Watering the Seeds of Compassion

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Good Evening!
My Awakening to Mindfulness
University of Washington – 1970’s
Meditation and Psychotherapy
(Alan Marlatt and Judith Gordon)
How can Life-span Developmental Psychology make greater contributions to building a compassionate world society?

This calls for a broad agenda to create comprehensive models and research on the development and promotion of emotional awareness, caring, and compassion.
The Roadmap

• What is Compassion?
• Compassion, Kindness, Prosocial Behavior, and Sympathy/Empathy
• How Do They Develop?
• What Can Families, Schools, and Communities do to Nurture These Qualities?
What is Empathy?

An Affective Response that is Experienced as Similar to what Another Person is Feeling or Might Feel

Decety & Jackson, 2006
What is Sympathy?

An Affective Response of Feelings of Sorrow or Concern that is Experienced When Apprehending Another Person’s Experiences Feelings of Trouble or Misfortune

Eisenberg
What is Compassion?

Definition:
“…a sensitivity to the suffering of self and others, with a deep commitment to try to relieve it.”

The Dalai Lama (1995)

Different Aspects of Compassion as a Construct
1. Intention (Cognition/Attitude)
2. Feeling (State of Emotion)
3. Behavior
Development of Compassion

Emotional Contagion

Empathy/Sympathy

Compassion

Relation to Altruism??
Compassion in Action

From Robert Roeser – Portland State Univ.
Theories of the Human Condition

• Predominant Western philosophical stance that there is self-interest in every action
• Recent recognition that there is a caring instinct and even young children show empathy in action
• So both self interest and caring are both fundamental of our nature-
• Competition and cooperation are both powerful in explaining human evolution
• Compassion and benevolence are an evolved part of human nature, rooted in biology, and ready to be cultivated
Broad Agenda

• The practical outcome of such a comprehensive program would include
  ✓ Clearer developmental/ecological models of the growth of caring, and compassion
  ✓ Effective policies, programs and practices that support the development of caring, compassion, and service to others in our schools and communities,
  ✓ Children, youth and adults who show greater service to others as well as caring about the preservation of the earth’s ecology
Global Context of 21st Century

• Increasing Global Interdependence
• Need to focus on “Modern Narratives of:
  ❖ Global Warming
  ❖ Environmental Degradation (Forests, Water)
  ❖ Terrorism
My Conviction

• Awareness, Sympathy and Compassion Are the Core Dimensions of Human Nature that Can be Nurtured

• When Nurtured they Enhance
  ◆ One’s Personal Health and Well-being
  ◆ Connection to Others
  ◆ Well-being of Others
  ◆ Quality of the Natural, Physical Environment
Contexts that Support Kindness and Compassion

• Early Childhood Attachments to Parents and Caregivers
• What Children See Adults Do and Why?
• What Values are Promoted (world view) at Home, at School, in the Community?
• What Skills Children Learn and Have the Opportunity to Practice?
It Begins with Parenting
Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory

• Developed by John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist, to explain why “maternal deprivation” so often leads to anxiety, anger, delinquency, and depression.
• First studied by Mary Ainsworth, a Canadian psychologist, with mothers and children in Africa and the US
Behavior and Emotion Regulation Across Development

Secure Attachment creates greater probability of:

Interpersonal attunement ➔ Internal Self-Regulation ➔ Resilience

Mutual regulation: Regulated with the help of the caregiver

Self-regulation of behavior and emotions
The Connection between Attachment and Mindfulness
(Bowlby, Siegel, Shaver & Mukilincer)

- Attachment Relationships Shape the Development of the Regulatory Circuitry of the Brain
- A Secure Mind is Reflective!
- Reflection enables Social and Emotional Intelligence, is at the heart of mindfulness, and is likely the common root of secure attachment, empathy, and compassion.
- When one feels secure, one acts with great altruism, caring and compassion
THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION
Issues in Creating a Caring School

- Both Children and Adults need **Emotion Regulation** skills
- Teachers and Adults need to create **Healthy Norms and a Safe Environment**
- Schools need to adopt practices that create **shared communities of caring**
- This can include **high quality SEL skills, mindfulness skills, expressing caring and gratitude**
- This requires **Principal Leadership**
HINDUISM
This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you

BHAKTAA FAITH
Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself

BUDDHISM
Treat not others as ways that you yourself would find hateful

CONFUCIANISM
One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct... loving kindness.

