

Weaving Self-Compassion into Post-secondary Education Delivery

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Abstract

The following manuscript explores the use of modified Mindful Self-Compassion touchpoints as in-class creative activities. They include: *How Would You Treat a Friend?*, *Self-Compassion in Daily Life*, *Self-Compassion -IT Bracelets*, *Soothing or Supportive Touch*, *Self-Compassion Break*, *The Stop Practice*, *Compassionate Letter to Myself*, and *Setting an Intention* (Sulit, 2023). The application of self-compassion into in-class creative activities reinforces how students mentally, emotionally, relationally, and physically experience the elements of kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness in their personal and professional practice as emerging clinicians. This manuscript illustrates how instructors can engage students in self-compassion activities in the classroom.

Introduction

I have held the position of Instructor with the University of Guelph—Humber's Social Services and Well-Being Studies Program and Humber Polytechnic's Child and Youth Care and Social Service Worker Programs since 2017. I hold the designation of Registered Social Worker and have worked with youth in crisis for a non-profit in Toronto and in private practice for 20 years. My work is challenging, and, at times, I feel the heaviness of my clients' and students' stories (alongside my own) within my mind, body and soul. My profession has taught me to weave self-compassion into my daily practice with students and clients and into my own self-care practice as a clinician. Sulit (2023) describes self-compassion as the capacity to comfort, soothe, and motivate ourselves with encouragement when we suffer or feel inadequate. Self-compassion is a learned, ongoing, daily practice further reinforced when connecting our compassion to ourselves and to others. I intentionally weave in self-compassion's three main elements of *kindness*, *common humanity*, and *mindfulness* into my pedagogical practice using in-class creative activities for my students and my own professional interest (Neff & Dahm, 2015). Kristin Neff, PhD, is a developmental psychologist, researcher, and Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Neff is recognized for curating the first empirical scales to measure self-compassion. Her work focuses on self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, aiming to replace self-criticism with emotional resilience. Smeets et al. (2014) used a self-compassion intervention based on Neff's work with a group

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***Innovation Spotlights** are extremely brief contributions that highlight an innovative teaching practice, approach, or tool, and provide accompanying evidence that speaks to the effectiveness of the innovation.

of college students and found that students benefit from self-compassion training as it strengthens their positive point of view, while minimizing negative self-talk and worry.

I collaborated with my post-secondary students in experiencing the elements of self-compassion through the application of in-class creative activities using inspired instructional touchpoints from Neff and Germer's (2018) *The mindful self-compassion workbook: A proven way to accept yourself, build inner strength, and thrive* and Sulit's (2023) *The Short Course in Mindful Self-Compassion (SC-MSC)* from St. John's Ambulance Canada as I felt it would benefit students connection to themselves and their studies as emerging clinicians. Neff and Germer's (2018) *workbook* provides an opportunity for individuals to weave self-compassion into their daily lives from a lens of self-discovery. The authors suggest that when individuals engage in a few self-compassion chapters a week for 30 minutes a day (at their own pace), they begin to experience self-transformation. Germer and Neff's research has been taught to thousands of participants globally. Neff et al. (2005, as cited Neff et al., 2007) note that when college students engage in self-compassion work, they are motivated to strengthen their sense of self.

As an instructor, I teach courses in human services at Humber Polytechnic and the University of Guelph-Humber. After working with my students, I discovered a need to bring Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) into the classroom as an opportunity to strengthen their sense of self-discovery and self-compassion. I felt that modifying some of Neff and Germer's (2018) MSC workbook and Sulit's (2023) workbook for the classroom could support my students by weaving self-compassion into their lives, curriculum, and a desire to engage with the public in their future careers with kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

This manuscript illustrates, in an instructional format, how instructors can engage in self-compassion activities with their students within the classroom. Over the course of the semester, students reflected on their completed in-class creative activities (not for a grade), through one-on-one self-compassion exchanges in collaboration with me (their instructor) and their peers to develop a self-compassionate point of view. These touchpoints can be found in Sulit's (2023) adapted short course:

- How Would You Treat a Friend?
- Self-Compassion in Daily Life

- Self-Compassion-IT Bracelets
- Soothing or Supportive Touch
- Self-Compassion Break
- The STOP Practice
- Compassionate Letter to Myself
- Setting An Intention

The application of self-compassion via in-class creative activities reinforced how students could mentally, emotionally, relationally, and physically incorporate the elements of *kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness* into their personal and professional practice as emerging clinicians. For instructors, these touchpoints were modified and adapted to suit my students' interests, to engage them in meaningful and creative activities they could create in the classroom and take home, that were easy to coordinate and source, inexpensive and offered a personal touch between the instructor and student. Additionally, the adapted touchpoints were considered to illustrate to students a 'how to' for bringing similar exercise modifications into the field with individuals that they will support in their future careers.

