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**BOOK REVIEW**

## *Towards the Compassionate University: From Golden Thread to Global Impact*

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If you are not employed in, or have little engagement with, universities, you might wonder if this book is relevant to you. I'd agree with the authors – compassion is everybody's business and the exploration of compassion as 'love in action' in this book has something to offer to learners, practitioners, educators, students and policymakers alike. The book is structured in three parts: context setting in Part 1: 'The need and foundations for compassion'; Part 2: 'Compassion in action'; and Part 3: 'Towards the compassionate university'. I found the book theoretically dense, with a use of unfamiliar concepts that may seem a little inaccessible to some readers. There are several places where I believe more explanation would have been helpful and there is little consistency in the way the chapters are presented. However, where there are scenarios and 'real' examples, the theoretical content comes to life. I imagine the book will lend itself to 'dipping in and out'; there is clear signposting within the chapters that will make this possible and, although the result is some repetition, this will not be a problem for the occasional visitor to the book.

The opening chapters introduce compassion as the all-pervasive 'golden thread' in the title, extending as far as 'compassion for the planet' as part of the climate emergency. This thread is woven throughout the book. The concept is defined, critiqued and different models offered, although in the second part of the book there is caution against commodification of compassion, with mindfulness cited as an example of this. From a practice developer's point of view, the emphasis on mentally healthy universities resonates with, among others, the work of Cardiff and colleagues (2020), who developed guiding lights for effective workplace cultures. The critique offered of current university culture is done through the familiar lens of critical theory, used in this context to examine market forces and other power imbalances that impact on student and staff experiences. Compassion in this book is referred to as a concern for others' suffering and a desire to alleviate it. The authors point to a promotion of individualism in academia, which is viewed as a deviation from the original raison d'être of universities to be a force for the wider public good. This perspective challenges us to think 'from me to we', from individual to collective approaches. In the second and third chapters, Maurice Irfan Coles and Dermot Breslin call for a move towards a more holistic, compassionate curriculum.

The second part of the book aims to help the reader understand how the value of compassion can be enacted and embodied. Authors suggest action learning as a means for this. In Chapter 4, Kathryn Waddington and Yusuf Kaplan set out the principles and processes of action learning clearly, deepening understanding through theory exploration in the latter half of the chapter. They consider facilitation, which is helpful for readers undertaking the role, sharing examples and observations on the issues that have arisen in their own action learning sets. I was interested in their use of metaphor but had expected

greater insight into how to explore its use in my academic practice. Chapter 5 explores dreaming as a means of supporting facilitators to reflect, which is thought provoking. Returning to the theme of 'from me to we', Chapters 6 and 7 re-emphasise the need to show compassion to ourselves, so that we can nurture and role model compassion and contribute to the creation of compassionate university environments for everyone. This could be seen as akin to the flourishing for all that is the outcome of person-centred practice, which places compassion at its heart (McCormack and McCance, 2017). Holistic business psychology practice, outlined in Chapter 8, has resonance with critical creativity (McCormack and Titchen, 2006).

I would think that, from Chapter 9 onwards, the appeal will mainly be to academics and others working in the university setting. It would have been good to read about how academics engage with partners from professional practice to keep the thread of compassion visible to learners within their programmes. Additionally, the book could have been enriched by increasing the student voice. Chapter 11 explores what constitutes a compassionate university, featuring intersectionality, emotional intelligence and compassionate communication as key components. These could have all been brought together by exploring the creation of a compassionate culture, which is the greatest challenge of all. Chapter 12, 'Care, concern and compassion in higher education', presents an interesting explanation for the challenges facing the sector, proposing mentorship, reflective practice and stewardship as ways to embed the values listed in the chapter's title. The chapter includes exemplars and guidance, and features poetry as a means of summarising the authors' understanding of compassion.

In the book's concluding remarks, Kathryn Waddington provides a helpful summary, giving the reader a nudge to stay curious about compassion while counselling against overuse of the concept. Again, poetry is used, alongside learning from indigenous stories, and reading it, I found myself in a thoughtful frame of mind. I will also take some practical tools and guidance from the book to help me contribute towards compassion in my own university.

Overall, I enjoyed this book and found it resonated with my work in the Person-centred Practice International Community of Practice (PcP-ICoP). This featured in a recent Special Issue of the *IPDJ*, in which a European project team shared the first phase of work to develop a person-centred curriculum framework for healthcare practitioners (Dickson et al., 2020). This book will contribute to the preparation of person-centred educators and learners, and will have wider value for readers outside the education sector. It provides models, frameworks and tools that will support practice development and person-centred practice, through the lens of compassion.

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