

TOWARDS COMPASSIONATE GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP: EDUCATING THE HEART THROUGH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND COGNITIVELY-BASED COMPASSION TRAINING

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Abstract: The authors present an argument for developing emotional literacy which can be applied to critical development education to bring about active citizens who have capacity to take compassionate action for global justice. It is argued that both emotional skills and critical thinking skills are mutually essential, and in fact it is only by cultivating a symbiosis between these, can pedagogy be developed that presents a true transformational agency to people. The paper attempts to synthesise development education (DE) with Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT), and argues that these are potentially compatible to acquire such pedagogy. While DE can provide individuals with the skills to think critically and react to injustice, CBCT can provide the skills and emotional capacity to intervene for change, without giving in to despair, anger, or burnout. In short, it is argued that DE and CBCT can provide the emotional and intellectual skills necessary for productive social activism and change.

Throughout this article it is highlighted how the international development organisation, Children in Crossfire (CIC), has been grappling with the above mentioned and related disciplines, and how it has been working, in partnership with researchers from Emory University and Life University's Center for Compassion and Secular Ethics, to evolve its DE teacher training practice, Teachers in Development and Learning (TIDAL), towards such a transformative pedagogy, entitled 'Educating the Heart for Compassionate Global Citizenship'.

Key words: Compassionate; training; critical; literacy; citizenship; education; global

Background to CIC

Children in Crossfire (CIC) is an international development non-government organisation (NGO) based in Northern Ireland. It supports partner organisations in Ethiopia and Tanzania, to help build their capacity to deliver interventions for children in relation to healthcare and education. It has developed a strategic focus on promoting services for young children aged up to eight years, especially those with malnutrition, disabilities and cancer. Internationally, CIC works to make a significant and lasting contribution to the fight against world poverty, and provide opportunities for children to reach their potential and make the world a better place.

CIC also engages the Irish/UK public in education that explores the injustice of poverty. Through its development education (DE) programmes, it works with teachers, youth workers, young people and the wider community to promote the importance of active global citizenship for addressing the underlying causes of poverty, and bringing about a fairer world for everyone. CIC is committed to the practice of DE because, being an organisation rooted in justice and fairness, it believes it has a responsibility to engage the public in looking at the complex structural causes of injustice which are tied up in many factors such as trade, debt, and global corruption. Injustices inherent in these factors make it more difficult for developing countries to work their way out of the cycle of poverty. For example, CIC believes that the problem of hunger and malnutrition associated with its international projects must not be simply seen as coming from *out there* in the developing world; rather, the people and communities involved in CIC projects are at the receiving end of a problem that has many of its root causes fuelled by wider social, political, cultural and economic structures. CIC therefore sees DE as an important practice to introduce people to these underlying causes. Through DE, CIC also explores with people how we all, however unintentionally, might be complicit in the reproduction of poverty and injustice. People can thus gain a wider understanding of their interconnectedness with the rest of the world whilst understanding that longer term change for the developing world will depend

on people taking action to address the complex underlying structural causes of poverty.

TIDAL as social change pedagogy

CIC has built considerable expertise in delivering DE through its teacher training TIDAL programme. TIDAL has reached over 800 teachers and teacher education students in the past five years, and is firmly situated within the concepts relating to the ‘Local and Global Citizenship’ strand of the Northern Ireland curriculum. These are:

1. Human Rights and Social Responsibility
2. Diversity and Inclusion
3. Equality and Social Justice
4. Democracy and Active Participation

TIDAL is also designed to address a number of key elements within the ‘Big Picture of the Curriculum’ at Key Stage Three. These include: mutual understanding, cultural understanding, media awareness, citizenship, ethical awareness, economic awareness and education for sustainable development. By using active participatory learning methods, TIDAL addresses all of the above whilst also meeting the demands of the required Learning Experiences highlighted in The Big Picture. Moreover, all of the methods are underpinned by Paulo Freire’s vision of education as a process of liberation using methodologies of problem-based learning, dialogue and participation. In this respect, TIDAL also meets the demands of the required thinking skills and personal capabilities also outlined in The Big Picture (Appendix A).

As just mentioned, CIC’s TIDAL, and indeed wider DE work, is rooted in Freirean liberation theory and critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is the label under which much social change education locates itself (Choules, 2007: 160). In essence, it encourages thinking critically in relation to socio-political lived experiences, and is grounded ‘in the moral imperative

of exposing systems of oppression’ (Alexander, 2005: 425). Similarly, Freirean theory believes education that promotes critical thinking has a role to play in liberating people from oppression, and bringing about social transformation. Teachers, according to Freire, should inspire emancipatory knowledge that will enable students to better understand the world, and equip them to transform socio-political injustices. They should pose authentic problems to their students, and subsequently enter into a dialogue with the students on how to solve such problems. Hence, ‘students, as they are increasingly faced with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge’ (Freire, 1973: 54). In other words, this ‘problem posing method’ facilitates a critical consciousness that challenges and encourages children to question their socio-political world, and take action for change. As Freire would argue, such a critical consciousness means reading the world as well as the word.