Personal Experience with the SC-MSC

Juggling my multiple caring professions has taken its toll, both personally and professionally, over the years. There are moments when the heaviness of private practice and supporting students impacts one's overall well-being. A moment of personal humility encouraged my participation in the 6-week Short Course in Mindful Self-Compassion (SC-MSC) modified by Sulit (2023), based on Germer & Neff's (2019) 8-week Mindful Self-Compassion program, which was facilitated by Jaisa Sulit, Reg OT. (Ont.) MScOT in October 2023. Sulit's approach illustrated the self-compassion elements of kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness in weekly online group sessions, with love, intention, and deep reflection. These concepts replenished and transformed my clinical practice when my 'compassion fatigue well' was empty in private practice and academia. In my daily reflexive practice, I created opportunities for prayer, exercise, connecting with family and friends, creative writing and finding moments of stillness to replenish my compassionate sense of self.

Sulit (2023) asserts that a mindful gesture of self-compassion is nurturing the ability to acknowledge and accept that one is suffering. Hardly an easy concept to accept, even in a moment of humility for oneself. Sulit's safe

and grounded approach allowed participants to engage in the elements of self-compassion, unpack strengths, and consider areas for improvement. Through the completion of the SC-MSc course in collaboration with Sulit, the following discoveries were gleaned that I felt were important to tap into the classroom alongside my students from a lens of self-discovery and self-reflection:

- **How do I show myself kindness?** I discovered that I enjoy going out for meals and cultural events with family and friends. I participate in acts of service to those who may be experiencing suffering through arts and crafts and cultural engagement. An area for improvement is unpacking how I can be kinder to myself in low moments in my personal and professional life, which could be unpacked with my therapist.
- **How do I remind myself of my common humanity?** I discovered that I lean into prayer to process mistakes that I am struggling with. Attending church and listening to scripture and reflecting on my week alongside fellow parishioners supports me in feeling less alone. When I gaze upon the congregation, the reminder of common humanity breathes with a heartbeat. Through this reflection, I feel lighter when I depart from mass alongside fellow parishioners and remind myself to leave my worries in church and with God. I also create opportunities in the days ahead to weave in moments to allow for forgiveness and usher in some well-needed kindness.
- **How do I participate in mindfulness?** I discovered that I usher in some well-needed kindness through daily meditative walks in my neighbourhood. Gentle meditative walks support in processing how I feel in my mind, body and soul. Implementing meditative moments through a gentle walk, pacing my home's hallway with a book in hand, or even stretching, helps move held tension out of my body. When I commence my meditative walk, I remind myself that I will be going at my own pace and will not be pushing myself too hard. The meditative walk is rooted in gentleness, kindness, filling my compassion well and forgiveness. I feel safe and less alone when I pass fellow walkers with their dogs and children in my neighbourhood. An area of improvement is checking in to see what I need—and then nourishing myself accordingly.

Upon completing the SC-MSc course, I explored personal and professional self-compassion training experiences with students within the classroom setting. I felt this learning was imperative as they prepared for field work. Students experience the heaviness of the work alongside their clients and would benefit from tools to keep them mentally, emotionally, relationally, and physically strong.

