their lifestyle environmentally sustainable ("Green Yoga").
- Yoga teachers are committed to maintaining impeccable standards of professional competence and integrity.
- Yoga teachers dedicate themselves to a thorough and continuing study and practice of Yoga, in particular the theoretical and practical aspects of the branch of Yoga that they teach.
- Yoga teachers are committed to avoiding substance abuse, and if for some reason they succumb to chemical dependency, they agree to stop teaching until they are free again from drug and/or alcohol abuse. They will then do everything in their power to remain free, including being fully accountable to a support group.
- Yoga teachers embrace the ideal of truthfulness in dealing with students and others, including accurately representing their training and experience relevant to their teaching of Yoga.
- Yoga teachers are committed to promoting the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well being of their students.

- Yoga teachers, especially those teaching Hatha-Yoga, will abstain from giving medical advice or advice that could be construed as such, unless they have the necessary medical qualifications.
- Yoga teachers are open to instructing all students regardless of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and social or financial status.
- Yoga teachers are willing to accept students with physical disabilities, providing they have the skill to teach those students properly.
- Yoga teachers agree to treat their students with respect.
- Yoga teachers will never force their own opinions on students but rather will appreciate the fact that every individual is entitled to his or her worldview, ideas, and beliefs. At the same time, Yoga teachers must communicate to their students that Yoga seeks to achieve a deep-level transformation of the human personality, including attitudes and ideas. If a student is not open to change, or if a student's opinions seriously impede the process of communicating yogic teachings to him or her, then Yoga teachers are free to decline to work with that individual and, if possible, find an amicable way of dissolving the teaching relationship.
- Yoga teachers agree to avoid any form of sexual harassment of students.
- Yoga teachers wishing to enter a consensual sexual relationship with a present or former student should seek the immediate counsel of their peers before taking any action. This is to ensure that the teacher in question is sufficiently clear about his or her motives.
- Yoga teachers will make every effort to avoid exploiting the trust of students and their potential dependency, and instead encourage students to find greater inner freedom.
- Yoga teachers acknowledge the importance of the proper context for teaching and agree to avoid teaching in a casual manner, which includes observing proper decorum inside and outside of the classroom.
- Yoga teachers strive to practice tolerance toward other Yoga teachers, schools, and traditions. When criticism has to be brought, this should be done with fairness and with focus on facts.

The topic of ethics has no boundaries. A basic analysis of yoga alone only skims the surface of what is deeply rooted in the conflicts of history, religion, culture and modern day living. When we think about ethics in this way, we realize that our day to day interactions within the microscope of our personal communities form the groundwork for connection to our global networks. Take note of the websites, articles and books listed in the Appendix to further educate yourself on the influence of ethics on yoga, other professions and society. By continuing your education on this topic you can inspire yourself to deeply research your own personally held

values and examine how you intend on sustaining them, upholding them and if necessary defending them.

ASSISTING

Webster's Dictionary definition of assisting: *"to give supplementary support or aid to"*

Let's think about this in the context of a yoga class. What are we supporting; our students, our role as teachers, or both? If we remember Donna Farhi's definition of ethics as, *"The realization of our complete interdependence with all beings and all living things"* then the answer is in the student/teacher relationship. We are supporting each of our synonymous efforts in our yoga practice. Those efforts reveal that what we seek in our experiences of yoga is the understanding and opening up to our interconnectivity. We are supporting one another, and if we open up our perspective to that relationship, we create a connection.

To further the practicalities of how to connect with one other, we need to look at how we as teachers project ethics both within our bodies and our voices. This work becomes the platform from which we learn to professionally demonstrate asana in class, how we skillfully adjust and assist our students and how we instruct students to assist one another in class.

USING YOUR VOICE

One of the most advantageous tools we have as yoga teachers is our voice. A strong command of this tool has the power to lead groups of individuals on a lifetime journey of self discovery. When neglected, it can destroy its own inspirational potential. By placing our attention on the following key points we have the potential to connect more deeply to our students:

- greet your students before class
- speak clearly
- speak at a reasonable volume, appropriate to the sound in the room
- avoid rushing your speech
- avoid dramatically slowing down your speech
- employ simple vocabulary which reaches a broader audience
- remember your audience. what is the level of the room? connect with the average level
- give space for silence and time for your students to explore on their own
- be honest. do not speak on subjects or offer poses that are unfamiliar to you
- regulate the tone of your voice with the dynamic of the pose
- remember always to listen
- make yourself available to answer questions after class

USING YOUR BODY

Think of your body as a support for your voice. In the same way we practice asana to support our meditation practice, we pay attention to our body to support the use of our voice in our teaching. How you treat and respect your body is reflective of your intimate relationship to it and so as teachers of Hatha Yoga it is of the utmost importance that we look more deeply into our relationship to our bodies.

Demonstrating

"When I practice, I am a philosopher. When I teach I am a scientist. When I demonstrate, I am an artist". B.K.S. Iyengar

In class visual learners will spend most of their time mimicking the movement you demonstrate in your body where as audible learners will express what they hear. If possible, to avoid your students misunderstanding you, prepare your demonstrations before class begins. This way you know why you are demonstrating the pose(s), how you will demonstrate it and at what point(s) it is appropriate to demonstrate. If you have a theme for your class this is an opportune time to relate the demonstration to your theme. Remember as you demonstrate: take your time! Breathe! Simple acts of clear verbal and non-verbal instruction make a world of difference in your students' understanding of yoga.

Touch

Touch is an essential topic and to approach it, we first need to clarify our present understanding of yoga asana and the principles of alignment. How we view a student's practice from the outside will greatly effect our decisions on how to best support that practice though assisting. You will find that as you continually refer to the ethics of yoga and strive to integrate this information within your teaching, you will grow to be a stronger and more competent support for your students.

