

"Mandala Time" -Exploring the Mandala of the Five Families with Young Children

- Ellen Booth Church

"Survival of humanity depends on educating the hearts of children." His Holiness the Dalai Lama

How to do we educate the hearts of children? It all begins in the circle ... a circle of children. Teachers of young children know that their day starts with the gathering of children's interests and energies, creating a community for collective sharing and learning that lasts throughout the day. This traditional part of every early childhood classroom is a modern interpretation of ancient "circles" that have joined people together in heart, song and mind for centuries. Throughout history, the circle has been used by many cultures as a place to share ideas on equal ground through conversation, story, dance, and song. Given this rich history, it's no wonder that circle time has traditionally been an essential element of learning for young children. The circle or mandala is also an essential element of Vajrayana Buddhism.

This paper is designed to offer a rationale for this bringing the Mandala of the Five Families to classes with young children. It is based on Vajrayana teachings, the work of Lama Tsultrim Allione and current studies in brain development, social and emotional learning and mindfulness in young children. The paper will also offer a suggested structure for classes and content.

Mandala Time

From this common ground of "circle time", teachers of Tibetan Buddhism can expand this concept to create "mandala time" with children.

The circle or Mandala is a central element of Vajrayana Buddhism. In her CD set The Mandala of the Enlightened Feminine, Lama Tsultrim Allione explains the mandala

and her first introduction to it in Nepal... *“The meaning of the word “Mandala” in Sanskrit is sacred circle and in Tibetan it’s kilcore which means the center and what moves around it or what spirals around it. The Mandala is the basic structure of enlightenment in the Tantric tradition. The Mandala is the architecture of enlightened experience. It is both the map for the transformation of encumbered emotional patterns into wisdom and a visual expression of the enlightened dimension. I began to discover that each part of this center and the four directions had certain meanings and represented the transformation of certain mind states into wisdom. And then I began to do practices that actually involved visualizing the Mandala, identifying with it and with various different energies connected these five directions, the center and the four.”* [Mandala of the Enlightened Feminine by Lama Tsultrim Allione -Sounds True]

The mandala “road map” of awareness is an excellent template to share with young children. Children learn first through symbols and experience. They notice shapes and colors in their environment, they study signs and symbols to make sense of the world around them...all long before they can read or write. By presenting the mandala to young children we are “speaking their language” of observation and exploration and providing them with concrete experiences with these essential aspects of personality.

In his book, Secret of the Vajra World, Reginald Ray says this about the mandala, *In the Vajrayana, the most important symbolic language is that of the mandala. While the symbolism of the mandala is schematic in the telling, it is essential to realize that what it points to can only be discovered when the mind is free from theory. Nevertheless, the theory of the mandala can sensitize us to that which cannot be spoken and cannot be thought.* [Secret of the Vajra World by Dr. Reginald Ray (Shambhala) 2002]

This quality of *the mind free from theory* is “homebase” to young children. They live with beginners mind and explore images, elements and concepts without expectation or preconception. Everything is new. Everything is magical and often surprising. In her instruction of the gaze in the Prajnaparamita meditation, Lama Tsultrim often uses the suggestion to “be like a young child seeing a temple for the first time.”...with the look of open amazement. Take a walk with a young child and you will find that a leaf, a bug, a stick can open an entire world of amazement. Everything is filled with wonder.

His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche once said:

“Whatever perceptions arise, you should be like a little child going into a beautifully decorated temple; he looks, but grasping does not enter into his perception at all. You leave everything fresh, natural, vivid and unspoiled. When you leave each thing in its own state, then its shape doesn’t change, its color doesn’t fade and its glow does not disappear. Whatever appears is unstained by any grasping, so then all that you perceive arises as the naked wisdom of Rigpa, which is the indivisibility of luminosity and emptiness.” [quote found on <http://www.viewonbuddhism.org/dharma-quotes-quotations-buddhist/buddha-nature.htm>]

As teachers, we can support this innate sense of wonder in children with the Five Family Mandala. While we might not be teaching Rigpa or luminous emptiness directly, we can provide children with the tools that invite to experience awareness in with their own open amazement.