Through its DE TIDAL programme, CIC has a strong emphasis on building the skills of teachers to utilise active learning methods in the classroom to apply such critical pedagogy. Evidence to date indicates TIDAL’s success as a capacity building course which provides teachers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to use participatory methodologies to engage children and young people in global education to enable them to become active citizens working towards a more just, equal and sustainable world.

Educating the Heart

Inspired by its patron, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, CIC has recently been considering if and how the notion of compassion may enhance its current TIDAL programme, and if it is an important variable to bring about global justice. Thus, in 2013, CIC launched its Educating the Heart initiative when the Dalai Lama visited Northern Ireland, and addressed a private audience of educators, students, policy makers, and researchers to explore the theme of compassion and educating the hearts of ourselves and our young people, specifically, within education. For the Dalai Lama, true

compassion can be developed by accustoming our minds to the common humanity and equality of all people, eventually leading to a sense of universal altruism that compels us to take actions for the good of all (see Dalai Lama, 2011). He argues that those we consider strangers or even enemies or ‘oppressors’ are equal to us, and like us, they have a desire to overcome suffering and have genuine happiness. Therefore, if we cultivate our minds to develop true compassion, we will respond to others’ needs more productively, and may even reach the point where instead of hating our enemies or oppressors, we desire to help them overcome their own suffering. The Dalai Lama acknowledges that practicing compassion at this level is not easy, but argues that given patience and time, we all have the ability to develop a more universally altruistic attitude towards others. Altruism, in this sense, means weakening and eventually eliminating our strong in-group/out-group biases and tendencies to be self-centred, as well as overcoming negative feelings such as hatred and anger which serve to overwhelm our minds and stifle our ability to take compassionate action.

This is highly relevant to DE, because it can be argued that self-centeredness is a major cause of poverty and injustice in the world. CIC works to expose such self-centred motives, which are tied up in complex issues surrounding aid, trade, debt and global corruption. However, through the Educating the Heart initiative, CIC further asks: can the cultivation of compassion through DE result in a compassionate active citizen who has the necessary emotional and critical literacy to challenge the structural causes of poverty and inequality? Can compassion actually be taught and practiced as a skill as an essential foundation or building block for DE? Is emotional literacy, such as the cultivation of compassion, actually necessary for engaging young people in global citizenship, or is DE, as already delivered by CIC and without the intentional cultivation of emotional literacy and compassion, adequately preparing young people for participating as global citizens? CIC wishes to explore if combining elements of these disciplines will advance endeavours to bring about global justice.

A word on the compassionate active citizen

In its endeavour to cultivate the compassionate active citizen through DE, CIC wishes to clarify how it situates itself in relation to voluntaristic and deterministic theorising. For instance, it might appear that setting out to cultivate compassion and other positive values in subjects, suggests that global injustice and inequality persists simply because people lack the necessary values, beliefs and attitudes to recognise everyone on the planet as equal. It might suggest that global justice solely depends on addressing such abnormal or problematic values and beliefs, so that people can begin to think more universally, and develop values located in secular ethics. Indeed the Dalai Lama has articulated his vision for the term secular ethics in numerous talks and writings, most notably in two books *Ethics for the New Millennium* (2001) and *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (2011). In these writings, the Dalai Lama has advocated the view that basic human values need not be based on what separates us, such as religion or culture, but can be established on the basis of common experience, and common sense. Our common humanity and our interdependence, the Dalai Lama has argued, are the two foundational principles for this model of secular ethics. A core aspect of that humanity is the fact that we all desire happiness and do not want suffering; therefore questions of how we treat one another become of paramount importance. For this reason, the Dalai Lama makes the argument that compassion should be one of the core values for secular ethics, since compassion is the wish to see others relieved of suffering, and is therefore also the opposite of the wish to cause others suffering or of tolerance of their suffering, the root of violence and other social ills. Once agreement is reached on the importance of basic human values, he goes on to argue, such values can then be taught as skills in educational settings.