Literature Review

Canadian students enter post-secondary classrooms with a constellation of lived experiences that affect their mental health and academic performance. Egan et al. (2021) surveyed over 200 undergraduate students and measured positive and negative traits, including self-compassion, mindfulness, resilience, self-criticism, social comparison and procrastination. They found that “treating oneself harshly, with self-criticism, and a general lack of kindness and acceptance after failure, may contribute to lower average marks” (p.7). Randstad’s (2020) research found that half of their survey participants considered ending their studies due to a correlation between their mental health and academic stress (as cited in Egan et al., 2021). Researchers who have contributed to the literature argue for strengthening mindful supports rooted in self-compassion with a youth focus that will encourage their resiliency in academics and life skills. Students begin their journey within academic institutions from a variety of backgrounds, sexual orientations, genders, spiritualities, neurodivergent presentations, social classes, and disabilities. Lisnyj et al.’s (2021) research with Canadian post-secondary students illustrated themes of “homesickness (...), adapting to a new campus and city environment, having a higher workload, and having greater control and more responsibilities in one’s life” (p. 8). Students may unintentionally bring their stress to class and struggle in achieving the grades they aspire for; as a result, they may direct their frustrations towards themselves. Lisnyj et al. (2021) found that students’ stress can manifest in various behaviours, including not attending lectures, ruminating over poor grades, expecting one’s instructor to structure and manage their time as in high school, underestimating how much time is required to complete a task, not recognizing the quantity of time spent does not always equate to quality of time spent, engaging in avoidance or distraction coping mechanisms, not meeting self-expectations, and not being able to communicate what they need (p. 9).

International students face additional stressors as they acclimate to campus life and their new communities. Prieto-Welch (2016) asserts that “international students are forced to adjust to a cultural, social, and political context that predates their arrival” (p. 54). As such, academic instructors should consider how international students may experience discrimination and consider current research when creating a safe and inclusive space for these students in the classroom and on campus.

A study by Bearden et al. (2024) explored whether mindfulness could affect post-secondary students' levels of perfectionism and self-compassion. The authors found that students who self-enrolled in an 8-week mindfulness course reported “lower perfectionism (self-oriented and other-oriented types), stress, and anxiety” (p. 2893).

Neff and Dahm (2015) argue that self-compassion consists of three main elements: *kindness*, *common humanity*, and *mindfulness*, which, when combined, mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind. Further, they suggest that self-compassion may support individuals in the consideration of their “personal inadequacies, mistakes, and failures, as well as when struggling with more general life situations that cause us mental, emotional, or physical pain” (p.4). Neff and Dahm (2015) note that even those who did not learn these skills as children may benefit from gradual exposure to self-compassion, which may plant a seed towards personal and professional growth.

When instructors engage in mindful reflective check-ins with students, it encourages them to practice self-kindness in the classroom. Instructors can read a meditation script to their students as a starting point for both instructors and students to settle into the rhythm of the class. At the conclusion of the meditation, the instructor can enquire how their student's week is going and how they are mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually showing up to class on the day.

When instructors provide their students with second chances on assignments, it demonstrates common humanity. Students may not submit their best academic work for a variety of reasons, including:

- burn out from life, school, work and family responsibilities;
- mental health issues, which are an ongoing stressor;

- disinterest in the course material, and
- forgetting to complete the assignment on time and rushing through the work.

Instructors can offer second chances on assignments as a reminder to students that they are not alone in their struggles outside the classroom. When an instructor recognizes that students have personal issues that are preventing them from submitting their best work for grading, providing another opportunity to submit work may strengthen the relationship between the student and their coursework, the student and their instructor and, most importantly, strengthen a student's professional growth. In the future, students may feel empowered to ask their instructor where they can go for academic or counselling support on campus or adjust their lifestyle so that they can continue to submit their best academic work without judgment from their instructor. The introduction of self-compassion within the safety of a classroom strengthens students' personal and professional growth as emerging clinicians.

Self-Kindness

Neff and Dahm (2015) suggest that instead of continually punishing ourselves for not being good enough, we should consider self-kindness as a way to soothe and nurture ourselves while acknowledging that we are doing the best we can. Linden et al.'s (2023) research articulates that students experience stressors not only in their academic lives but also in their personal lives and relationships. Instructors can incorporate moments of self-kindness into the day's lecture to soothe students' emotional stressors.

International and domestic students report similar experiences in post-secondary institutions, including anxiety, academic pressures, financial concerns, relationship hurdles, and mental health concerns (Prieto-Welch, 2016). It is important to keep in mind that international students have additional “unique pressures and struggles, which may interact with and compound the expected pressures” (p. 54). Instructors can consider asking their domestic and international students what self-kindness means to them during a classroom check-in.