ISLAM
Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself

TAOISM
Regard your neighbour’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbour’s loss as your own loss

JUDAISM
What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary

Sikhism
I am a stranger to no one, and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all

JAINISM
One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated

ZOROASTRIANISM
Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself

CHIVALRY
In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets

WISDOM
We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive

UNITARIANISM
We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part
THE CASEL Model: Schoolwide SEL

Self-Management
Self-Awareness
Social Awareness
Relationship Skills
Responsible Decision-Making

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
Schools Can Adopt Practices that Create Shared Communities of Caring

It is possible to nurture and support

- Kindness
- Altruism
- Caring/Compassion

What is the Process? The Social Development Model

- Teach New Skills
- Provide Ample Opportunity to Practice the Skills
- Provide Feedback and Recognition for Their Performance
The Seattle Social Development Model

The goal...
Healthy behaviors
for all children and youth

Start with...
Healthy beliefs & clear standards
...in families, schools, communities and peer groups

Build...
Bonding
[Attachment] [Commitment]
...to families, schools, communities and peer groups

By providing...
Opportunities
By providing...
Skills
By providing...
Recognition
...in families, schools, communities and peer groups

And by nurturing...
Individual characteristics
Contemplative Developmental Science (Roeser)

• Nascent field which focuses upon gaining an empirical understanding of the effects of secular mindfulness and related trainings

• Contemplative Education, an allied, applied discipline focused on understanding the development, implementation, and efficacy of secular mindfulness and related trainings in school and community settings with children, adolescents, parents, and educators.
Core SEL Competencies – Contemplative Deepening

- Emotion Regulation
- Inhibitory Control
- Deployment of Attention

- Self-Management
  - Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals

- Self-Awareness
  - Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and challenges

- Social & Emotional Learning
  - Showing understanding and empathy for others

- Responsible Decision-Making
  - Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior

- Relationship Skills
  - Forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict

- Mindful Listening
- Thoughtful Dialogue
- Managing conflict

- Understanding the Nature of Mind
- Emotional Awareness
- Stating Facts without judgment
- Making ethical choices based in awareness and caring

Showing empathy and compassion for others
The Soul of Education
Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School
Rachael Kessler
Rachel’s vision

Imagine if every student were provided with a safe place to sit with a group of their peers and reflect on their lives.....

to share the questions that trouble or confuse or mystify them...

to find support for their pain and joy...

to discover the solace that comes in silence...

to be challenged to respect those who appear fundamentally different from them.
• Making such experiences available not only nourish students spiritual development, they also help them
  — to transcend prejudice,
  — increase academic motivation
  — improve focus and cooperation
• In other words, caring about the inner lives of our students make educational sense at every level.
Bringing in the Inner Life

• I use the word “soul” to call attention in schools to the inner life; to the depth dimension of human experience; to students longing for more than an ordinary, material and fragmented existence.

• When the soul is present in education, attention shifts. We listen with great care. And then we concentrate on what has heart and meaning. The yearning, wonder, wisdom, fear and confusion of students become central to the curriculum.
What is Mindfulness?

• Mindfulness is: paying attention, in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. --Kabat-Zinn, 1990

• An awareness of one’s conduct and the quality of one’s relationships..... are intrinsic elements of the cultivation of mindfulness.

• Mindfulness in everyday life is the ultimate challenge and practice.

Kabat-Zinn 2011
Mindfulness, Ethics and Cognition

• Engaging in mindful awareness means not only being aware in the present, but it also means reflecting on and living a set of ethics including “not to harm others and to engage in wholesome actions”

• This involves recollecting and reflecting on one’s actions with discrimination, evaluation and mature judgment – rather than being reactive.
Research on Effects of Mindfulness

• Focus has been primarily on
  – Symptoms (pain, stress)
  – Brain Activity
  – Self-Reports of Mindfulness

• Less Focus till very recently on
  – Being Compassionate

• Little Focus on
  – Our Interpersonal behavior
What is Interpersonal Mindfulness? (Teachers/Parents)

• Listening with full attention to children and colleagues

• Present-centered awareness of emotions experienced by self and students during interactions

• Openness and non-judgmental acceptance and receptivity to child’s thoughts and feelings

• Self-regulation in teaching/parenting - Low reactivity and low automaticity in reaction to normative child and adolescent behavior

• Awareness of and responsiveness to child’s individual needs – “teachable moments”

• Compassion for self and students
Broad Question:
How Do We Promote Caring & Compassion?

