

Quality Education News

Tel: 012-349-5006 ♦ Fax: 012-349-1232 ♦ www.saqi.co.za

Issue 61

February 2022



A quarterly publication issued by the South African Quality Institute (SAQI) in the interest of promoting educational excellence.

Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Being compassionate

Twelve-year-old Andrew never saw himself as compassionate. He most probably didn't quite understand the meaning of the word. Yet his behavior was indeed compassionate.

One day his mother became ill. A visit to the doctor confirmed that she had a mild form of Covid-19. The doctor instructed her to stay at home for a fortnight. Medicines were prescribed. Andrew was also told to stay at home as a health precaution.

When mom and Andrew had the stay-at-home curfew lifted, Andrew made a few wry comments about the fortnight. He quipped, "Over the last fortnight, I've never made my mom so many cups of tea in my life. I've also had to become a strict doctor in making sure that she took all her medicines at the right times and to the right dosages each time!"

Andrew had displayed common-sense compassion towards his mother during her illness. This small scenario of loving care has been played out in various forms across the world during the pandemic. Often during times of catastrophes such as famines, floods and wars, the levels of compassion towards others soar.

What is compassion? Paul Gilbert in his book, *The compassionate mind* describes it thus:

...its essence is a basic kindness, with a deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and of other living things, coupled with the wish and effort to relieve it.

Our 21st century world is not - by nature - a compassionate planet. Pick up a newspaper, switch on the radio or TV. The levels of cruelty and hatred towards fellow humans are terrifying. At times, we become overwhelmed by its enormity. A point might arrive where we become anaesthetized to the suffering of others. This has been described as compassion fatigue.

Is it possible to create a more compassionate and caring world? Definitely. A starting point is within every school. When a school is permeated with a spirit of compassion, incidents of bullying, cruelty and unkindness drop dramatically. The children of today can become compassionate citizens of tomorrow.

Most school district and regional authorities insist that schools under their management have anti-bullying policies. So often these policies fill many pages. To misquote the environment activist Greta Thunberg, they're filled with, "Blah, blah, blah." So many words, so little effective concrete action. The policies include a wide range of punishments to be enforced if bullying occurs. The policies usually consist of long lists of 'don't do this' and 'don't do that'. There's a focus on what shouldn't be done.

How about turning anti-bullying policies on their head. Instead, advise children and staff about what should be done.

The policy could then rather focus on what everyone should be doing. Let the policy focus on action. Encourage the displaying of values such as compassion, friendship, helpfulness, kindness and ubuntu.

Then, of course, there's the Golden Rule that should be applicable to any school anywhere. Whatever one's religious or secular background, the Golden Rule applies.

The Golden Rule

Love. Harmony. Friendship. Kindness. Peace.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:29-31
Bible

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Leviticus 19:18
Torah

And do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is stranger, the companion by your side.

Surah 14:36
Quran

At a practical level, the Golden Rule is a quick 'go-to' when there are incidents of school indiscipline. If you're a teacher and an alleged 'crime' has been committed, ask the 'accused' this simple question, "Would you like what you've just done to so-and-so be done to you?" Every now and then there's the would-be lawyer who wishes to reinterpret school rules. When confronted by the teacher with this question, there could be an awkward pause. This Golden Rule question helps to short-circuit long-winded discussions around whether or not a rule has been broken!

I remember an angry teacher who remarked that a boy had spoken to her in a rude manner. She stated that she was employed at the school to teach Maths but not manners. In our discussion, we both agreed that yes, she was employed to teach Maths. However, due to what's sometimes not done in the home and often in the wider society, the school has to teach the children manners too!

Teaching involves teaching knowledge across a range of subjects. That's only part of the job description. Teaching values is also part of the curriculum. If we can instil compassion in a school, it becomes a place imbued with goodwill, kindness and peace. We create a more compassionate world.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

Reference

Gilbert, P 2013. *The compassionate mind*. London: Robinson.



