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Book Review: Jule, A. (2019). The compassionate educator: Understanding social issues and the ethics of care in Canadian schools. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars. Hardcover, 305 pages, ISBN 978-1-77338-133-6.

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Book Review: The Compassionate Educator: Understanding Social Issues and the Ethics of Care in Canadian Schools

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Christina Belcher

Compassion is not what it seems at a quick glance. It is so much more

This book, edited by Allyson Jule, is a timely read on a significant social topic, as well as a compass in the art of educating the young. Her first comment in the Introduction, “Schools in Canada today are complex places ...”, provides a segue into deep research, and ushers in reasons why this book is so crucial in preparing teachers to respond to the wide range of backgrounds and experiences currently engaged between the walls of every classroom. It is a thoughtful resource, building upon the large, robust body of work by Nel Noddings (1992, 2005, 2012) and others in the foundational and important field of care theory.

This text begins with exploring three theories of care; the caring teacher behavior theory, the caring capacity theory and the caring difference theory. I shall not divulge them further, as I want you to read the book. Each of these theories are reflectively mined, extracting strengths, weaknesses and possibilities, which include significant definitions. This is well crafted, expounding not only what the theories offer, but also what they lack. The book then proceeds into considerations of the embodiment of care through the stories experienced by 14 educators. These stories embrace key themes: sociocultural reality, difficulty, indigenous history and culture, straight teacher allies, mental health, refugee students, English Language Learners and respect, parental challenges, children with disabilities, religious responsiveness, radicalization, poverty, anti-racist pedagogy and educational leadership. And this

text does all of this under the umbrella of educators showing grace and care.

For example, Chapter 8 is entitled, Teaching English Language-Learners with Respect: Critical Practice. What makes this chapter different for me than others I have read on the same topic is that the chapter does not just stop with the content delivery of care, it knows care is critical and needs critique. It goes on to suggest a critical praxis, and, as with every chapter in this book, it contains learning objectives and academic references to support them, as well as questions to ponder regarding the situations shared. In short, the book expects the reader to not only read it, but also apply it. Care is a serious topic, but it is also seen as a way of being as a teacher that makes it less of a medical model and more of a lifestyle. It is critical of care and gentle with the huge complexity of it at the same time. Hence, care is critiqued, it is practiced, and it is scrutinized in order that adherents can become better givers of care as educators.

As with any good book, this has certainly provoked my thinking into our current social framework and educational practices around words, definitions, and social praxis. As an educator who is currently in teacher education, and has been interested in this topic and the embodiment of it over many years, my only pondering is what is the reason behind care giving

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going to be in this generation of digital humanity and transhumanism?

Care is a serious topic, but it is also seen as a way of being as a teacher that makes it less of a medical model and more of a lifestyle.

In my experience, I have seen many great theories simply turned into mini movements, not contextual life applications. Every theory takes place in a social context and specific era. Many good books have been read and written on theories of many things, but what if the theory is taken in a different social direction, and becomes a cause; a movement in mental health, which can be used to various ends, rather than an aspect of becoming more fully humane? What if care is divorced from morality and ethics? Could care then become reduced to a self-centered excuse for avoidance, giving way to a movement of convenience as self-care, (but not care in the sense of the word as a balanced aspect of life). Would this place care as a catalyst for doing good as a public good, or just a personal one? Without an overarching story on the reason for care extending beyond ourselves, can the definition hold?

Compassion in this text moves beyond an emotional response to a deeply reflective act of engagement. It extends upon what Craig Gay (2019) explained as a way of learning to be fully human, because our being directs our doing. Gay stated that when things in life go wrong, you do not need practical solutions as much as philosophical commitments about the way things are or should be in order to make sense of life. It is these intertwined relationships of the mind, heart, and spirit, which enable us to be fully human. Compassion is an act that shows we are more than human in species, but also in soul.

I think this book is going to be a foundational text for future educators, and hope that many will read, read again, agree, and raise questions of educational practice as they consider it. Deeply probe this text, deeply reflect on it, and most of all, embody it in a humane way that assists us all in

becoming more fully human than we may be at the moment.

Compassion...moves beyond an emotional response to a deeply reflective act of engagement...Compassion is an act that shows we are more than human in species, but also in soul.

This is a good read for anyone who works with, lives with, or is entranced by the presence and actions of others.

Beyond that, it is an essential read for educators.

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