The mandala is part of the Tantra teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism. The rich experiential quality of tantra reflects what is called “best teaching practices” in early childhood. Studies show that young children learn best when actively involved with multi-sensory, whole child experiences. (See Multi-Sensory Learning below) Young children love to play pretend, to express themselves with sound and color and movement. These key aspects of childhood are also central to tantric meditation.

Lama Tsultrim wrote, *Tantra uses the creative act of visualization, sound and mudra to engage our whole being in the process of meditation. So it's a very complete engagement of all aspects of our being. In a way we could say that the deities are archetypes of enlightenment. They trigger, like an archetype, certain internal experiences. If we were to simply describe those experiences in words we wouldn't experience the same effect as we do when we visualize and embody those qualities.*

Young children learn best when they can identify with some aspect of what they are learning and experiencing. The visualization and embodiment of mandala meditation is a natural “doorway” to Buddhist study for young children.

***“Educating the mind without educating the heart
is no education at all.”***

- Aristotle

Why we need Mandala Time with children.

The education world is starting to look more closely at the need for a focus on social emotional learning. Teachers of children as young as two and three years old, are seeing children with difficulties dealing with emotions and social interactions. Over the last 10+ years children's education has been focus mostly on cognitive learning and preparations for tests. In the process, the basics of childhood learning such as outdoor play in nature, artistic exploration, dramatic play and open-ended thinking have taken a back seat to “book knowledge”. It isn't working. Schools are now looking towards mindfulness programs, yoga and meditation to help balance the educational focus and meet the needs of the whole child. The climate for introducing mandala work right now is both receptive and curious.

The Dalai Lama himself spoke beautifully about this at a recent Heart-Mind Summit created by the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education. Heartmind online offered

this insightful review of his talk. *The Dalai Lama spoke about the importance of educating the hearts of children. "Our care for others is rich and powerful when we are young. We see no differences between those around us and ourselves. We care for others as we would care for ourselves." He believes that somewhere down the line as we go through school and enter adulthood we lose this innate sense of compassion. He wonders why. He argues that in the past, this perhaps made sense. Practically, it may have once been wise to focus on yourself rather than others as a matter of self-preservation. But the Dalai Lama believes that this time has passed. Today, not only is it unnecessary to think only of yourself – we don't face the same day-to-day dangers we once did – but it is imperative that we build a deep caring for others."*

The Dalai Lama says this begins at home and in the schools. He believes parents and educators have a unique ability to nurture the positive human qualities children are born with – affection, sense of community, a sense of social responsibility.

He knows it can't be done with a flip of a switch, but the Dalai Lama suggests that if even one person takes this message of "educating the heart" into his or her everyday life, then that one person can turn into 10, then into 100 and so on. He believes we all have the power to start this ripple effect. The Dalai Lama paints a powerful picture when he says this is not just a well-intentioned ideal. It is the very essence of the "survival of humanity". [<http://dalailamacenter.org/learn/dalai-lama-survival-humanity-depends-educating-hearts-children>]

Social Emotional Learning and the Young Brain

If you have played with a young child, it can feel like you can actually see the brain at work! Young children are constantly observing the world around them, interacting with it and developing understandings about themselves and others. Interestingly, the creative activities of art, music, dramatic play and nature study that early childhood teachers have offered for years are now being supported with brain research. We are finding that using the hands and fingers in a finger-play song (mudra) such as The Itsy Bitsy Spider actually stimulate the same parts of the brain we need to learn how to read. We have learned that playing pretend (visualization and embodiment) builds the cognitive flexibility and self-awareness of emotions and

personality. [Pretend Play and Brain Growth, The Link to Learning and Academic Success from The Gesell Institute of Child Development] Just as brain studies of meditators have supported the importance of meditation for human functioning, these current brain studies and many others support the importance of play and interaction for young children.

Harvard University pediatrician, Dr. Jack Shonkoff says, “**Brains are built, not born.**” He goes on to explain that, “*The brain is one of the only organs not fully developed at birth. Most of the cells are there, but the connections – the wiring that forms the architecture is not. **These connections develop in early childhood through play-based activities and social interaction.** A child’s interactions with the world determine how these connections (wiring) are formed, providing either a strong or weak foundation for all future health and learning.*”

[<http://first2000days.org/first-2000-days/#.Vulzihhgvdw>]

Through the varied activities provided in “Mandala Time” session’s children are encouraged to build synaptic connections through exploration and interaction. But it is not all about the brain. It is about the heart as well.