This newsletter is published under the aegis of SAQI as a social responsibility project. You are welcome to download earlier issues at www.saqi.co.za Go to 'SAQI Publications' and then click 'Quality Education News' or scan the QR-Code to take you directly to the page. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, contact Mrs Vanessa du Toit on vanessa@saqi.co.za



How can we teach compassion?



Compassion is a value that can be nurtured in a school. However, it's unlikely to be a daily, frequent occurrence if there's no focussed encouragement and guidance. Yes, there will be moments of spontaneous compassion. That's not enough. Ideally, there is a deliberate effort to ensure that compassion is a basic 'the way we do things here' philosophy of the school.

Six suggestions that help towards permeating compassion across the entire school are:

1 Understand what the word 'compassion' entails

The word 'compassion' isn't a familiar word to many children. It's seldom used in the media and our consumer society. So, while encouraging a child to practise compassion, it helps to clearly understand what it entails.

To help, certain related words could be discussed at age-appropriate levels. Such words could include condolence, empathy, generosity, kindness, mercy and understanding. Class discussion could include sharing those times where the children have personally seen or displayed those values. Like Andrew that I mentioned on page 1, most children display compassion in their daily lives.

2 Read and talk about compassionate people

It's easy to find role-models of people who have displayed compassionate behaviour. Iconic Nelson Mandela is an obvious example. Others who've displayed different forms of compassion include Bill Gates, the Dalai Lama, Florence Nightingale, Oprah Winfrey, Mother Teresa and Desmond Tutu. Put autobiographies and biographies about such people in the class and school libraries.

Classroom discussions can include how compassionate people often have to stand up for the rights of others. That can result in them being subjected to abuse and hatred. John F Kennedy, the American President, was assassinated in November 1963. One of the reasons for his being killed was his staunch support for the repeal of racist laws in American society.

There are organisations such as the Gift of the Givers, Doctors without Borders, Red Cross, SPCA and the United Nations. These organisations attempt to alleviate suffering through their various programmes. How can a child and a school support their programmes of compassion?

The children will be able to give examples from their own communities of churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and the like that have outreach programmes. Compassion takes many forms and everyone can practise it in their preferred ways.

3 Be a role-model

Every day both inside and out of the classroom, the teacher can show the child what it means to be compassionate. In a normal (is there such a thing as a normal?!) school day, there are countless chances to display compassion. There could be the 'outlier' child who needs to be treated with sensitivity; there's the child who's struggling with the school work and needs endless teacher patience.

For a child to be compassionate, let it be on the receiving end of abundant TLCC (tender, loving and compassionate care).

4 Respect diversity

It's easier to be compassionate to those with whom we can relate. If they're in the same family or community, we can often empathise more easily with their need for our compassion. We understand them. It can become more difficult when the person needing our compassion has a different culture and ethnicity to our own. That person might have a hugely different value system. Think of the attitude towards religious diversity in a country such as the United States of America and Iran.

South African readers of this newsletter are only too aware of the many different cultures to be found in the country. To complicate the compassionate understanding of fellow citizens, there are eleven (yes, eleven!) official languages. When there's ignorance and misunderstanding of cultural backgrounds, lack of empathy comes to the fore. That lack could lead into dislike, mistrust and even hatred.

The classroom is a place to learn about different cultures. It's also a place to interact with classmates from different home backgrounds. With the awareness and understanding of those differences, respect can be inculcated. There should be acceptance and not simply tolerance. We need to understand our common humanity. We all have the same needs of empathy, kindness, love and respect.

5 Give of your time

The compassionate mind moves beyond words. It moves to compassionate action. So many schools 'walk the talk' of compassion. They have weekly collections for various charities; they have teacher outreach programmes for staff and students living in disadvantaged communities. Children visit the sick, the elderly, homes for abandoned pets and the like.

Compassion begins in the home and then the school. In the school, the children and staff make sure that compassion is shown towards each other. They help each other emotionally, give of their time and, if able, assist financially.