PRIMARY PRINCIPLES FOR YOGA ASANA

We analyze asana with three primary principles: foundation, primary movement, and breath. These three foundational techniques are the essential components of every asana and should be taken into account as you teach your classes, demonstrate, and before you touch a student.

Foundation: is an essential component of a balanced asana. It provides the spine with correct alignment, while enabling a student to remain calm and present for an extended period of time. When a student finds his or her foundation in a pose, breath flows naturally and all further actions happen naturally. Sometimes referred to as the "anchor point", foundation also

describes the action(s) in which a pose becomes secure. The foundation creates a connection with gravity so that a movement may be achieved.

Primary Movement: Refers to the central movement that is happening in a particular area of the body. It is a direct result of Vinyasa (movement with breath), the coming into the pose, and the remaining within a pose to keep the pose stable.

Breath: Breath is the essential tool for moving towards a balanced mind and body. It offers a reflection of the mind and its intricate relationship with the body. This also describes the breath action coming in and out of every pose. It is intimately linked with the Foundation and the Primary Movement.

ASSISTING VS. ADJUSTING

"Yogic assists are a creative process between two people, not something that a teacher does to a student. They are opportunities to deepen and perfect relationships." Karl Straub

It is important to understand the difference between an adjustment and an assist because they can and should be differentiated. Far too often teachers convolute these modes of support and end up making a student feel more frustrated than relaxed. Let us not assume that we cannot use these tools together but understand that the way in which we use them should stem from awareness.

Assisting a student in asana is **only** offered when the student is fully present in all three primary principles, foundation, primary movement and breath. When one of these elements is missing from either the student or the teacher, the benefits of the support are lost.

Adjusting a student in asana is offered when you notice that the student's body is undergoing excessive and unnecessary strain. Asana requires both stability and simultaneously mobility. The three primary principles provide this balance. If a student cannot be assisted in a pose due to the missing components of the primary principles, then an adjustment may be offered instead.

Perhaps after adjusting a student in a pose you notice that the primary principles are in effect. This could be an opportune moment to then offer an assist to that student. You would never assist first and then adjust. Make sure you make a clear distinction before you decide to adjust/assist.

One other important consideration is to request a student's permission prior to adjusting or assisting them. This is particularly important with new students whom you do not know and who are not familiar with your approach, or perhaps even with a yoga practice or a yoga class atmosphere. This verbal consent shows both courtesy and respect, given that we do not know everyone's background or touch-history, and it allows one to gauge if he or she is receptive to your touch or not. If they say "no", do not proceed further. If they agree, but seem tense or their breath is not steady, check in with them. Students whom you know and who know you do not

necessarily require a verbal permission prior to adjusting or assisting, but it is always a good idea to check with them verbally during or after an assist if you notice any tension, resistance or strain.

STYLES OF ASSISTS

Resistance Assists

The aim of these assists is to provide a deeper understanding of the primary action(s) in a specific pose. The teacher provides a contact point with his or her body (ex: a hand) against which the student then pushes as a means to feel and deepen the primary action(s) of the pose. These assists encourage movement from the student's body as opposed to the teacher's. The teacher's touch acts as a point of reference and suggests movement, but there is a deep respect for the wisdom of the student's body in how he or she accesses movement. Although the assist from the teacher is minimal, it is important that she help the student stay grounded in which case the student can then explore more movement possibility.

Passive Assists

These assists stem primarily from the directed touch of the teacher. When the intention of the assist is clear, the teacher has the power to skillfully affect the movement of the responding body and thus the experience that the student is having. These are considered passive because the student is encouraged to move with the pressure, not against, which generally provides a deep sense of release in his or her body.

Partner Yoga

This is considered assisting because the intent of partner yoga is to deepen the student's understanding and experience of a pose. The teacher plays a critical role when demonstrating the exercise. Not rushing through the demo but rather taking the time to explain the details creates more clarity for the students. It helps in the demos to utilize partners whom you know and trust to demonstrate skillfully.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ADJUSTING AND ASSISTING

Take into account this list of guidelines prior and during adjusts/assists. These tools become paramount when you are faced with the juggling act of teaching. Keep in mind these are guidelines. If something doesn't feel right or a problem arises refer back to ethics as a way to find a solution.

- Keep your eyes open while teaching.
- Walk around the room to make yourself available.

- Always ask first before touching a student.
- Never assist a student if they asked you originally not to.
- Always approach the student in the least intimate way.
- Approach a student so he or she can see you.
- Try speaking with the fewest words to maximize the student's experience in his or her body.
- If you do speak, do so quietly, clearly and simply.
- Never shout out adjustments from the other side of the room
- Watch your language; always show courtesy and professionalism.
- Use the student's name, as long as it will not draw unnecessary attention to them or make them feel ostracized from the group.
- If you think a student will feel ostracized, verbalize the statement as a general instruction to the group so the direction is less personal.
- Be clear as to whether it is an adjustment or an assist.
- Never rush into your assist or adjust.
- Know why you are adjusting or assisting a student.
- Approach each assist/adjust from an individual stand point. There is no one assist that is perfect for everyone.
- Remember that touch is an intimate experience. The first moment only happens once.
- Remember your touch can be just as healing as it can be volatile.
- Ask yourself what you are assisting or adjusting (eg. bone, muscle, connective tissue, organ).
- Watch your student's breath. try to synch your breath with theirs to provide a stronger connection.
- Guide their breath if necessary so they are in synch with their movement.
- Always know when to apply pressure. Is it the inhale or the exhale?
- If a pose has two sides and you assisting someone on one side, try to assist them on the other side as well.
- Adjust a student no more than three times in one class.
- Assist each consenting student at least once in every class.
- Don't forget to offer props for added support if a student is struggling in a pose or is injured.
- Remember you are always suggesting ideas, not insisting on them.
- Remember, it is the student's pose, not yours.
- Respect the person's body and its limitations.
- Respond, don't react, to your students, even if they react to you.