However, although CIC wishes to explore the whole notion of teaching compassion and other human values as skills that can be applied to DE and active global citizenship, it does not situate itself solely within voluntaristic theorising. In other words, it is not suggested that global justice depends solely on changing the values and attitudes of people, who will then have the capacity to ‘behave’ more ethically, or more compassionately, as if

unconstrained by systems and structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Such a perspective would ignore the extent of the deep-rooted structures that fuel inequality, and imply that justice can be actualised if individuals simply learn to be more compassionate. Fundamentally, such a theoretical notion would fail to acknowledge that global injustice has become deeply embedded within broader political and economic structures, which can be argued to have evolved from colonial exploitation, and continue today through ‘globalisation (the integration, to varying degrees, of all countries into a single world system) which shows remarkable continuity with colonialism...the attempt of the great powers to take over the wealth and raw materials of the world’ (Seabrook, 2009: 63), or, as Asante puts it, ‘the globalizing ethos of white corporate capital that leads ultimately, it seems to me, to another form of enslavement and domination’ (Asante, 2006: 654). Subsequently, global injustice is not simply a consequence of a lack of individual compassion, but is rather a result of the oppressive economic control of rich countries which is manifested and reproduced through unfair trade laws, tax avoidance, debt and other structural causes. Thus, whether or not an individual is compassionate, they may be located in specific Western contexts, political situations, and economic structures that by their very nature discriminate, and reproduce global poverty whilst promoting white cultural supremacy.

On the other hand, however, it is not the intention to imply that individuals, despite developing as compassionate global citizens, are destined to collapse under such structures. This indeed would give supremacy to notions of determinism, and fail to acknowledge that human conduct and agency have the capacity to bring about change. Rather, it is argued that through the cultivation of compassion, within critical DE practice, individuals are better able to both emotionally and intellectually recognise structures of oppression that they may participate in. Because of CBCT’s emphasis on emotion regulation and the cultivation of impartiality (breaking down in-group/out-group bias), compassion training therefore builds up the capacity to acknowledge and then work to transform unjust social, political and economic structures. It is therefore argued that rather than simply

perpetuating structures of injustice, individuals gradually become empowered to make better choices and engage in more productive action. Since such structures are neither immutable nor impervious to human decision-making, the transformation of values on a large scale can eventually lead to positive transformations even on a structural level, giving rise to social, political and economic systems that are more just and better reflect the values of our equality and common humanity regardless of geographic location, class, or race.

Thus for CIC, giving supremacy to either the structures of inequality or the compassionate global citizen as the key site for bringing about global justice, is not necessarily useful within the context and settings of its DE programmes. For CIC, and indeed its colleagues at Emory University and Life University, change is conceptualised through a dynamic process involving both human agency and structures. The authors of this paper recognise that it is very difficult to adequately address the complicated dichotomy between structure and agency in this short article. Basically, however, we position ourselves around the following:

- Situating compassion solely within voluntarism does not recognise the extent to which dominant structures of inequality have become embedded into time and space as powerful institutions;
- Compassion should be situated within critical DE analysis to reveal the dominant structures and levels of social, political, and institutional changes required for social justice to be fully realised;
- Compassion applied to critical DE analysis, at an even deeper level, should recognise that such structures are also perpetuated by the beliefs, values, and actions of collections of individuals. Therefore, if the consciousness of those individuals is raised, if their perspectives are changed, if their values are transformed, then they will start to behave differently, even working to overthrow, undermine, or transform the structures they perhaps once viewed uncritically.

Ultimately, CIC, Emory University and Life University see it as an important breakthrough in knowledge to explore together the integration of CBCT, or compassion training, into DE and vice versa. We wish to explore whether the teaching and practice of compassion and other values can become cultivated as skills, and how such values and emotions underpin and drive an individual's desire to take action. Basically, if by cultivating compassion, will individuals develop a more sophisticated emotional literacy in duality with critical literacy which might impel them to intervene more rigorously for social change as a compassionate global citizen? It is possible that emotional literacy combined with critical literacy will give rise to increased courage, patience, and the empathic concern necessary to work to change structures of inequality? Will it result in increased motivation and emotional skills applied to the analytical ability to tackle the complexity of global inequality and injustice in an effective manner?

Indeed, CBCT, as of yet, has primarily been carried out as a stand-alone personal development exercise, whereas the authors believe that it may be even more powerful when applied directly to DE and active global citizenship. This is also considered relevant in relation to locating CIC's TIDAL programme more firmly within the curriculum. In short, through integrating compassion training into DE, can the Local and Global Citizenship Strand of the curriculum become closely synthesised with the Personal Development strand (Appendix B)? Furthermore, if this synthesis is made tangible through methods and tools, then might the requirements under Attitudes and Dispositions within The Big Picture (Appendix A) be fully realised?