1. What does it mean to be caring/compassionate?
   - Attentive and Aware
   - Sensitive to others needs and states
   - Open-minded
   - Listening without judgment (or deep listening)
   - Recognizing of our common humanity
   - **Acting** from a ground of Ethics “Do No Harm”

2. In what ways can we effectively promote these skills in:
   - Schools
   - Families
   - Students
Developmental Issues

• Understanding the nature of mind
• Ability to see the other as oneself – widening our circle of concern
• Ability to see past outward experiences of race, gender, culture, age, etc.
• The understand the fundamental similarity of all beings
• Discernment of moral issues and ability to see with clarity and insight
Building Nurturing Environments

- There is much yet to be learned in promoting compassion in children.
- Helping adults (parents and teachers) to become mindful is essential.
Focus on Caregivers

Promoting these abilities in caregivers (parents, teachers, other givers of care to children) is essential for

- Child well-being
- Strengthening families
- Building cohesive communities
- Caring for the Environment
A Holistic Picture: Supporting Effective Social and Academic Development and Well Being

Healthy, Caring Schools

Teacher Well-Being and Awareness

Social and Emotional Skill Development

Effective Conditions for Learning/Norms of Caring
Ways to Facilitate Mindfulness & Compassion: A Taxonomy
The Tree of Contemplative Practices

From Center for Contemplative Mind in Society
Elevation, Awe, & Wonder

• Feeling of Elevation is caused by witnessing virtuous acts or feats of moral beauty. Elevation elicits warm, pleasurable sensations in the chest.

• Elevation makes an individual feel admiration for the altruist and motivated to help others. Elevation has the potential to spread by creating an upward helping spiral in which individuals view others doing good deeds and then feel an increased urge to help others.

• Shiota & Haidt assert that elevation is a self-transcendent emotion that directs attention away from the self towards appreciating an exceptional human action or remarkable aspect of the natural world.

• Compared to joy or amusement, people experiencing elevation were more likely to express a desire to perform kind or helpful actions for others, become better people, and imitate the virtuous exemplar.
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES TO FACILITATE CARING AND COMPASSION

• Milieu Models
  – Golden Rule
  – Noticing and Remembering The “Good” Things (Prosocial Mapping – D. Martin)

• SEL Skills Development
  – Emotional Awareness of Self and Other
  – Listening skills

• Contemplative Awareness Practices
  – Meditations (Just Like Me, Tong-len, Loving Kindness)
  – Story telling
  – Council Procedures

• Specific Actions
  – Service and Volunteering with Reflection
  – Vigils and Bearing Witness
  – Honoring the Actions of Others
  – Viral strategies in social networks
The best way to find yourself is by losing yourself in the service of others.

Mahatma Gandhi
Measuring Processes and Outcomes

- Self-report (first person phenomenology)
- Reports of Others (teachers, peers, parents, spouses)
- Hypothetical Vignettes (social cognitions)
- Observations that are Naturalistic
- Observations of Social Task Performance (interpersonal “tests” /behavioral economics, etc)
- Observed Reactions in Virtual Reality Contexts
- Psycho-physiological Reactivity and Regulation
- Neural and Epigenetic Activity
Challenges

• Can we understand with greater clarity the developmental course of empathy/sympathy and compassion in different cultural settings?

• What combination of skills necessary for empathy and prosocial behavior and motivation for compassion develop? And how can it be nurtured?

• How do prosocial behaviors develop that are motivated by true compassion, and not based on future rewards?

• What kind of “service-learning” experiences best nurture a compassionate perspective?
Challenges #2

• Can carefully prepared experiences lead to the softening of in-group vs. out-group perceptions and thus lessen bullying, aggression and other forms of fear and hatred towards those that appear different?

• Can we increase our own capacity to care for others with an attitude of gratitude for the opportunity to do so?

• Can we nurture greater appreciation for the interdependence of all beings and thus deepen our understanding and caring for the natural environment and to act to reduce global warming and environmental degradation?
Suggestions for Developing a Common Ethical Framework

- Discernment exercises that extend the ‘what is’ to ‘what is beneficial’ in the development of human capacity
- Creation of a learning or developmental space that permits inquiry and critical evaluation of the causes of suffering
- Skillful examination of the grounds of human motivations and intentions
- Removing the hindrances and obstacles to safe, health and truly democratic modes for organizing human communities
- Employing practices that enable human potential by taking other’s perspective
- Leading with the premise that people are more alike than different, yet mindfully exploring, recognizing and honoring differences
- Cultivation of non-aggression and peaceful modes of action
- Developing mutual tolerance and respect for all faiths
Questions

1. When a child shows compassion, should we consider it to be different than that experienced by a teen or adult?
   • Because it is intuitive, rather than based on a deep, meta-cognitive understanding of the relations (oneness) between all living things – should we talk about it differently

2. If children are insecure in their attachments or have experienced deep trauma, should compassion support contain a greater emphasis on self-compassion?
KEEP CALM AND SHOW COMPASSION
Partners:
  Garrison Institute
  Contemplation & Education Leadership Council
  Holistic Life Foundation: Travelling Yogis
  Johns Hopkins – School of Public Health
  Numerous Public School Districts
  Penn State – Prevention Research Center

Funders:
  Garrison Institute
  Mind and Life Institute
  Attias Family Fund
  1440 Foundation
  Johns Hopkins Ctr on Violence Prevention
  PSU Center
  U.S. Department of Education
  National Institute of Drug Abuse