Common Humanity

Neff and Dahm (2015) define the sense of common humanity as “recognizing that everyone fails, makes mistakes, and gets it wrong sometimes” (p. 5). The authors note that

remembering that struggle and disappointment are inevitable parts of being human can help us “feel less isolated when we are in pain” (p. 5). Some students may have a hard time receiving feedback on completed essays and group presentations and, in turn, feel they are the weakest student in class. Weaving in strength-based feedback through a lens of common humanity into students’ in-class creative activities may inspire their belief in themselves and spark an optimism to continue honing their work and attending class. Bearden et al. (2024) suggest that mindfulness strategies may encourage social connectedness, which, in turn, amplifies self-compassion. Further, the authors note that “social connectedness could be driven by a sense of security, stable self-worth, common humanity, and value for both self and others, which would lead to healthier, more balanced relational dynamics (Neff, 2011, p. 2905).

Mindfulness

Neff and Dahm (2015) define mindfulness as “awareness of our negative thoughts and emotions so that they are approached with balance and equanimity” (p. 6). They acknowledge that weaving in self-compassion during pangs of self-criticism can take immense effort, but it can strengthen emotional safety and minimize suffering. Some students may turn to social media as a distraction or an escape from the stress of their hectic lives (Ghanayem et al., 2024). Instructors are in competition with voice notes and social media messaging, which accompany students to class, making class engagement a challenge, which in turn affects their retention, coursework and in-class participation. Neff and Dahm (2015) acknowledge that in moments of self-criticism, the weaving in of self-compassion will take immense effort. Engaging students with mindfulness-infused in-class activities encourages the development of self-compassionate relationships with themselves, the instructor and their peers.

Neff and Dahm (2015) propose that self-compassion is best understood as a “single experience composed of interacting parts” such as kindness, common humanity and mindfulness (p. 6). When bringing self-compassion elements into the classroom experience as an instructor, it is important to consistently demonstrate kindness, mindfully model these elements in front of students, and be clear that instructors are far from perfect (even if they are teaching at a post-secondary institution).

In-Class Activities

The Short Course in Mindful Self-Compassion Participant Handbook Booklet articulates a 6-week adaptation of the empirically supported 8-week Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) program (Germer & Neff, 2019). Eight examples of in-class creative activities follow, illustrating SC-MSC-modified self-compassion touchpoints.

How Would You Treat A Friend?

Self-compassion involves treating yourself with the same kindness, concern and support that you’d show to a good friend. I demonstrated to my students that I was curious about their mental health at the start of every lecture by simply asking them, ‘How are you? How was your weekend? How are your classes going?’ I illustrated to my students why mental health check-ins are important with the individuals that they will support in their future practice, while also responding with care and compassion when working in the field.

Neff and Germer’s (2018) *How Would You Treat a Friend?* exercise encourages individuals to consider how they would treat a friend in despair and apply the same findings to themselves when experiencing despair. I adapted this exercise into a ‘Create a Spring Ornament’ activity to encourage students to creatively engage service users in dialogue while making an arts and crafts piece. The creative piece would be created alongside a service user when they were going through a difficult time. The creation of the creative piece could also be used as a reflection point for the student to consider how they would treat themselves if they were going through a similar hardship. In my modified activity, the students were gifted with art supplies (consisting of stickers, Christmas ornaments, construction paper, glue, scrap paper, glue palettes, and markers, see [Figure 1](#)) which they could use to create ornaments to engage Good2Talk’s (Good2Talk provides free, confidential support services for post-secondary students in Ontario and Nova Scotia) service users presenting with issues, including suicide ideation and self-harm. Students would weave in illustrated messages of kindness, belonging and respect through a trauma-informed lens onto the Spring Ornament for service users (see [Figure 2](#)).

If I were to engage in this activity again, I would ask students to choose a demographic and a cause that are meaningful to them, and a modality (digital or art and crafts) that speaks to their self-compassionate point of view. Our students come from diverse ethnicities, faiths, sexual orientations, genders



Figure 1. Supplies, including stickers, Christmas ornaments, construction paper, glue, provided for the 'Create a Spring Ornament' activity.



Figure 2. An example of student work from the 'Create a Spring Ornament' activity.

and disabilities. In reflection, what didn't work well was that some students felt they weren't 'creative' and that they might be judged for their contributions. To remedy that issue, I would have invited students to bring in artifacts they owned and asked them to modify the "How Would You Treat a Friend?" exercise into their own adaptation using Neff and Germer's (2018) scholarship on their terms.