- Practice patience.
- Practice non-attachment.

GUIDELINES SPECIFIC TO ASSISTING

The effort required to offer adequate support in an assist is more involved than that of an adjustment. In order to provide the best experience possible for every student it is important to try and keep your verbal cues to a minimum. This way the student has enough time and space to receive your assist and integrate the information on his or her own. This way of learning is invaluable. It means the difference between a student intellectually understanding a pose, versus the embodiment of a pose. Emphasize these guidelines in your assisting and participate with your students in creating some of their most memorable yoga experiences.

- Approach with calmness.
- Touch the student before you begin to direct their body towards any movement. This moment can make or break the trust between a student and teacher.
- Clearly acknowledge their response to your touch. Stay longer if they need more time to trust you.
- Feel what is under your hands as you begin to assist. Acknowledge to the best of your efforts what you are about to direct.
- If you are directing bone and joints, are you respecting those limitations?
- If it is muscle, make sure the pressure is accurate and appropriate to the person you are assisting. Be aware of too much or too little pressure.
- If the student's body is responding and his or her body is opening, stay with the assist and take him or her deeper. This can be the difference between a good assist and a great assist.
- Recognize the time in the pose. Make sure that you have spent enough time there. The opposite is also true. Be confident to let go of an assist if it is not benefiting the student.
- Remember exiting is just as important as entering. Be patient. Live in the present moment. Live in the entirety of each assist with each individual.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

Without a doubt we may not succeed with ourselves and others at certain points along our road of yoga. This practice has never claimed to strive for perfection but instead reveals its honest truth as an on-going, lifetime of learning. During moments of difficulty or failure how do we find the strength to pick ourselves up and learn from our mistakes? The following is a list of questions that may help us deal with challenging in-class and post-class situations.

- Does this student need my adjustment/assist?
- Why do I feel the need to adjust/assist? Based on my ethics is that reason valid?

- Who is this person I am adjusting/assisting?
- Have I asked this person for their consent?
- What is my intention with my adjustment/assist?
- How and from which direction should I approach the student?
- What am I intending to touch? Bone, muscle, etc...
- How do I feel in my body? Am I as relaxed as I could be? Am I in a hurry?
- Am I moving with awareness and a willingness to adapt?
- Am I responding to what I notice(d) happening?

"Touch is an intimate act and a complex issue. Yet the intimate quality of touch is both its benefit and risk. As teachers, we need to find a balance between caring, concern, compassion, and professional detachment." -Ester Myers

I'm Not a Yoga Therapist Anymore!

by Leslie Kaminoff

As I enter my 30th year as a Yoga teacher, and the 25th year of full-time employment doing Yoga-based work with individuals, I've just recently figured out something that I consider to be vitally important: I no longer wish to be known as a "Yoga therapist."

This bit of clarity is largely due to the opportunity I've had to bounce ideas off my colleagues at IAYT and attendees at SYTAR, so it seems fitting to share this perspective in the pages of this journal. The process of producing a written summary based on repeated discussions with teachers, students, and friends is very familiar to me. It's what I did 10 years ago when I started the email newlist e-Sutra with the following post:

I have been personally engaged in countless discussions [about standards for Yoga teachers and therapists] for at least the past seven years. In those seven years, my fundamental views about certification standards have not changed, although my arguments supporting those views have become simpler and clearer with each new discussion...I will now present to you what I hope will be a clear and persuasive overview of my position.

When I first wrote that, the topic was the establishment of national certification standards for Yoga teachers, which culminated in the birth of the Yoga Alliance. IAYT's recent ongoing dialogue about the scope of practice and definition of Yoga Therapy is an extension of this debate. In my view, the fundamentals underlying both issues are identical, and can be summed up by the following question: "How can we define our professional activities in a way that preserves our freedom to conduct our relationships with our students in a manner that honors the core principles of Yoga?"

To fully explain my answer to this question, a little personal history will be necessary. Back in 1993, when the certification dialogue was just starting, I was serving as vice-president of a non-profit group called Unity in Yoga, and I was the principal author of the following official position statement:

- We enthusiastically support the ongoing dialogue addressing higher personal, professional, and ethical standards for Yoga teachers and therapists.
- We are in support of a process that results in the establishment of Yoga as a respected personal and academic pursuit, and any certification or accreditation that may result.
- We are, however, opposed to the establishment of any entity that assumes the authority to license or regulate Yoga teachers as professional practitioners and to enforce its standards on the Yoga community.

Against my objections, Unity in Yoga's executive board decided to release only the first two sentences—an action I saw as a critical error. Shortly thereafter, I resigned from Unity in Yoga.

Four years later, I witnessed another group of Yoga teachers make a similar error in collective judgment just before I resigned from the ad hoc committee that turned into the Yoga Alliance when it acquired Unity in Yoga's non-profit status.

The error is this: It is not enough to say that you are supporting and establishing high standards for Yoga teacher training and certification. That's the easy, obvious part. You must also state clearly, consistently, and defensibly what you are not supporting, on ethical grounds. Yoga ethics are very clear on this point. The teaching concerning what we should avoid (yama) is presented before the teachings about what we should pursue (niyama). Furthermore, the very first injunction is ahimsâ, the avoidance of doing harm. In the context of professional standards, what exactly must we avoid harming? The process of teaching Yoga. What is the vehicle for this process? The student-teacher relationship.