Overall, it is recognised that the above endeavour is something new and exploratory which will hopefully break new ground in developing pedagogy for meeting curriculum demands and bringing about a better world. The next section considers the origins and aims of Cognitively-Based Compassion Training.

CBCT, compassion and pity

Geshe Lobsang Tenzin of Emory University, located in greater Atlanta in the US, developed CBCT in 2005 as a protocol for the systematic cultivation of compassion. Unlike other practices, meditation in CBCT is not merely a practice for stress-reduction or achieving a calm mind, but rather an active process of restructuring cognitive frameworks that are seen as problematic in order to achieve a healthier, more productive, and more ethical subjectivity. This can be argued to be a more encompassing use of meditation than that employed in some other meditation modalities, and it is also important to stress that it stands in contrast to religious uses of meditation, since it is based on secular reasons and analysis (see Ozawa-de Silva, 2014).

Nonetheless, the practice of CBCT intends to develop ‘emotional awareness and intelligence, emotion regulation, self-compassion, interdependence, appreciation, empathy, non-discrimination, equanimity (understood as impartiality), and compassion (understood as the wish to relieve others from suffering)’ (Ozawa-de Silva & Dodson-Lavelle, 2011: 12). Recently, there has been an emerging body of evidence demonstrating the benefits of CBCT. These include research studies suggesting that individuals who actively seek to cultivate compassion through CBCT show improvements in empathic accuracy and activation in brain regions associated with empathy (Mascaro, Rilling, Negi, & Raison, 2012); a healthier response to psychosocial stress (Pace et al., 2008); increased hopefulness (Reddy et al., 2012); and other salutary effects (Ozawa-de Silva, Dodson-Lavelle, Raison & Negi, 2012). CBCT has recently been adapted as an age-appropriate pedagogy for compassion education in schools, and research suggests that it increases friendship networks and speeds the development of more sophisticated reasoning and decision making among children (Dodson-Lavelle et al., n.d.).

Ultimately, the type of compassion that CBCT seeks to cultivate, and that CIC sees as appropriate to be integrated into DE, is an unbiased, engaged compassion built on inner strength and critical thinking. It is important to point this out, since compassion might be considered as pity,

condescension and an unequal power relationship informed between two parties. In other words, compassion could be viewed as a value for the western citizen, whose business it is to feel and ‘act for’ those in developing countries who are simply bystanders or victims of global injustice. Indeed, such a notion of compassion runs counter to the endeavours of CIC to develop its DE critical pedagogy, and would simply serve to promote a two-world concept of ‘us and them’, which would actually work to position the compassionate active citizen in a hierarchical role. Hence, this would reinforce notions of dependency and helplessness, which people in the West are often exposed to through charitable representations of the global South. Indeed, research recently conducted in Ireland has found that Irish NGOs are in fact reinforcing the notion of dependency and helplessness through public communication materials. Drawing on the work of Darnton and Kirk (2011), *Finding Irish Frames: Exploring how Irish NGOs Communicate with the Public* (Murphy, 2014) found that NGOs in Ireland largely portray people from the global South as reliant on charity, with messages framed under the dominant narrative of ‘help the poor’, ‘poverty’ and a moral order of white above black and rich above poor.

In cultivating compassion, CIC does not seek to simply situate people from the global South as objects of study who ultimately rely on white Western compassionate action. Rather, in developing the compassionate global citizen, CIC seeks to increase understanding of the interconnections between lives here and the lives of those in developing countries, in order to create a sense of shared citizenship and solidarity rather than an ‘us and them’ narrative, which only serves to disempower students relative to the rest of the world. The compassion CIC strives to cultivate is an unbiased, engaged compassion built on inner strength and critical thinking, which is neither rooted in pity, passivity nor weakness. Rather it is a motivating force involving standing up to injustice in solidarity with people. Ultimately, pity in the face of injustice cannot be seen as true compassion, because failing to seek to end situations of inequality and violence allows for the continuation of exploitation, and true compassion is the motivation to end the causes of

injustice and promote more equitable and non-hierarchical relations for the sake of all parties.

Social activists such as the Thich Nhat Hanh (2013) have argued that when the motivation for social justice is compassion for all — rather than anger, bias, or self-righteousness, which can easily creep into efforts to effect social change – such compassionate action is much more likely to yield a positive result, is less likely to result in furthering conflict, division and enemy images, and is less likely to lead to burn-out, frustration and despair. Here, if anywhere, is where CIC wishes to explore the whole concept of the compassionate active citizen. It aims to investigate whether cultivating compassion and other human values results in subjects intervening more rigorously and consistently for global justice, on the basis that they have a more advanced emotional literacy working in duality with critical literacy.