Hearts and Minds Together

In Tibetan Buddhism the word “bodhicitta” can be defined as the awakened heart mind. Lama Tsultrim’s teachings on Mahayana once said, “*Mahayana Buddhism says to generate the heart of compassion called bodhicitta. Bodhi means awake, and citta means heart-mind, which is said to center itself in our heart chakra. We must develop bodhicitta - which is the essence of enlightenment - for the benefit of all beings.*”

This way of looking at the mind and heart together is essential to teaching of young children. Studies show the importance of teaching minds and hearts together. The University of British Columbia's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) has conducted a 14-year study, which found:

- Children who develop social and emotional skills have better attitudes about themselves and others, and better social interactions.
- Children with strong social and emotional skills are less aggressive, can handle difficult emotions, and they have lower levels of emotional distress.
- We can successfully create conditions in schools, communities and families that build the capacity of children to recognize their emotions, to understand and empathize with others, and to make constructive choices
- We can foster positive human qualities such as compassion, empathy and confidence, and we can help children manage difficult emotions such as fear, hatred, anger, and anxiety.

FIVE DOMAINS OF HEART-MIND WELL-BEING

The study identified measures Heart-Mind well-being according to five positive human qualities, which are anchored in evidence-based research related to the social and emotional development of children.

- GETS ALONG WITH OTHERS - the ability to form positive and healthy relationships with peers and adults.
- COMPASSIONATE AND KIND - the ability to be aware of other people's emotions and a desire to help when a person is in need.
- SOLVES PROBLEMS PEACEFULLY - the ability to behave in a peaceful and respectful way in a variety of situations and relationships.
- SECURE AND CALM - the ability to take part in daily activities and approach new situations without being overwhelmed with worries, sadness or anxiety.
- ALERT AND ENGAGED - the ability to stay calm, focused and alert; to demonstrate self-control and to slow down and think before acting.

[<http://dalailamacenter.org/programs/heart-mind-index>]

If we look at these “positive human qualities” we can see how these parallel and support Tibetan Buddhist values of compassion, self-awareness and interaction

within the mandala teachings. We use the mandala to see ourselves and see others. As we introduce children to the elements, emotions and wisdoms of the five families we support the development of their own awakened heart mind.

In the introduction to my book "Getting to the Heart of Learning" (Gryphon House) I present the concept of the importance of social emotional learning connecting the heart and mind together:

All learning is social emotional learning. Children do not learn skills in isolation but through social connection and interconnection to the real world...their world. It is their curiosity about the world and others that stimulates their desire to learn and share what they have learned. We all learn best when we care about what we are learning and whom we are learning it with. Mind and hearts together...there is a direct line between the two. We think with our minds and learn with our hearts. And children do it best. They live their lives with their hearts and minds open and connected. From that union they develop into people who are balanced, happy and successful. [Getting to the Heart of Learning By Ellen Booth Church Gryphon House 2015]

Experiences within the Five Family Mandala create a safe container for children to explore their hearts and minds together. The activities and meditations offered in a Mandala Time class help children to understand the deeply shared roots of sangha from an early age. From the opening Intention setting to the shared Mandala Activities and Meditation to the ending with the Four Immeasurables... children will feel a sense of a community where they are seen, appreciated and respected. In an article in Tricycle magazine, Thich Nhat Hahn said, *If you have a supportive sangha, it's easy to nourish your bodhicitta, the seeds of enlightenment. If you don't have anyone who understands you, who encourages you in the practice of the living dharma, your desire to practice may wither. Your sangha—family, friends, and copractitioners—is the soil, and you are the seed. No matter how vigorous the seed is, if the soil does not provide nourishment, your seed will die. A good sangha is crucial for the practice. Please find a good sangha or help create one.- Thich Nhat Hanh, "The Fertile soil of Sangha"*

[<http://www.tricycle.com/insights/fertile-soil-sangha>]