Therefore, the professional “yama” I adhere to is “I avoid engaging in any action that will lead to third-party interference in the student-teacher relationship.” My “niyama” is “I support and protect through my actions the sanctity, integrity, and freedom of the student-teacher relationship.”

Those statements are the core of my ethical and practical values as a practitioner, and it would be impossible for me to overstate their importance in my life. They reflect fundamental principles that tell me which actions to avoid, and which to pursue. Without consciously identifying those principles and validating their truth through my life's experience, I could easily become lost and confused. My actions could proceed from fear and ignorance, and I could end up doing harm to myself, my students, and my profession.

The value of my original 1993 statement on standards has been repeatedly confirmed for me, and I continue to vigorously stand by it, with one exception. In the first sentence, I used the phrase “Yoga teachers and therapists.” I now realize that this phrase is redundant, confusing, and potentially harmful. As the title of this piece implies, I am stating for the record that I no longer wish to be known as a Yoga therapist. I have come to the conclusion that my continued use of the term would misrepresent the nature of my work, both to the public and to myself, and would violate the professional ethics I've outlined above.

This does not in any way mean that I intend to stop doing my job. In fact, I will be able to work far more effectively, having identified my actual job title: “Yoga educator.” In retrospect, I realize that from the moment I taught my first group âsana class until the present day, I've always had the same job. I've just been doing it more effectively by learning how to better tailor the teachings to individual needs. I used to unquestioningly assume that my education in anatomy, biomechanics, bodywork, physical rehabilitation, and philosophy granted me the right to call myself a therapist. But, in fact, it just turned me into a highly-educated Yoga teacher.

By understanding that a “Yoga therapist” is nothing more than a very good Yoga teacher, I can eliminate the troublesome word “therapy” from my job description. I no longer need to define what I do beyond stating that I educate people about how their bodies and minds can be more fully integrated through the use of breath, posture, and movement. Even when I employ touch as part of that process, it is only for the purpose of educating, not fixing.

Why is the word “therapy” troublesome? Let's start with the dictionary. Judge for yourself which definition is closest to what we do:

- Therapy (from the Greek *therapeutikos*, to attend or treat): treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder; relating to the treatment of disease or disorders by remedial agents or methods...
- Educate (from the Latin *educere*, to draw out): to train by formal instruction or supervised practice; to give intellectual, moral, and social instruction to someone; to provide information...

I submit that even the most highly skilled and experienced Yoga “Therapist” does not “treat disease...by remedial agents or methods.” This is the province of a medical system, whether it’s allopathic, naturopathic, or Ayurvedic. Yoga is not a medical system. Yoga is a set of principles that show us we are interconnected, multidimensional beings composed of body, breath, and mind. These teachings suggest strategies for identifying and reducing obstructions that can occur in any of these dimensions. When obstructions (*klesha*) are reduced, it is the human system itself that reestablishes a healthy balance. We simply show people how to make more space (*sukha*) in their bodies so *prāna* can flow more freely. It’s the body’s own resources that do the healing. In other words, the teacher doesn’t heal the student, the teachings do. This is my definition of Yoga therapy - it’s Yoga applied to the individual.

As Yoga educators, we must constantly remind ourselves of and preserve this essential truth by minding our *yama* and *niyama*. We must not attempt to integrate ourselves into mainstream healthcare delivery by posing as a new therapeutic profession. Not only will this take us further from the truth of who we are, it will create destructive turf battles with established fields like physical therapy, massage therapy, dance therapy, and so on.

We must not seek third-party reimbursement (*de facto* regulation) for our services, which are very affordable compared to medical treatment. If we are concerned about under-served populations, we are free to charitably offer our skills to them. This will be vastly easier to do without health insurance bureaucrats dictating our rates while wasting our time filling out their paperwork.

Most importantly, we must not seek out or surrender to government control (licensing) over our precious and unique field. This would be a betrayal of our students, who have sought us out precisely because we are outside the mainstream. After all, Yoga is ultimately about freedom. How can we represent that freedom if we allow ourselves to be co-opted by an oppressive system?

How then do we reach all the patients and doctors within mainstream healthcare who desperately need our skills? My answer is that we already are.

All across the world, we Yoga educators are sharing our vital work in every area of healthcare delivery by virtue of what we do best: connecting with people. This sharing will only grow exponentially as more doctors, nurses, administrators, and business people become our students, transform their lives, and advocate on our behalf. If we continue to take a strong stand for our own freedom as educators, we can have nothing but a positive influence on everyone. This is especially true for those working and being treated within mainstream healthcare, whose freedoms have been severely eroded by the destructive aspects of a system that’s forgotten to honor above all else the practitioner-patient relationship.

Is some form of government regulation of our field inevitable? Perhaps we can't avoid it forever, but consider this: would you rather be answerable to the authorities as a healthcare provider, or as an educator?

Lastly, committing ourselves to the educational/academic model reveals perhaps the most important area we should be pursuing: the institution of undergraduate and graduate Yoga training programs at the university level. There is no reason on earth why serious students shouldn't be able to acquire bachelor's, master's or doctorate-level training in any and all aspects of Yoga. A university-based Yoga program would unite in an unprecedented way many existing departments: anatomy, kinesiology, physiology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, religion, Sanskrit, to name just a handful. The majority of the necessary resources are already there. All that's missing is a staff of experienced Yoga teachers to design and administer the Yoga training.

Think of what a valuable resource a full-blown Department of Yoga would be to a university! Students, teachers, and administrators in every department would benefit from the availability of ongoing, high-level, campus-based Yoga training. If we really want to be more accepted by doctors, there is no better way than to teach them Yoga while they're still in medical school.

I guarantee that the first university with the vision to create a degree program in Yoga would be deluged by applications from highly motivated, deeply-committed students. It's a cherished dream of mine to see this happen in my lifetime—perhaps soon enough for my younger sons to take advantage of it.