Compassion for social justice

“Compassion demands, not that we accept injustice, but that we take a stand against it. It does imply that such a stand should be nonviolent. But nonviolence is not a sign of weakness, but rather one of self-confidence and courage...it shows the confidence that comes from having truth and justice on one’s side” (Dalai Lama, 2011: 58).

It can be argued that fighting for social justice requires great courage, determination, perseverance and inner strength. The first three topics of CBCT are oriented towards developing these capacities through mindfulness (topic one), introspection (topic two), and self-compassion (topic three). Since burn-out, fatigue, frustration, anger or being overwhelmed by the scale of suffering in the world can undermine efforts at social justice, these stages prepare the individual for dealing with such emotions. Through mindfulness, individuals learn to calm and focus their minds (topic one). This calm and focus is then used to watch and learn about emotions, thoughts, and behavioural patterns (topic two). Through this process, individuals determine for themselves, through critical analysis, which perspectives, emotional

reactions, and behavioural patterns are problematic and which are beneficial to their wellbeing.

Additionally, by learning that emotions can be regulated and thought patterns can be transformed, individuals gain confidence and skill in emotion regulation and resolve to build inner strength and resilience in this way (topic three). The intention is that they thereby become less subject to frustrations, anxieties, and empathetic distress. As individuals learn to catch emotional ‘sparks’ before they become full-fledged ‘forest fires’, their increasing self-confidence should lead to a greater sense of inner peace, which can then serve as a strong basis for cultivating compassion towards others.

It is the intention of CIC to explore such elements of CBCT and integrate these into DE themes and activities, in order to investigate if a contemplative process that begins with oneself can then turn outwards to the global community. In fact, one of the reasons why compassion training may be especially important for DE is its emphasis on cultivating equanimity (topic four). In CBCT the term ‘equanimity’ refers specifically to an evenness of feeling towards others. This does not come naturally for most people, but rather is cultivated through critical reasoning that leads to a recognition of our shared humanity, and the fact that all people want happiness and justice. On this basis, all human beings have basic rights that must be acknowledged, and these rights apply regardless of whether that individual is a loved one, a stranger, an enemy, or located either in the global North or South. Cultivating equanimity, it might be argued, will work towards countering the two-world concept of global development, which often reduces relations between the global North and South to an ‘us and them narrative’. Overall, cultivating equanimity and emotional regulation, together with critical literacy, might give individuals critical skills to counter bias, acknowledge the two-world narrative, understand the underlying structures of injustice, whilst providing them with the emotional capacity to work for positive change without giving in to despair, anger, or burnout. In fact, equanimity serves as the basis for the remaining steps of CBCT, which include unbiased appreciation for others (topic five), empathy (topic six),

aspirational compassion, or the heartfelt wish to see others relieved of suffering (topic seven), and ultimately engaged compassion, or taking responsibility for relieving others of suffering or injustice (topic eight).

Towards a model of practice

CIC has yet to explore fully how all of the above CBCT steps might be integrated into its DE practice. What can be said, however, is that each of the steps will be fully explored with both DE and CBCT practitioners, to design a model that is specifically applicable to DE themes and pedagogy with the intention of piloting this model early in 2015. The key intention of the model will be to cultivate critical awareness together with emotional strength for a DE pedagogy that grants true transformational agency to individuals. Without critical skills, individuals may not even see or acknowledge structures of injustice; without emotion regulation skills they may not be able to deal with the consequences of recognising those structures and how their lives might be implicated in them. Nor, it might be argued, do they have the emotional capacity to work to change them without giving in to despair, anger, or burnout. For CIC, and indeed its colleagues, advancing its DE pedagogy to address all of these elements is what it means to educate someone fully as an active compassionate global citizen.

Overall, CIC recognises that Educating the Heart may appear an insurmountable task, and will require more than the efforts of a few organisations to pilot and test a model. However, to date, CIC has already built an enthusiasm for this initiative amongst the local Education and Library Board, schools, teachers, DE practitioners, community educators and various research institutions. Hence, CIC and its colleagues at Emory University and Life University, will continue to explore the possibilities which we see existing in combining DE with CBCT to Educate the Heart for a more engaged and compassionate global citizenship that works to transform the structures of injustice and inequality.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Big Picture of the Curriculum at Key Stage Three
http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/BigPictureKS3.pdf.

Appendix B

Learning for Life and Work: Local and Global Citizenship

http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/areas_of_learning/statutory_requirements/ks3_citizenship.pdf.

Learning for Life and Work: Personal Development

http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/areas_of_learning/statutory_requirements/ks3_personaldev.pdf

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