Self-Compassion in Daily Life

Neff and Dahm (2015) argue that the degree to which participants practice informal self-compassion techniques in daily life also predicts gains in self-compassion. They suggest "self-compassion is [a] teachable skill that is 'dose dependent.' The more you practice it, the more you learn it"

(p.18). In the early weeks of the course, I demonstrated to my students that I was curious about their lived experiences while also adhering to trauma-informed practice. I emphasized themes of self-compassion, empathy and care when they disclosed their own experiences with abuse and neglect. Neff and Germer (2018) articulate that behavioural self-compassion "anchors self-compassion practice in ordinary activities of everyday life" (p. 60). Students learned how to identify facets of abuse (emotional, verbal, physical, neglect) in vulnerable service users and how they could attend to them using common humanity. Using Neff and Germer's scholarship, I asked students to consider what it would be like to weave in creative examples of physically softening their body (caring for one's body physically in moments of stress); mindfully reducing agitation in their body (caring for one's mind in moments of stress); engaging in emotional soothing and comforting themselves (considering your emotional needs in moments of stress); relationally connecting with others (connecting with others to encourage a happiness reset) and spiritually committing to their values into their work with service users (pp. 61-63).

I adapted the *Self-Compassion in Daily Life* exercise into a Design a Bathroom Tile show-and-tell activity to encourage students to creatively engage service users in dialogue about how they could demonstrate self-compassion to themselves after experiencing abuse, and also for the students to demonstrate self-compassion to themselves after hearing emotionally charged disclosures based on the course literature. Students were gifted with bathroom tiles, markers, scrap paper, and stickers (see Figure 3). Students were asked to use bathroom tiles to create an art piece and then participate in an in-class show-and-tell. The final creative art piece presented in class would be used as a therapeutic activity sample, which students could introduce to service users experiencing abuse from a lens of common humanity. The completed bathroom tile pieces yielded strength-based snapshots that were generous in spirit and intentionally thoughtful.

If I were to engage in this activity again with my students, I would ask them to reflect on their personal physical, mindful, emotional, relational, and spiritual self-compassionate needs and to create a show-and-tell activity using the modality of their choice. I would also give my students an opportunity to prepare journal entries reflecting on their findings if they did not feel creatively inclined.

Self-Compassion-IT Bracelets

Sulit (2023) suggests a *Self Compassion-IT Bracelet* exercise, that provides an opportunity to practice self-compassion, reframe negative self-talk, and serve as a reminder to care for oneself. I adapted this activity and reenvisioned it to encourage students to creatively engage service users into an intentional, personalized homemade or pre-purchased card that illustrates care, self-compassion, and self-discovery. I also wanted them to experience what it feels like to be thought of outside of the classroom on Valentine's Day. Students were gifted with a personalized Valentine card, printed from an online template, a puffy sticker heart purchased from Michaels Canada, and a mini chocolate bar (see Figure 4). There may be some students who are newcomers who don't have friends or family who could give them a Valentine. Perhaps Valentine cards aren't something that they have received in the past. I wrote each of them a personalized message to demonstrate that they are special and cared for. Additionally, I left a stack of blank cards, puffy hearts and chocolates beside the personalized cards on the table so students may mindfully create their own cards as an in-class creative activity for their peers. Students created cards brimming with meaningful messages for their peers and family. I witnessed joy and excitement in their eyes as they received their personalized Valentine cards.

If I were to engage in this activity again with my students, I would ask them to create beaded bracelets using supplies from Michaels Canada or a dollar store. I would gift thread, a diverse collection of beads, buttons, and a puffy heart with a hole punch in the centre for weaving thread through. Students would be encouraged to create a Self-Compassion-IT Bracelet that was symbolic to them, would remind them to care for themselves and engage in a self-compassion break. They could additionally make Self-Compassion-IT Bracelets for their friends and family. In reflection, there was nothing that I would revise about the gifted Valentine cards, as there were enough supplies for each student, and students felt special receiving them. To ensure that every student receives a bracelet, I would create a personalized bracelet for each student prior to class. Prior to their class departure, every student can pick up their personalized Self-Compassion-IT Bracelet from the front of the class so that no one is missed. For students who may have missed the class, I would set their personalized bracelet aside to give to them upon their return. I would expand the activity by encouraging students to consider what they could do for Valentine's Day in their clinical



Figure 3. An example of student work from the Design a Bathroom Tile show-and-tell activity.



Figure 4. Examples of personalized Valentine's Day cards given to students.

placement with service users, and use the opportunity to brainstorm the activity with them.

