

The Compassionate Educator: Understanding social issues and the ethics of care in Canadian schools

Samantha Cutrara

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

The Compassionate Educator: Understanding social issues and the ethics of care in Canadian schools

edited by Allyson Jule

Canadian Scholars. 2019, 316 pages

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Reviewed by:

Samantha Cutrara, PhD

Independent scholar

With schools and schooling turned on its head with the arrival of COVID-19, educators and administrators had to (re)create and (re)develop their ideas and methods for teaching and learning in quick and reactive succession. While many educators and experts saw the need for education to become more people-centric and responsive to the social and global trauma of illness and isolation, many institutional approaches to the 2020/2021 school year focused on the physicality and technology of education in ways that may have increased the emotional and mental burden on teachers, students, and parents (Cutrara 2021). Many in education may now be looking for ways to (re)engage with education to allow for healing, account for the diversity of students' experiences during remote and/or hybrid learning, and even (re)develop our approach(s) to teaching and curriculum that begins with an explicit acknowledgement, and appreciation, of students' differences. While it will not be a clean slate when we return to "normal" teaching and learning practices in the coming years – indeed, we should be redefining what "normal" will be after this – we can use this moment of crisis to reassess and reevaluate what happens, and what could happen, in our classrooms in ways that best meet the diverse experiences of the young people in Canada.

This is why it was such a pleasure to have the opportunity to review *The Compassionate Educator: Understanding social issues and the ethics of care in Canadian schools* edited by Allyson Jule for the *Canadian Journal of Education*. Published in 2019 by Canadian Scholars Press, *The Compassionate Educator* is an edited collection with 14 unique contributions on how to bring greater compassion and care into our classrooms in ways that – and this is where this collection stands out as unique – begin with a “deep understanding of diversity” in Canada and centres moving these diverse students in Canada “from merely surviving [k-12] public education to thriving in it” (Jule, P. 2).

Editor Dr. Allyson Jule, Dean of Education at Trinity Western University, presents this collection as a talking to and with the diversity in Canadian society and the ways many teachers may not have the tools to adequately approach this diversity with the “compassionate” that is needed to frame it as a strength rather than a challenge. This premise sets this collection up to be as much about exercising care and compassion as it is as thinking of care and compassion as social justice initiatives, which would then mean these concepts need greater critical understanding and interrogation than we often give them credit for.

Jule writes that this collection was a “collaborative process” with educational experts drawing on various research projects to highlight the “gritty” importance of a “critical caring,” which she defines as “a deep connection and commitment to compassion at the centre of school life” (P. 4). While Nel Noddings’ 1992 work on the “ethic of care” is cited throughout the collection, Jule identifies the limitations of Noddings’ work right in the introduction – specifically, the lack of intersections Noddings makes between culture and care. Exploring how powerful the notion of concept of ethics of care is, *as well as* recognizing and augmenting the limitations of Noddings’ original work, is a theoretical consistency in this collection, especially in the first few chapters.

Chapters in this collection cover a range of topics that demonstrate the critical care needed toward compassionately teaching toward diversity and difference; including chapters on indigeneity and reconciliation, LGBTQ+ allyship, mental health and mental wellness, English language learners, refugee and immigrant students, students with disabilities, students with minority religious affiliations, the radicalization of youth, and the intersection of poverty and racism with students’ experiences in/with schools(ing). This broad range of topics means that there is something for every reader, thus expanding the reach of this research in practice.

Aligned with this focus on engendering more critical praxis, the audience for this collection is broad, with Jule identifying that it is for seasoned teachers, in-service teachers, preservice teachers, school administrators, and educational researchers. The chapters are then organized in a way that invites different types of readers in; with, for example, each chapter beginning with a set of learning outcomes and endings with a glossary of important terms, but the body still written in a traditional academic writing style. The diversity of topics and the organization of the chapters thus provides a collection structured for greater reader access, increasing the potential for this research to be used to evoke change in schools and classrooms.

While the events of 2020 (may) have forced a greater recognition of the different and inequitable circumstances for teaching and learning, these differences are not new nor are the research and solutions that support them. As we chart our way through the (post) pandemic world, many will be looking for tools and approaches that address these differences and differing experiences of societal trauma, and may gravitate toward research or approaches that appear new. This collection demonstrates that compassionate care toward recognizing and attending to difference and inequity is neither new nor should be addressed in reactive ways. Rather, the work of paying attention and teaching to students' diverse selves and abilities; differing access to language(s) and technology; and diverse experiences with racism, religion, and radicalism, are all elements of students' lives that were present before COVID and certainly will be after. This collection demonstrates the legacies of this praxis and, with a collection that was published in 2019, it does not begin with the raw reactivity many of us are feeling towards this work right now. Rather, the work provides many practical, research-informed examples of what compassionate critical care looks like in the classroom and how teachers can engage in (more of) this work in their teaching and learning. This book is highly recommended for teachers and educational scholars who may be looking to transform their practices because of COVID, but also those educators who knew that the work of critical and compassionate care in education was never COVID specific.

Reference

- Cutrara, Samantha. 2021. "Beyond Pandemic Pedagogy: Thoughts on deconstruction, structure, and justice post-pandemic." *The Councilor: A Journal of the Social Studies* 82 (1):1.