EMPATHY

While young children are often considered too egocentric to develop empathy and compassion, studies are showing that young children are capable of expressing empathy and compassion. In a paper titled *The Development of Empathy* by Nicole M. McDonald & Daniel S. Messinger (University of Florida) said: *Early theorists suggested that young children were too egocentric or otherwise not cognitively able to experience empathy (Freud 1958; Piaget 1965). However, a multitude of studies have provided evidence that very young children are, in fact, capable of displaying a variety of rather sophisticated empathy related behaviors (Zahn-Waxler et al.1979; Zahn-Waxler et al.1992a; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1992b).*

In my 45 years of teaching young children I can say that many children have a deep sense of caring for others from a very young age. It might be a family member, a pet, or a character in a book...but it does exist. Context is necessary to explore empathy and compassion with young children. They can relate to a discussion about a character in a book or friend who is having a difficult time. This is where Mandala Time discussions can be so helpful to supporting children expressing their feelings and noticing the feelings of others. Sitting in the circle of Mandala Time children learn to listen to others, to use language to express their thoughts and feelings, and rest in community. These are all key skills that support the development of empathy.

In an article I wrote for Parent and Child Magazine I give an example of how children can express compassion and empathy:

On the playground, a few children gather around the teacher to talk about a friend who seems to be out of sorts. "Maybe Sophie is feeling sad because her mom had to go to the hospital," declares six-year-old Tyrone, demonstrating a mature level of awareness for a classmate's feelings. Five-year-old Regina suggests: "I missed my dad when he went away on a trip." Another small voice adds: "She could be scared too. It's

scary when someone goes away." The teacher Mr. Levine, asks: "What can we do to help? What would make you feel better if you were Sophie?"

Empathy-the ability to identify with and understand another person's feelings, situation, or motives-has its roots in discussions like this, which take place between a small group of "buddingly" aware children and a sensitive teacher. Mr. Levine is conscious of all the emotions involved in the conversation and careful not to try to "fix" the situation by telling the children what to do. He's also careful not to discount their feelings by suggesting that Sophie will feel better soon. By acknowledging children's feelings and emotions, he is demonstrating empathy without passing judgment. His message is clear: Emotions are welcome in this class and can be expressed and discussed freely. [<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/ages-stages-empathy>]

This approach to saying "all emotions are welcome here" correlates to tantra and the teachings of the mandala. In *Secret of the Vajra World* Reginald Ray offered this thought: *Esoteric Buddhism (Vajrayana): In this training, practitioners accept negative concepts and emotions and their sources and transmute them as enlightened wisdom and wisdom power. This approach is like transforming the poison of the tree into a medicinal potion. This is the path of tantra (esoteric continuum) that mainly emphasizes realizing and perfecting the union of wisdom and skillful means and accomplishing the goal of benefits for both oneself and others simultaneously.* [Secret of the Vajra World by Dr. Reginald Ray (Shambhala) 2002]

Multi-Sensory Learners

Young children are explorers and they use their sense to do it! Thus making Mandala Time a particularly appropriate avenue for introducing children to the beauty of mindfulness and awareness. In the early years children are multi-sensory in their approach to what interests and fascinates them. They use the main senses of *sight, sound* and *touch* as they explore the world around them. What fascinates them

most? Often it is “Nature” that children are starting to be curiously fascinated in. The elements of the Five Family Mandala (space, water, earth, fire and air) are all fascinating to children. Combine this with the fact that young children are moving out of the egocentric “me” stage into a greater interest in the diversity of the world around them and you have the perfect combination for Mandala Time.

Young children use their senses to “think” about their world and their feelings. Activities with the Mandala provide children with opportunities to listen and create sacred sound, visualize and see the world through the mandala lens and touch the world through sacred art. Some children are visually (sight) oriented while others have either an auditory (sound) or tactile (touch) propensity. Of course, many children use all three senses to explore the world. These sense are all essential for mastery of learning and life!

The Importance of Ritual

We all need ritual. Whether it is as simple as our personal daily rituals or the beautifully elaborate vajrayāna practice rituals, they all speak to our minds and hearts of awareness. The ritual of sharing activities, discussions and meditation within a Mandala Time session celebrates this important human need.