This brief piece does not permit me to explore all the implications of my view, and I am well aware there are a great many (including what the “T” in IAYT might be changed to). I sincerely hope a lively dialogue will emerge as you consider the possibility of re-identifying yourself as what you truly are: a Yoga educator. I'd love to hear from you.

In closing, I salute the leadership of IAYT for their enlightened stewardship of our field, and for their open-mindedness in allowing my ideas to appear in their journal. The fact that you are reading this is ample evidence of their commitment to a truly open dialogue, and I am deeply honored that they have welcomed me into this forum.

Leslie Kaminoff is the founder of the Breathing Project, a nonprofit educational corporation in New York City dedicated to the teaching of individualized, breath-centered Yoga practice. He is also the author of the book Yoga Anatomy.

The Student-Teacher Relationship: Opening the Heart of Compassion

By Sonia Osorio

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“I used to ask my teacher Jamgon Kongtrul every day to help me with my meditation practice. He was willing to talk to me but was usually quite brief, and he kept on saying the same thing, which was, ‘Keep going, everything’s OK.’ Finally I got really frustrated and developed fantastic doubt and resentment. I thought maybe I’d been cheated, and maybe they had just set me up as a tulku [reincarnate lama] when I actually wasn’t, and maybe the whole thing around me was hoo-ha. I thought maybe I should just be an ordinary person, ask his help, and he might tell me more of the truth. I felt there were a lot of barriers because of my title, my honor, and I should ask him again about that. I was so worked up.... And I said to Jamgon Kongtrul, ‘Maybe I am not the great person you expected me to be, I’m so ordinary and I have those thoughts, and it doesn’t seem to make much sense, me practicing.’

“Jamgon Kongtrul seemed to be quite startled at that.... And he said, ‘Do you have devotion to me – do you love me?’ And the whole thing turned my concepts completely upside-down. I realized that I was regarding his teaching as merchandise and had never realized his teaching was the gift of love. I burst into tears, ran out of the room, and cried in the woods.”

- From Collected Vajra Assemblies, Vol. 1. Halifax: Vajradhatu Publications © Diana J. Mukpo.

I, too, found tears coming to my eyes when I read this story about Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder of the Shambhala Buddhist tradition, and his teacher. It echoed my own doubts in terms of myself as a student, of the teachings that I had been receiving, and of my own capacity to become a teacher. I knew that in its deepest expression, teaching is never a commodity, but rather an exchange of energy, wisdom and skill. Up until that point, however, it had never struck me that teaching is also an expression of love - love for the teachings, love between a student and teacher, love for oneself in the expression of the teachings. It was then that the student-teacher relationship took on a deeper meaning for me and I understood with my heart what was being offered to me, and that the work of a teacher is simply to touch the student’s heart, allowing it to open so that others may know what is already within them.

According to Buddhist tradition to find a solid foundation for relationships (in this case, between a student and teacher), we need to consider what we most value in our connection with someone we care about. What are the moments in a relationship that we most cherish? It may be the understanding, or the feeling of being heard or seen, but ultimately, it is the sense that we are seen and understood - and yes, loved - for who we are and for where we are in our experience and on our path. In such moments, we become more connected to ourselves and to another human being, ultimately understanding the interconnectedness of all things.

This connection is about something we trust (the practice, teachings), through someone we trust (the teacher) - and it is absolutely integral to the student-teacher relationship. For this to

happen, however, the aspects of caring, compassion and love must become conscious and must be used responsibly. It is this that will sustain us and offer us insight in periods of doubt, questioning or conflict.

Two phrases remain embedded in my mind, offered to me by one of my own teachers, during that period when I was questioning my practice and my path: “Does the practice still touch your heart? Would you teach it to someone you love?” So long as I am able to sincerely answer yes to both of these questions, I know that my work as both a teacher and student is not yet done. There is still more in me to be drawn out, more in the teaching to draw from, and something still touches me deeply in others.

“The word ‘educate’ comes for the Latin *educare*, which means ‘to draw out’,” states Constance Buck, PhD, Academic Dean at Southwestern College, in Santa Fe, an institute dedicated to experiential teaching counseling, psychology and bodywork. “When we educate, we draw out from within the student what’s already there. That’s the basis of any good relationship.”

The word relationship is key here. To be in relationship requires both respect and humility. There’s a humbleness required of the student, where they must enter the relationship as an empty vessel, to use a Buddhist term, empty of preconceptions and ideas of what they believe they know or should be learning, and allowing themselves to be filled with the knowledge and wisdom being presented to them. That’s easier said than done, to be sure. It presumes integrity and clarity on the part of the teacher and total trust on the part of the student. In this sense, the student-teacher relationship is initially based in a perceived power or knowledge differential between a student and a teacher, which must always be recognized and respected, where one person goes to another to learn or to be informed of something that they don’t yet understand or are not experts in. This, however, does not mean that one has power over another.

“To assume that I know and that you don’t is really only part of the picture,” states Buck. “I may know a skill that you don’t and I may be able to teach you how to use your hands on a person’s body, but that doesn’t mean that the relationship needs to be based on notions of domination and submission because that will eventually lead to problems between the two parties.”

The more students and teachers are open to one another, the greater the potential is to encounter obstacles that stand in the way of openness. These obstacles can be about perceived differences in power or roles, or arise from our habituated patterns that we’ve developed to deal with painful circumstances in our past. True learning can only happen when we become conscious of the ways we shut ourselves off from truly relating to one another – and to life. To avoid closing off, we have to dismantle our stories about the roles of teacher and student, and then lift the veil off what we think we’re learning. Though this may be transformational, it is far from magical – it is, in fact, often quite raw and yet simultaneously quite liberating.