Soothing or Supportive Touch

Using a supportive touch provides an opportunity to offer care for oneself (Germer & Neff, 2019). My students mentioned that they appreciated the feedback that I provided in their essays and assignments. They expressed that it was important for them to know what they could do to improve their work, where they went wrong and celebrate what they did well. When offering feedback using Blackboard, I ensured that my comments were soothing and delivered through a lens of optimism, self-discovery, self-compassion and encouragement to keep trying their best. Neff and Germer (2018) note that *Soothing Touch* is engaging in physical touch (for example, hand over heart, or on your cheek) to self-soothe when under stress or requiring personal support. I adapted the exercise into a weekly mindful reflection at the beginning of the lecture that students could use for rest. I wanted to demonstrate to the students what it would feel like to experience a reflection as a soothing reset, so they, in turn, can offer the same practice to service users in their future before a counselling session or a therapeutic activity. I read a mindful reflection to students as a way to help them quiet their minds and bodies. The reflections were always optimistic, encouraging, strength-based and relational. Mindful reflection scripts can be easily found online. The script should be read thoroughly before reading it to students in class. Neff's meditations can be found on *Self-Compassion Institute with Dr. Kristin Neff* (<https://self-compassion.org>) (Neff, 2026). Instructors may consider reading the mindful reflection script slowly, with a hand over their heart—demonstrating soothing touch to students as they consider their emerging mindful reflective style. Alternatively, instructors can provide word searches or colouring sheets (available online) at the beginning of class for students who may not want to participate in a mindful reflection or need a brain break during the lecture. My students always came to expect that I would have new weekly colouring sheets and word searches for them at the beginning of their lecture, which they could find on table in the front of the classroom. See [Figure 5](#).

If I were to engage in this activity again with my students, I would ask them to lead their own Soothing Touch or mindful meditation every week before the day's lecture. They would gain practice reading a mindful reflection of their choice

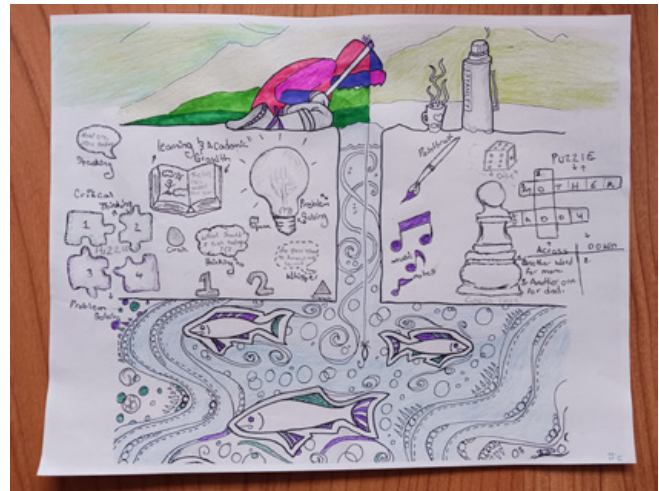


Figure 5. An example of a colouring sheet that students could pick up at the start of every class.

and engage in their own physical touch. I would assign a bonus mark of 1% to each student's final grade for engaging in Soothing Touch or a mindful meditation with their peers. I noticed that when I facilitated Soothing Touch or mindful meditation, some students still stayed on their laptops or phones. In reflection, before I ask students to adopt a mindful posture, I would ask them to close their devices for two minutes for the mindful reflection.

Self-Compassion Break

Teaching my students about the different forms of abuse experienced by young service users required me to create a safe space in the classroom for my students. Students are typically 19+ and may have gone through experiences of abuse in their past or have children of their own who may be experiencing abuse. Working with service users who have experienced abuse can be triggering for students who may have experienced abuse at the hands of parents and individuals in their community. During the lecture, I would take a pause midway for students to go out for a self-compassion break to grab a drink or snack before returning for the last part of the lecture. I would also leave space at the beginning and end of the lecture for students to debrief the material. I also held online office hours for students to share anything that had come up for them, and I warmly redirected them to on-campus counselling services.