Rituals with young children help them navigate emotionally important interactions, events and transitions. Even simple daily rituals and routine can add depth and meaning to relationships and connections. Young children thrive when they know and understand the sequence of events in a class or event. Keeping a clear and repetitive sequence of the Mandala Time rituals helps children feel comfortable in the group and give them a sense of place and time. For example, starting your session with an Intention and ending with the Four Immeasurables supports children in feeling of successful “ownership” within the circle. The predictability and reliable emotional tone of Mandala Time rituals provides comfort to children and creates a safe place to manage and express feelings. Mandala time Songs and

movements encourage children to join in and express themselves as a member of the group/ sangha.

Lama Tsultrim Allione feels that Ritual is very important. In her interview **Elephant Bones** talked about the importance of ritual and the process of creating ritual with her children. *“This is something very close to my heart. Rituals break through the conscious mind and impact a subterranean layer of the psyche....In raising my children, I instituted ritual in the family around holidays or other important events. We regularly held family councils, where we used a talking stick and whoever held the stick could not be interrupted. We held council to mark significant meetings and departures, for example, when I left on pilgrimage to Tibet. We gathered, and I told the family why I was going and spoke personally to each of them. When I returned, we met again, and I relayed my journey, while they shared all that had occurred in my absence. For birthdays we created a ritual of lighting three candles. Before lighting each candle, each person spoke about the past year and the present moment and made affirmations for the future year. This simple act made for a more meaningful ceremony than the usual cake and candles alone.”*

[<http://www.inquiringmind.com/Articles/ElephantBones.html>]

In the Mandala Time sessions for each of the Five Families we can create ritual to work with the emotions, element, color and wisdom. These rituals will open the door to understanding that pure discussion or study cannot.

“Superheroes” and “Power Play” and Embodiment

In classrooms, superhero or power play can be a way for children to deal with their fears. Young children are at a stage when they are becoming aware of what they might call “bad people” in the world. Even if you limit things like newscasts and action movies, children are still exposed to violence in the world. When they participate in “super hero” or “tough guy” play they are trying out a feeling of power in both the role of fearsome villain and conquering hero. While it can be upsetting to see this sort of play, it’s important to remember that closely monitored dramatic

play in the classroom or home is a safe arena for children to “try on” these different characteristics and experience feelings of fear and strength.

For example, becoming a superhero in play can be part of children's quest for power in a world where they have very little. While we don't want children to engage in power play exclusively, it is important to recognize that acting out some of these magical powers is natural for young children.

How does this work with the Mandala Time concept? It is in Lama Tsultrim’s work with the Mandala that participants use *embodiment* as a means for experiencing both the encumbered and wisdom state of awareness. In her Mandala of the Enlightened Feminine CD she states: *“One of the main things that entered Buddhism with Tantra was the Mandala and then within the Mandala were various deities... You may have seen Tibetan scroll paintings with various kinds of figures on them. Some might be a peaceful Buddha, some might be a very strange looking creature with all kinds of heads and arms and some might be a dancing female figure. There are many, many forms of deities that occur within the Tibetan pantheon. And it’s important to understand that these entities, or these beings, are really representations of our own inner potential for enlightenment.... All the forms are symbolic of the transformation of obstructed patterns, of obstructed emotion into the innate potential for enlightenment. And the various forms, and symbols and accouterments of the deities have a significance as this representation of our own innate potential.”* [Mandala of the Enlightened Feminine by Lama Tsultrim Allione -Sounds True]

Perhaps the key words in this quote are “transformation” and “potential”. This is what children do in power play. They are experimenting with the transformation of a personality, an emotion or action and they experience the potential to be the “hero”. Guided meditations, dance movement, art and dramatic play are key elements of Mandala Time. These activities invite children to experience themselves transform into jnannasattavas-wisdom beings.

Creating “Mandala Time” Classes for Children and Families

***“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood,
for it alone is the
free expression of what is in a child’s
soul.”***

–Frederick Froebel, 1926, Father of Kindergarten

Suggestions for Creating Mandala Time Sessions

Mandala Time gatherings or classes can provide the opportunity for young children to explore their heart and mind through sensory activities with the elements, guided meditations, embodiment activities and the arts. As multi-sensory learners, children learn through exploration and embodiment. They use all of their sense to develop an understanding of themselves and the elements of the seen and unseen world. The Mandala of the Five Families provides the perfect educational, physical, emotional and spiritual architecture for children to explore their own psyche through play and reflection.