6 Self-compassion

It's difficult to be compassionate towards others if we lack compassion towards ourselves. We need to be self-compassionate. We all makes mistakes; we all have personal shortcomings. It's to be gentle with ourselves in such situations. Yes, we do acknowledge our faults and take responsibility but we don't wallow in them. We move on. Whatever happens, we need - as the saying goes - be comfortable in our own skins. From a position of self-worth, we can step out to show compassion to others.

The teacher can help the child who lacks self-compassion to avoid being too self-critical and judgemental. Nurture the sense of self-worth and being kind to one-self. Avoid comparing against the achievements of others. Simply put: Be the best possible you.

References

Miller, M 2021. *How can we teach kids compassion?*
[Downloaded from PositivePsychology.com](https://www.positivepsychology.com)

Whitson, S 2014. *8 ways to teach compassion to kids.*
<https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-ways-to-teach-compassion>



Discipline with compassion

A reality of school life is that there will be those who are neither compassionate nor want to adhere to an acceptable code of behaviour. There are those children and teachers who are bullies. There are the thieves. There are those who wantonly damage and destroy property. The list of misdemeanours is long.

A school that practices compassion is not soft on those who break rules. In fact, the school believes strongly that justice must be seen to be done. It must be done quickly and firmly.

Yet compassionate discipline administers justice markedly different to the traditional way of dealing with law breakers. Traditionally, those who break the law are punished. It's the 'eye for an eye' and 'tooth for a tooth' way. If you caused others to suffer, you need to suffer too. This type of justice is known as retributive justice. It's justice that insists on some form of 'pay back' which usually includes some form of public condemnation, humiliation and unpleasant punishment.

Compassionate discipline has a different approach. Yes, wrongs are to be corrected. Wrongs are not downplayed. However, achieving justice involves getting matters back to where they were prior to the transgression. This is described as restorative justice.

Imagine a bully who attacks another child and tears his shirt. In retributive justice, the bully might have detention and isolation from peers for a number of break times. Restorative justice, by contrast, would insist that the torn shirt is repaired or replaced. The bully

would be made to understand the emotional and physical harm caused to someone else. There would be an apology but not a grudging one. The apology is based on the true grasp of the pain caused. The bully and victim would be asked what can be done going forward.

No doubt the bully needs counselling on anger management. That would include the counsellor aiming to understand the bully's background and the root causes of the aggressive behaviour. There's a need by the counsellor to pinpoint the reasons for the bully's sense of personal inadequacies. Strategies would be put in place to help the child stop the need to bully others.

There are two broad ways that a perpetrator responds when confronted about unacceptable behaviour. The first way is a **sense of shame**. The perpetrator focuses inward and what others think of them. The person has a sense of being inadequate and flawed. The person becomes anxious and avoids the gaze of others so as to hide the shame.

The second response is a **sense of guilt**. Here the perpetrator accepts that a wrong has been committed. There's a feeling of wanting to repair it, to reach out to the person who has been hurt. Unlike shame which retreats and avoids contact with others, guilt reaches out to try and mend the situation.

Retributive vs Restorative justice (adapted: Gilbert 2013: 241)

Retributive justice (shame-focused)	Restorative justice (guilt-focused)
<p>The victim feels this towards the perpetrator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger • Blaming • Condemning • Punishing • Retaliation • Retribution • Vengeance <p>The perpetrator responds in defensive, self-focused and threat-linked ways by being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious, depressed and fearful • Feigning regret as socially expected • Other-blaming, aggressive and defiant • Punishment-focused 	<p>The victim feels this towards the perpetrator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex emotions of anger, fear, sadness and vulnerability • Making clear that pain has been caused • Needing to understand • Non-retaliatory • Possibility of forgiveness <p>The perpetrator is more open and other-focused:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathic awareness of harm done • Guilt for one's behaviour • Repairing • Sorry, regret • Taking responsibility



A challenge for the teacher and the school leadership team is to get children to 'own up' if they've done something wrong. If the school applies compassionate discipline imbued with restorative justice, the truth is likely to come to the fore. There is no fear of punitive painful punishment for being honest.

Reference

Gilbert, P 2013. *The compassionate mind*. London: Robinson.



WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION?



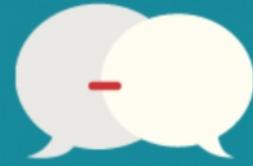
Mindfulness

Self-compassion involves recognising when we're stressed or struggling without being judgmental or over-reacting.



Self-Kindness

Being supportive and understanding towards ourselves when we're having a hard time, rather than being harshly self-critical.



Connectedness

Remembering that everyone makes mistakes and experiences difficulties at times. We are not alone!

Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud.

Maya Angelou

If you want others to be happy, practise compassion.

If you want to be happy, practise compassion.

Dalai Lama

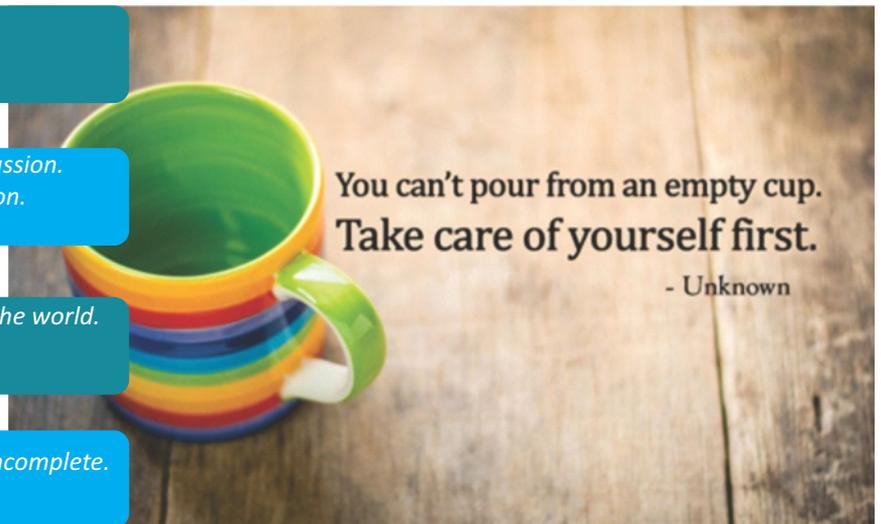
When you are kind to others, it not only changes the world.

It changes you.

Harold Kushner

If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.

Gautama Buddha

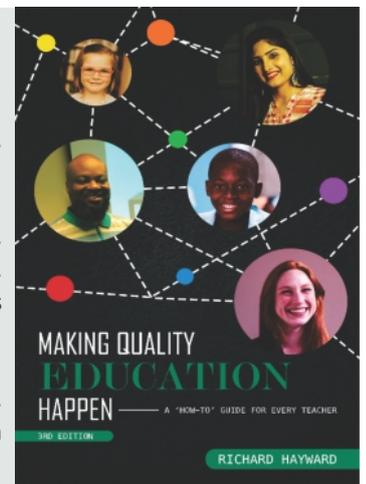


Total Quality Education (TQE)

The third edition of Richard Hayward's book *Making Quality Education happen* has been published. It's available on Amazon, Smashwords and Takealot.

The book looks at applying TQE leadership and management practices and principles in a school. Quality leadership and management shouldn't only be seen as belonging in the principal's office. Every quality teacher uses TQE techniques and tools to ensure excellent education. The book shares those ideas.

Amazon has the book in kindle format for \$8.04 and \$16.99 for the colour paperback edition. Smashwords sells the book in e-book format for \$6.99. There's a free read of 20% of the book on both sites. Takealot sells the book for R 200.



SACE

South African Council for Educators

Towards Excellence in Education

Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD)

SAQI has a range of professional activities that are endorsed by SACE (South African Council for Educators). The activities earn CPTD points.

Topics dealt with include bullying (at child and staff level), child management, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, ethics and teacher stress. For the 2022 list of activities, please contact Dr Richard Hayward, the programme facilitator, on rpdayward@yahoo.com or 011 888 3262.

The programmes are done at schools and tertiary institutions across Southern Africa. Disadvantaged schools are sponsored.