“I have no interest in keeping people in a submissive attitude or in letting them see bodywork or therapy as something magical just because it opens our capacity for deep feeling states,” says Buck. “A teacher has to help the student learn how to be very skillful in these feelings states and in their application of connecting to another human being. I can teach [technique], but as a teacher what I’m much more interested in doing is pulling out an art and a truth: that human

beings inherently know how [to relate to each other]. So, if I'm teaching massage, what I know to be true and what I want to teach is that touch is a fundamental experience. Human beings wouldn't have survived as a species if we hadn't been touched. It's our connection to one another, to this life, and when we truly feel this, we're truly alive."

Waking Up to Ourselves

The teacher knows something which the student does not yet know, but the orientation and skill of a teacher is of one who stands in a place of knowing - not just the subject matter at-hand, but also that they are awakening a person to their own potential. A teacher's fundamental role is to simply allow another person to experience themselves as mastering something, actualizing themselves - and we need to be very honest and continually vigilant about that.

"Instruction should always be moving the student in the direction of an internal reference point," says yoga teacher Donna Farhi in her book *Understanding the Teacher-Student Relationship* (Rodmell Press, 2006). "I am not interested in the student's ability to be obedient to instruction, but rather in his ability to inquire into the meaning and relevance of an instruction for him."

Buddhist teacher and author Ken McLeod (*Wake Up to Your Life*; Harper Collins, 2001) outlines four criteria in spiritual work, which could be used relative to any student-teacher relationship. These are: power (the ability to do something versus having power-over), ecstasy (the ability to open), insight (the ability to see into), and compassion (the ability to let go). He further states that the teacher has three responsibilities: to show the student what being awake means, which they do through their own actions and various other means; to teach and train the student in the techniques that they'll need; and to point out what's getting in the way of their awakening. Ultimately, the role of both the teacher and student converge in one task: to remain present and awake for the work at-hand, and to bring their own unique talents to bear in that process.

Teaching should create an awakening inside us, an awakening to our own capacity: to know, to surrender, to give and receive - to know the difference between reacting and acting in a way that the situation requires. Most importantly, teaching should serve to awaken something inside of us, to (re)connect us to ourselves, to our bodies and to this world.

"How awake are we to the fact that this other person, whom we call a student, just needs a field to come into and experience their inherent capacity and skill for themselves?" asks Buck. "The goal of teaching is to wake that up - and then there's a skill that's an overlay to that. If the skill is massage, then what I teach you is a manual skill, and at that level, I do perhaps know something that you don't know. But all the rest is inside us."

Buck sees teaching this aspect of connection, or interconnection, as a refinement that enables a person to open to something they haven't learned yet: to be attuned to the inner state of another and to their own inner state simultaneously. "Their humanity and their capacity for compassion, and their desire to become a teacher, a therapist, or a counselor. What we're teaching is about refining our capacity to be sensitive to another's state by being continually vigilant of our own."

Teaching as Transformation

What teachers and students ultimately engage in is in developing compassion for one another - and by extension to all living beings. To teach is to look for the highest expression within a student. Just as when we work with someone who's injured, tense or ill, we look for the healthiest and most vital expression of who they are or can be.

“We attempt through whatever understanding we have gained from our own experience, to act as ushers for the student’s fiery process of transmutation,” states Farhi. “It is our task [as teachers] to ensure a safe and effective context for this process to occur, using skillful means to ignite and sustain the fires of transformation, and providing ongoing support and recognition of the student’s intrinsic wholeness, regardless of where they are in the journey. Perhaps this last is most important of all, because when we feel truly seen and recognized we experience profound healing.”

“The attitude that all of who I am is already there, and that I can cultivate an environment where this can emerge is what teaching and learning are all about,” says Buck. “The experience of being with a teacher who hands that capacity back to you is exciting and transformational.”

It is this sincere commitment, first to our own and then to another’s process of transformation, that is the hallmark of a nourishing student-teacher relationship. It is also the paradox: we come to a point where we can no longer do this alone and we seek a teacher; then we come to a point where we absolutely must do this alone. These are not fixed points, however. They are always shifting, sometimes bringing us more to working in concert, sometimes taking us to where we must work on our own. It is in this continual flux that the student-teacher relationship expresses itself best, where we are at times the teacher, at times seeking one, and forever a student – ever-open to exploration and humble in the face of what we do not yet know.

At that point, teaching and learning become part of a much more skillful and compassionate transformation, in the real meaning of compassion, which is to be with someone fully and completely, regardless of what is arising. It means that we are no longer identified with the role of a teacher as someone who has power-over someone, but more as someone who can help us connect to our own power for change and guide us through a territory where they, too, have been. In this way, the roles of teacher and student become secondary to that experience of deep human connection.

For this process to occur, states Farhi, healthy boundaries need to be established and sustained by both student and teacher. “The teacher acts to uphold a safe and sacred container in which the process can occur,” she states. “In the same way that discipline limits in order to liberate, containment helps us to narrow our focus so we can gather and concentrate our energy toward a singular purpose.” While Farhi says that it is ultimately the teacher’s responsibility to maintain clear boundaries, she also believes that transgression of these boundaries would occur much less frequently if students were more aware of and clear within themselves about what constitutes healthy boundaries. So once again, we return full-circle to the joint responsibility that’s inherent in the student-teacher relationship.

Beyond Money-Making

We may think that we enter a teacher-training to become a teacher - whether working one-on-one with individuals or teaching to groups – but that’s often the least of it. There are a lot more subtle things going on, many of which have to do with healing of our own wounds – and we generally move towards a profession that will heal us or awaken the parts of us that have been numb for far too long – that is what the teacher has to know and understand. Teachers are facilitators, individuals who have had an experience that a student may not yet have had, but one which the student is totally able to experience herself. We teach how to break down the barriers to that experience, how to work with what comes up when stories about who we think we are crumble, and ultimately how to hold and guide another – student or client - through his or her own experience.