As Tibetan Buddhist teachers and parents we can use the structure of the mandala as a guide for creating Mandala Meditation Classes and activities for children. These class gatherings could be “Parent and Child classes” for the youngest children or “Children’s classes” for children over four years of age. In the “Parent and Child” classes the children who are three and younger would share the activities and time side by side with a treasured adult. Children who are four, five and six years old can meet with the teacher (or teachers) and explore activities in a small group.

The Mandala is Sacred Space

“Your sacred space is where you can find yourself again and again and again.” -

Joseph Campbell

A sense of space is an important aspect of all programs and class settings for young children. Studies have shown that the colors, space and arrangement of a room can have a strong impact on the children who inhabit the place. Early childhood educators know the importance of clear, uncluttered, visually attractive space that creates a sense of sanctity and safety for children. Mandala Time settings can use the structure and beauty of the mandala to create just this type of sacred space for children.

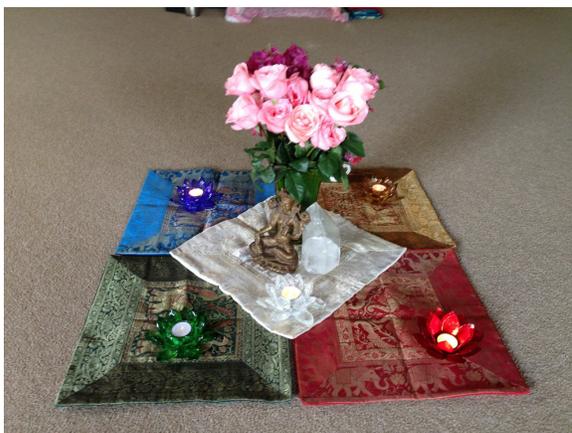
One suggestion is to create a central circular mandala for children to sit around. This encourages children to sit in a circle with a sense that no one is left out. A large round table cloth can serve as the “base” to create the center and four directions of the mandala. Cloth squares or triangles of the five colors can set upon the central cloth to create the mandala directions.

Here is one example using flowers for each section of the mandala.

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This example uses squares to create the center and four directions.



Candles (either electric or real) can be placed in each of the five directions and become a part of the intention setting ceremony. As the group studies the Mandala together the different objects that relate to the element of each section of the mandala can be added to the altar. Children can also collect and contribute stones

and other sacred items to the mandala. If any statues and/or thangkas of the Buddha are available, these can be added to create a sense of sacred space in the room.

Suggested Learning Structure

In a recent Lion's Roar article His Holiness the Dalai Lama talks about the importance of Buddhist centers becoming places of learning. He said, "It would be better if [Buddhist centers] were not only temples for worship, but centers of learning,"

Click here for the full article:

http://www.lionsroar.com/dalai-lama-urging/?utm_source=Lion%27s+Roar+Newsletter&utm_campaign=7daca857d0-LR+Weekly+Mar+14+2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1988ee44b2-7daca857d0-21261261&goal=0_1988ee44b2-7daca857d0-21261261

How do we do that? We offer programs for families and children! One of the best ways to structure a program is to provide a series of classes based on the Five Family Mandala.

"Mandala Time" Activities Sequence and Content

- *Exploring the Mandala*

The structure of the Mandala Activities can start with a focus on the concept of the Mandala. Children can be introduced to the many forms of mandalas from different cultures, in art and in nature. As part of this section children will experiment with creating mandalas with various art materials, nature walks and natural creations, and movement.

- *Meeting the Five Families*

Once children have a sense of the mandala and its structure and use, we can introduce them to the five families. The best way to do this is with guided meditations. Lama Tsultrim's guided meditation on meeting the Dakinis in the "Mandala of the Enlightened Feminine CD" set can serve as a guide for creating

this meditation. It would need to be shorter for young children but the beautiful process of embodiment through visualization is perfect for young children. These gatherings can also introduce the different Buddhas or Dakinis and what they represent.

- ***The Center and the Four Directions***

The next section of the Mandala Time class sequence can include a specific focus on each of the directions of the mandala. Starting in the center, the leader would introduce the specific qualities of each of the sections of the mandala. This would be offered over several weeks time so that children have an opportunity to explore the specific element, emotion, wisdom with the Arts. At the end of this piece, please find a chart of the attributes of the mandala. This can be used for creating activities for each of the five families.