Self-Compassion Breaks consist of calling to mind a current life struggle and finding a soothing physical expression of compassion such as putting both hands over one's heart, then silently repeating words that convey the main elements

of self-compassion e.g. “This is a moment of suffering, suffering is part of life, may I be kind to myself in this moment, may I give myself the compassion I need” (Neff & Dahm, 2015, p.26). I adapted the idea of a Self-Compassion Break into a self-compassion toy that students could create and use as a caring tool when working with service users who have been abused. Students were asked to engage in a show-and-tell activity and use gifted personalized fabric bundles to create a comforting toy/object that vulnerable service users could use during a self-compassion break. The supplies consisted of fabric from Michaels Canada and a ribbon to hold the swatches of fabric together (see [Figure 6](#)). Students were inspired by the colourful fabric bundles and the designed creations, including a teddy bear, tote bags that held storybooks, and a stuffed toy turtle. Students considered common humanity as they wrote mindful meditation scripts (“This is a moment of suffering, suffering is part of life, may I be kind to myself in this moment, may I give myself the compassion I need” (Neff & Dahm, 2015, p.26)), in addition to their comfort creations, to console vulnerable service users. The completed comfort creations could offer vulnerable service users a respite from suffering.

If I were to engage in this activity again with my students, I would ask my students to illustrate what a Self-Compassion Break looks like for them and how they could engage service users using their vision and a personalized mindful meditation script. Some students complained they didn’t know what to do with the fabric and said they “weren’t creative.” Providing students with an opportunity to create their own Self-Compassion Break could have been a more empowering experience. Finally, for those students who feel that they are not creative, I would provide an opportunity for them to sit in a pair or with peer(s) that they feel safe with to complete the activity or to engage in an alternative activity that suits them on their own.

The STOP Practice

Using the STOP acronym provides an opportunity to pause, reflect, and self-regulate throughout one’s day (Sulit, 2023). The acronym stands for:

- Stop what you are doing,
- Take 3 deep breaths,
- Observe what you’re feeling in your body, emotions, thoughts, relaxing or softening as you need,
- Proceed with what you are doing.

I adapted this exercise into a Spotify playlist activity after noticing that my students would be listening to music on their headphones before the lecture. When I commenced my lecture, some of the students would be listening to music or podcasts, or viewing their social media accounts with one earphone in while listening to the lecture with their other ear. I wondered how I could use the idea of a streaming music playlist to engage in a self-regulating activity with my students while also considering how they could use it as a self-compassion STOP practice with service users in their care. Students were asked to create Spotify playlists for service users who may need a transitional moment when in classroom, day treatment or hospital settings. The Spotify playlist activity was initiated after midterm grades were posted to boost morale. Students were provided with pre-cut square watercolour paper, stickers, and access to their devices and music streaming accounts to create a playlist focused on youth self-regulation (see [Figure 7](#)). Students provided personal STOP scripts for service users to practice emotional regulation skills whilst listening to the student prepared playlists. The completed playlist sheets were creatively supportive and easy to use in moments of vulnerability.

Compassionate Letter to Myself

As the last day of classes drew close, I wanted to demonstrate to the students that their shared self-compassion activities in class were meaningful and should be celebrated. For many students, self-compassion was a new concept. I felt that it was important for them to remember what it felt like to receive and give self-compassion and engage in self-discovery as a



Figure 6. Bundles of fabric that students could use to create a toy for the Self-Compassion Break activity.

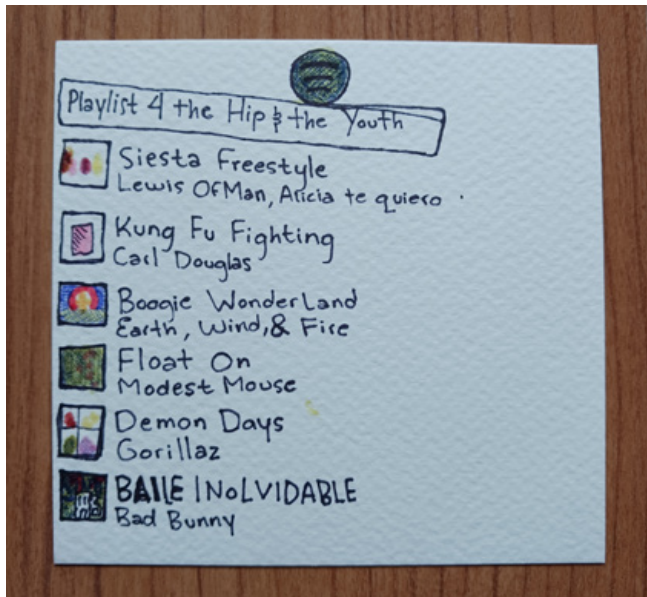


Figure 7. An example of student work from the Spotify playlist activity.