“Making money is certainly why people may enter some schools or training and there’s a reality to that,” states Buck. “But as educators we also have to understand that people need access to new roles, other than how society tells us we should be. The other person must be facilitated, must be embraced, in the same way that the person who’s teaching was embraced and facilitated by another. It’s a lineage. It’s also a respect for wisdom and elders that we’ve lost in our culture. I’ve been facilitated by people who not only had great wisdom, but who also knew and understood that their responsibility was to impart their knowledge so that it could continue when they were no longer here. That is indigenous in the true meaning of the word: ‘to be born from within’. As teachers, we’re making it possible for whatever it is that we’re teaching to be born within another in their own unique way.”

This whole subtle dynamic is not always stated as people enter a formal training because it’s not always understood, even by those who teach. People go into a training wanting to learn a skill that’s marketable, and sometimes neither those learning nor those teaching understand what it is that they might be putting out on the market.

“My commitment is to finding the teacher in the student – and I don’t own that role,” emphasizes Buck. “We’re into ownership and possession in our society. I own something and you’re paying me to get it. This is particularly true of people who develop their own methods that are touted as so unique, creative and unbelievably new. There are many people who will sell those roles of teacher because this is a consumer culture, and massage and healing professions are not immune to that.”

The Threat of Change

Every time we open a new book, or take or offer a new training, or move deeper into ourselves, or into the student-teacher relationship (or any relationship, for that matter), we’re confronting a place of “not-knowing”. For some, this can be intimidating or humbling, exciting or terrifying. But, the often unspoken aspect of this place of not-knowing is that it is threatening, to who we are and all that we thought we knew. At a very primal level, this is perceived as a very dangerous place because we are, in fact, approaching the notion of dying, even as we are primed to birth or open to something new.

“Not-knowing can threaten our survival,” says Buck. “Here, I don’t separate the student-teacher; it’s just about being human. It’s annihilation anxiety. At a psychological level, we

actually evoke that part of our nervous system that perceives the person in front of us as dangerous, even if they're not. The reflex is real, but the story about it comes from our wounding and it's a distortion of perception. In teaching, we're asking people to go into the unknown and to face all that this implies. As teachers, we have to understand that this is happening in both parties - and we have to especially be conscious of that in ourselves."

Any teaching is always an experiential education, where the person is taken into a world where anything can happen, where you put people in motion, in relationship to their bodies, to themselves and to others. Usually what emerges is that, even though on the surface we're learning a particular skill, there's a place where we don't know what's going to happen next. We sometimes forget that. The teacher, because of the familiarity that they have with world that they're trying to impart - above and beyond the technique - has an easier time in that place of not-knowing.

"It's an actual part of the nervous system, called mirror neurons," explains Buck. "It's a bridge between that place where your subjectivity and my subjectivity connect. We're picking up subtle queues - facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice - all the time, and what we don't like to admit, or know how to admit, is that we're on the look-out for potential danger: Are you a threat? Will you kill me - or the idea that I have of me? These subtle cues are hardwired into us, but we can also awaken to the fact that these mirror neurons give us a powerful amount of information and potential to connect to one another in ways that are healthy, nurturing and life-supporting as well."

In many ways, the work of teaching is to make this survival-action reflex conscious and work with it in a life-affirming way, where our capacity for attunement to another person - whether in counseling, teaching, or any profession or relationship - becomes valuable: that the other is just as important as I, instead of threatening to me. All that a teacher in this situation is doing is allowing a person to experience who they already are by allowing them to drop the idea of who they think they need to be. As we do this, we become less fearful of what is happening and more open to change.

"Students and teachers have these two forces at work: an embryonic sense of caring, commitment, and love that wants to blossom, and the imprisoning weight of our past fears, anxieties, and hurts," states Robert P. Craig in his essay on the student-teacher relationship from a Buddhist perspective (Clearing House, 1996). "If either side of a student's or teacher's nature is emphasized to the exclusion of the other, that person cannot move forward in relationship in any meaningful way... The relationship between a student and teacher can help free both from hidden entanglements by allowing each person to see exactly how and where he or she is stuck... The difficulties we have with intimacy, caring, and compassion become not so much obstacles as an integral part of love's path."

"We can think this intellectually and believe it's what we're doing, but on a more unconscious level, we're often threatened by this deeper shift in the relationship," states Buck. "That's because we live in a culture that's all about resources and access to those resources and domination over them. If that's the unconscious concern, then I will put you, as a student, in a position that's slightly inferior, less informed, or even more ignorant than or submissive to me."

And that can be very subtle without any intention to harm, but it can compromise the full expression of both the student and the teacher. So, I have to continually examine what my role is as a teacher, and what I believe about myself and others in that role.”

Moving Into Mentoring

When that world of who a student really is, begins to open up, it’s both extremely exciting but also hugely threatening – and this is true not only in the learning but also in the teaching. If the teacher can become aware of this dynamic, then we move towards inclusion and mentoring.

“When I teach, I’m bringing the student into the role of teacher,” says Buck. “I’m showing them what a teacher is by letting them experience it for themselves, versus having to get it or take it from me; so it’s less about imposing and more about offering and opening. I am, in effect, allowing them to take my job. At that point, it’s a mentoring relationship. I know that this person knows just as much as I do, but they just don’t know it yet. My attempt in teaching at this stage is to work my way out of a job. Do I, as a teacher, facilitate you into becoming a peer to me? Is that my bottom-line value? If I’m teaching you the skills in such a deep way that when it’s my time to move over, there’s someone there who truly knows and understand how to do this, then I’ve moved into a mentoring role. That has to be a value that comes from the heart.”