- **Gifting**

Gifting is a traditional part of the Mandala study offered to adults. At the end of each “family study” the participants are given a gift to represent the family and element. In the past these have always included items that can be used to create an altar at home. For example, The Buddha Family gift is usually the five candles that will create the sacred “space” of the mandala. In the Vajra Family the gift is a blue glass that is used for the “water” offering. The Ratna Family gift is sometimes a plant or a sand based incense holder for “earth”. The fire gift for Padma Family is usually a box of matches with a symbol of the padma deity. The Karma family gift has been prayer flags to represent wind or wind chimes.

These gifts would have to be modified for young children but this is quite possible. For example the candleholders can have battery candles for safety and the fire gift could a “warm” glass red heart.

A Vajra Example.

- Water Changes: When children are exploring the East and the element of Water they can experiment with changing the changeable nature of water through exploring flow, blockage, heat, steam, and ice.

- Water Art: Children can also experience water by working with watercolors on wet and dry paper. Painting on frozen paper can provide an interesting new dimension for seeing how water changes.
- Water Field Trip: A field trip to a body of water could provide a wonderful opportunity to experience mirror-like wisdom.
- Circle Discussions: In early childhood there is a technique called The Magic Circle (a book by Gerry Dunne, Ph.D.) that creates a simple format for children to discuss the “tough stuff.” There are specific guidelines for creating a safe container for sharing as well as very focused “sentence starters” that can be used to get the discussion started. This technique can be perfectly adapted to the Mandala Time discussions.
- Seed Syllable Meditations: Simple, short meditations for children can be a part of each Mandala Time gathering. Children can learn to work with the sound of seed syllables as part of this section. The seed syllable for each family will be introduced and offered.
- Guided Meditations: Also short guided meditations for each of the five families will be offered in a similar way as the full mandala guided meditation. These too will be based on the guided mandala meditations of Lama Tsultrim Allione.
- Closing Ritual: At the end of each family study there would be a closing ritual for children to experience. They can dress in the colors, dance and “meet the wisdom being”, make an offering and receive their gift.

A Simple Class Ritual Structure

A predictable class structure helps children anticipate the class elements and feel comfortable in the session. There can be variety within the structure but a simple structure will create a sense of safety and knowing for children. Depending on the age of the children, you may want to have children enter the sacred mandala space in silence and find a seat in the circle. With young children it is best to keep the “circle time” short and varied. This will hold their attention. Switching to an Activity Time that includes art, science, nature will help children stay focused. Then ending with a return to the Mandala circle will create a predictable sequence.

Potential Mandala Time Class Sequence

- **Enter in Silence**
- **Start with an Intention**
- **Lighting the Candles Ritual** - short meditation using seed syllables
- **Discussion/Teaching**
- **Activity Time** - Art, science, nature, etc.
- **Return to the Circle (mandala)** - discuss the activity
- **Guided Meditation**
- **End with saying the Four Immeasurables for all beings**

The Five Family Mandala Attributes for Curriculum Planning

Central Location ~ BUDDHA Family

<u>Color:</u>	White body ~ blue light radiance
<u>Symbol:</u>	Wheel
<u>Element:</u>	Space/Ether
<u>Sense:</u>	Mind
<u>Body/Clothing Type:</u>	Soft, slightly plump relaxed body. Likes billowy soft clothing
<u>Season:</u>	Winter
<u>Time:</u>	No time of day=Totality of Everything
<u>Landscape:</u>	Big Sky Country, open expanses
<u>Shape:</u>	Dot, circle
<u>Seed Syllable:</u>	BAM (dakini) OM (Buddha)

Encumbered Pattern:

Confusion, deliberate ignorance, depression, procrastinating, nesting, giving up, spacing out, overly serious, waiting for things to be different, passivity, denial, forgetful, overly accommodating, immobilized

Worries: spaces out rather than worrying

Wisdom State: *Dharmadhatu*- All Encompassing Cognizance

The union of emptiness and compassion, the quality of openness and spaciousness, sky-like awareness of totality

In the EAST ~ VAJRA Family

Color: Blue body ~ white light radiance

Symbol: Vajra

Element: Water (All is not solid)