takeaway from the class. Neff and Germer (2018) articulate that writing a *Compassionate Letter to [Your]self* when you are struggling could support a shift in thinking and feeling. They state that a compassionate letter to oneself could include writing a letter to yourself from the perspective of a caring friend; writing a letter to a friend who may be experiencing the same struggles as you; or writing a compassionate letter to a part of yourself that is in need. Once the letter is complete, store it away for later in the day so that you can savour the comforting words (Neff and Germer, 2018). Shapira and Mongrain's (2010) research engaged participants in a self-compassionate writing letter exercise directed towards themselves which supported in the strengthening of their mood. I adapted Neff and Germer's (2018) Compassionate Letter to Myself exercise into a personalized, handmade compassionate goodbye fabric pockets activity, which students could use to write their own compassionate letters to themselves or their peers. Students received personalized, handmade, compassionate goodbye fabric pockets created by the instructor at the end of the semester. The pockets were the size of a palm, different colours, and contained a charm, blank paper, chocolate and personalized notes from the instructor. The supplies consisted of sourced fabric and charms from Michaels Canada. I hand-sewed all the fabric pockets and wrote personal messages to each student, celebrating their journey of self-compassion throughout the semester. Extra sheets were included for them to write out their own thoughts and aspirations. The idea behind the compassionate goodbye fabric pockets was that they were small enough to tuck into a

backpack or jacket pocket as students were daily commuters to and from campus. Students were encouraged to write their own compassionate letters to themselves and to their peers as goodwill gestures.

If I were to engage in this activity again with my students, I would ask my students to create their own goodbye gestures for service users. I would encourage them to reflect on the compassionate goodbye fabric pockets and consider how they might modify the activity. The feedback received was that, instead of using a variety of fabric pockets, I should have used a single fabric design. In reflection, I would have liked to add the STOP script into each fabric pockets.

Setting an Intention

The last day of classes was approaching, and I felt it would be meaningful to wrap up the year with a card celebrating each student's personalized wins. On the last day of classes, I felt that it was important to say goodbye to my students while weaving in care and appreciation of their contributions through a tangible written piece. Sulit (2023) notes that *Setting an Intention* is a strategy to consider when we feel destabilized and while also focusing on what is important to our everyday life. Germer and Neff (2019) assert that one can orient one's heart and mind to one's core values every morning or at the end of the day with a "ritual such as lighting a candle" (p. 21). I adapted the Setting an Intention exercise into an origami art and compassionate goodbye cards activity to encourage students to creatively engage service users in an intentional homemade or pre-purchased card that illustrates care, self-compassion, self-discovery and a formal goodbye message. Students were gifted origami sheets at the start of every class during the semester and personalized goodbye cards created by the instructor on the last day of class. The supplies consisted of origami sheets from Michaels Canada and a dollar store. The origami sheets and instructions were given at the beginning of every class as a brain break activity, to create an intentional art piece that students could reflect on during the lecture, and as something to take home. The compassionate goodbye cards template was found online and modified into a blank sheet of paper, which was then folded. I used a colour printer to print the cards and handwrote personal goodbye messages for each student (see [Figure 8](#)). Students were given blank cards to write compassionate messages to themselves and their peers. Students noted that no instructor had ever given them a goodbye card.

If I were to engage in this activity again with my students, I would ask them to consider setting an intention on a slip of paper during every class. I would keep their intentions in individually labelled envelopes in my office. At the end of the semester, I would return the envelopes to the students so (if interested) they could create a meaningful piece of art from their intentional slips of paper. What did not go well during the activities was that those students who did not attend the last class did not receive a compassionate goodbye card. As an alternative, I could have emailed students a digital card through their Blackboard account.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when instructors weave in-class creative self-compassion activities for their students, they have the opportunity to strengthen their personal and professional practice. When instructors mindfully refill their self-compassion well in their personal lives, they kindly inspire their students through acts of service. Students bear witness to the common humanity that they share with their instructors. More research in this area would benefit the discipline. When instructors collaborate with their students on self-compassion, they plant the seeds of kindness, common humanity and mindfulness for future generations.



Figure 8. Goodbye cards for students illustrating the Setting an Intention activity.

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