As we learn how to be in relationship with one another in a way that supports all life, we perceive less threats and see through dichotomies. At this stage, we move into a relationship of equality, or “peership” as Buck says, where we value the “other”, not as someone separate or threatening, but as ourselves. I teach you as I learn from you and learn from you as I teach you. To have such boundaries blur, however, requires a deep initial respect for boundaries and limits, then a dropping of them to open to something limitless.

A teacher is a student first and foremost and we must never forget that. The whole relationship between student and teacher has to do with leveling the disparity between a person who knows and one who doesn’t. To get there, the student has to drop what they think they know and open to what they can – and do – truly know. The teacher, meanwhile, has to remain open to the ever-present possibility of learning something new about themselves, about another, or from the teachings themselves. Then, both parties can enter a space where they can become more fully who they are. Here, we become mentors to one another. This is true relationship - with one’s teacher, with one’s students, and with one another. Then, the true teachings begin to touch us - and others - through our work, with our words, and from our hearts.

Teaching Principles

By Richard Freeman

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While these principles were originally presented to yoga teachers, the spirit of them can easily be applied to any teaching practice.

- To be a good teacher you must be an eager, humble, inquisitive student.
- Teaching is rendering service. It is much like parenting.

- Prepare students so that they have good listening and learning skills. They must learn to lay aside their presuppositions and ways of doing things. Genuine yoga [teaching] begins when students have respect, desire and are completely present. The transmission is one of relationship. Of course the teacher has had this attitude in relation to their teachers. Students must have this attitude even if other students are teaching. Otherwise, without humility and respect, yoga [teaching] becomes a farce.
- Just attitude and eager respect can suspend citta vritti [“fluctuations of the mind” – i.e. distractions and stories]. It is not hard. It is not easy. If someone you love is there, you don’t even need technique.
- Be truly helpful. Do not try to impress. Do not show off.
- Don’t be self-righteous. Don’t lay a “trip” on the student.
- Do not be seductive and flirtatious with students. And do not respond to seductive and flirtatious students.
- Beware using flattery or ego-empowering techniques. They might be useful as skillful-means with certain students on rare occasions, yet they easily backfire. Puffing up the egos of neophyte students and teachers is the business of cults and extends the power of the teacher irresistibly.
- It can take many years of study before one is burning with intensity to know the truth.
- Allow the student to discover the internal and full action of a pose [or technique].
- Be kind and patient. That person is you.
- Look at the whole pose. Breathe the pose.
- Know the vinyasa [flow] of the pose. Not only what poses might proceed or follow, but what sequences of movement occur within the pose as it matures.
- Get feedback. Find out if the message got through for real. Students are always reluctant to disappoint an insecure teacher.
- Watch the student’s feet, hands, face, breath, eyes, lips and overall action.
- Look before you leap. Don’t be cavalier and arrogant by fixing what is not broken.
- Know when anger is arising in the student or in yourself. Be aware of your own and the other’s mind-state.
- Respect the space and internal process of yoga students. Invading someone’s sacred space can be offensive and violent.
- Teaching is constant mindfulness practice in thought, word and posture.
- Always practice refined alignment in your own body as you adjust another.
- Teach directly out of your own experience, in the moment. Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know.” Know when to refer problems to someone with more experience.
- Beware of flattery. Do not praise yourself. Be satisfied being the servant of a servant.
- Practice asana as mudra. [Practice teaching as sacred space where creative energy can flow].
- Practice and teach Bhava, or ecstatic feeling, rather than technique.
- Teach what you know. Do not teach what you don’t know.

References:

Beck CJ. Nothing Special: Living Zen. Harper-Collins, 1993.

Beck CJ. Nothing Special: Living Zen. Harper-Collins, 1993.

Craig R. The Face We Put On: Carl Jung for Teachers. Clearing House, 1994.

APPENDIX I

WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY ON ETHICS

California Yoga teachers Association code of conduct
<http://www.rickross.com/reference/3ho/3ho52.html>

Shula Day-Savage: statement with respect to ethics
<http://shulamit8.tripod.com/id51.htm>

The Case against Swami Rama: by Peter Rutter:
http://books.google.ca/books?id=iekDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA60&lpg=PA60&dq=peter+rutter+ethics+of+yoga&source=bl&ots=00x07uEsAI&sig=vnrsHRvjDm7NNHaNukUF7dEoXd8&hl=en&ei=4qHyTJyGHoT6lwFM-NCLDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=peter%20rutter%20ethics%20of%20yoga&f=false

William Ury: The walk from "no" to "yes"

http://www.ted.com/talks/william_ury.html

Canadian Nurses Association
http://www.cna-aicc.ca/CNA/practice/ethics/code/default_e.aspx

Natural Health Practitioners of Canada
<http://www.nhpcanada.org/about-us/code-of-ethics/>

Council for Healing
<http://councilforhealing.org/Ethics.html>

RECOMMENDED READING ON ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS:

- *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power - Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers and Others - Betray Women's Trust*, by Peter Rutter
- *The Ethics of Touch* by Ben Benjamin and Cherie Sohlen-Moe
- *Teaching Yoga: Exploring the Teacher-Student Relationship* by Donna Farhi
- *The Ethics of Caring: Honoring the Web of Life in Our Professional Healing Relationships* by Kylea Taylor

- *The Educated Heart: Professional Guidelines for Massage Therapists, Bodyworkers, and Movement Therapies* by Nina McIntosh
- *Sex, Power, & Boundaries: Understanding & Preventing Sexual Harassment* by Peter Rutter
- *Yoga Posture Adjustments and Assisting: An Insightful Guide for Yoga Teachers and Students* by Stephanie Pappas