Sense Perception: Sight

Body/Clothing Type: Thin, hard body with eyes like watery mirrors. Likes simple lines and solid colors

Season: Late Autumn

Time: Dawn

Landscape: Rugged Mountains, icy rivers

Shape: circle

Seed Syllable: **HA** (dakini) **HUNG** (Buddha)

Encumbered Pattern:

Fear, sharpness, anger, covering all territory, excessive precision, over intellectualizing, physical coldness, austerity, over analyzing, convoluted logic, fear of emotional intimacy, need to be "right"

Worries: getting it right, knowing it all

Wisdom State: *Mirror-Like Wisdom*- self-reflection in all actions, reflecting what IS without judgment, seeing consciousness as a huge mirror...clear, vast with no self-clinging

In the SOUTH ~ RATNA Family

Color: Yellow body ~ golden light

Symbol: Jewel

Element: Earth

Sense: Smell and Taste

Body/Clothing Type: Large, generous statuesque. Loves bright colors, prints and big jewelry

Season: Early Autumn

Time: High Noon

Landscape: Jungle, Fertile Valleys

Shape: Square

Seed Syllable: **RI** (dakini) **TRAM** (Buddha)

Encumbered Pattern:

Pride, invasiveness, insisting on love and nurturance, consuming hunger, need to be noticed, overbearing, self pity, name dropping, consumerism, feelings of inadequacy covered with arrogance and bravado.

Worries: about poverty (nothing is ever enough)

Wisdom State: *Wisdom of Equanimity* ~ the fundamental quality of equality.

Enriching Presence, a good sense of humor. A deep, fulfilling relationship with the earth...No need for anything else

In the WEST ~ PADMA Family

Color: Ruby red

Symbol: Lotus

Element: FIRE

Sense: Hearing

Body/Clothing Type: Perfectly proportioned body, balanced, athletic or seductive. Likes soft or seductive clothing

Season: Spring

Time: Dusk, Sunset

Landscape: Soft, rolling hills, Mossy glens

Shape: Upward pointing Triangle

Seed Syllable: **NI** (dakini) **HRI** (Buddha)

Encumbered Pattern:

Craving, compulsive seduction, desire for union, suction, sense of insignificance which one thinks would disappear if the "right person/object" could be magnetized, misused empathic intensity. Manipulating others (and events) to serve the ego, needing others feedback to exist

Worries: boredom, stability, and rejection

Wisdom State: *Discriminating Awareness Wisdom* ~ Magnetic without manipulation, self-contained, seeing the fine points of things, intuitive, good communicator, balanced, able to make appropriate judgments for the good of all

In the NORTH ~ KARMA Family

Color: Green

Symbol: Sword

Element: AIR

Chakra: Throat

Sense: Touch

Body/Clothing Type: Wispy, thin, speedy body. See in in profile, Always Moving. Likes sheer, flowing, airy clothing, long skirts & scarves

Season: Summer

Time: Midnight

Landscape: Windy places, complicated landscapes

Shape: Half Circle

Seed Syllable: **SA** (dakini) **AH** (Buddha)

Encumbered Pattern:

Competitiveness, defensiveness, speediness, overly ambitious, paranoid comparison with others, avoidance of heartbreak by staying free, workaholic, jealousy fed by envy

Worries: About everything not getting done, not being superior to others

Wisdom State: *All Accomplishing Wisdom* ~ “The Flow rather than the Force”, self-existing energy, effortless, automatic fulfillment, knowing all will get done in its right time, trusting the flow, synchronicity

An Ending Note from Ellen

I am grateful to my teacher, Lama Tsultrim Allione for her mandala work, meditation and multi-dimensional study. It has changed my life. I dedicate any merit from this work to her with a heart full of gratitude.

I have been creating Mandala class series for adults for many years. As an early childhood educator it has been my dream to combine what I know about the Mandala and what I know about young children. I hope this work is a good start to

bringing this dream to fruition. I have seen the power of Lama Tsultrim's mandala work and meditations. Lives are illuminated, hearts are opened and a life-long map created. May this work be offered for the welfare of all children and their loved-ones.

May Lama Tsultrim's work continue to flourish and may all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.

Ellen Booth Church (Yeshe Chöepel)