Catching up with the Science of Compassion In HE Group work

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What IS Compassion?
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What **IS** Compassion (as a secular concept)?

Noticing/anticipating disadvantaging of others and/or their social or physical distress

*and*

Doing something to reduce or prevent that.
Practical Compassion in Group work
Compassion that is not general, but is specific to face-to-face task-focused group/team work requires particular compassionate micro skills.
Eye gaze
Three kinds of eye contact in face to face group discussion
Excluding eye contact – tends to be linked with monopolising behaviour.

Inclusive eye contact – appears to positively steer groups into an equal spread of participation around the group; and with increased quality of individual and group critical thinking (Vertegaal, et al, 2002, 2003).

Avoidant eye gaze – The student avoiding others gaze is often unable to notice signals of non verbal support around the group. This is
Two Key questions to begin the module.

1. What is it I do in this seminar/group work to develop my fellow students’ social and learning experiences that they most value in me?

2. What do my fellow students do here in this seminar/group work to develop my social and learning experiences that I most value in them?
These questions set compassion up to be properly understood as a *subject-focussed competency* which:

1. **Does not require** an emotion to be enacted.

2. **Does require** deliberative, meaning-making cognitive processes.
A typical route into discussion group dysfunction:

An ‘alpha pair’ (Bion, 1971)

Transitioning to single Monopoliser
What can students do about those who are too shy to speak?
Suggestions:

- You could invite them *by name* into the discussion – ask for their opinions. “What do *you* think, Sara?”

- When they are pushed out of the discussion by confident speakers who like to talk over others, find another chance to invite the shyer ones back in later.

- Tell them that when they speak, if they *suddenly* are shy and have no more to say, they can ‘*pass the hot potato*’. That is, they can quickly say to any other student “So what do *you* think, Steve?”
What can students who have not read/not prepared for seminars or tutorials?
Compassion/courage: set individual reading/TEF
1. Speed meeting.
2. What is compassion?
3. Small group → whole group consensus on:
   a. Noticing unhelpful seminar behaviours.
   b. How to address these compassionately.

**STEP TWO**
- **HOMEWORK**
  1. After each weekly lecture, students read independently on the topic of the lecture.
- **IN WEEKLY SEMINARS**
  2. In small groups, students share the research they have each done, presenting for discussion one at a time.
  3. Tutor facilitates students to support each other with the micro-skills of compassion.

**STEP THREE – FINAL ASSESSED SEMINAR**
1. The final small group discussions, at the end of the module, are filmed and each student is assessed according to criteria seen next.
Shall we?
Outcomes for a participating module the UH Business School (n=38 students)
Statistics Team

Dr Sylvia Beka
Researcher Molecular Genetics. Reader in Applied Statistics and Bioinformatics
Roslin Institute

Dr Neil Spencer
Director of Statistics Services
Business School

Dr Soheil Davari
Business Analysis and Statistics Group
Business School

Dr Matteo Crotta
Production and Population Health

University of Edinburgh
University of Hertfordshire
University of Hertfordshire
Royal Veterinary College London
Differences in % marks for Critical Thinking between local ethnic, international & white students for an essay on UH Business module
Differences in % marks for Critical Thinking between categories of students Essay and CfP seminar discussions, compared: same students as above.
Outcomes for a participating module the UH School of Computer Science (n=247) students
Computer Science study
Box plot for white students – comparison of marks control and intervention groups
Computer Science study
Box plot for BME students: comparison of marks control (and intervention groups)
HOW GOOGLE BUILDS THE PERFECT TEAM
National Union of Students’ (2009) explored why “Black students are less likely to be satisfied with their educational experience and to attain first-class degrees in comparison to their White peers” (p4).

A survey of 938 black students:

- “with 23 per cent describing it as ‘cliquey’…
- 17 per cent as ‘isolating’…
- 8 per cent as ‘hostile’…
- and respondents “often speaking of alienation and exclusion“ (p5).

“spawned from inside the classroom”
“feeling left out of discussions and debates” (p4).
The local BME student

The international student

The working class student
(Mallman, 2017)

The LGBT student
(Mobley and Johnson, 2015; Taulke-Johnson, 2008),

The disabled student
(Vickerman and Blundell, 2010)

The mature student
(Chapman, 2017; Mallman and Lee, 2016; Fragoso et al,
Focussing on differences? 
The Snowflake Generation ?

Highest ever levels of HE student anxiety and depression in the UK (You.Gov, 2016)

Multiculturalism

Integrating people in the wider social context focused on (protecting the rights of) minority groups.

- plural communities in Britain living in parallel
- not integrated
you got the gift, but it looks like you're waiting for something...

...your next life maybe, who knows?
Interculturalism

- Attends to the positive interactions of diverse and complex, human individuals (not groups), acting and living together in collaboration (Zapata-Barrero, 2013).

- Cultures can and should be entered and exited freely – in “mobile and dynamic processes” (Ibid, p8) – by the individual. These processes are not recognised nor attended to in the more limited, multicultural model (Cantle, 2012; Zapata-Barrero, 2013).
• I felt not as one person but I felt as a person within an entity and the entity was my group. ... I felt that I was part of the group ... I didn’t feel like an individual at that point. It didn’t make me feel like I’m focused on it. It didn’t make me feel like we’re all focussed on it.

• S29 Local ethnic minority male
S13: And ....you realise, "Well no, we’re also responsible for making sure other people have things to say and want to talk."
“I was worried being the oldest person and the only non-native English person... [But] they made me feel like an equal... Having ten years of working experience with many people from different cultures and backgrounds, I never found it as smooth as this time. Outside of university, we’re still hanging out together.”

Group G2, Computer Science
Staff response to Compassion Focused Pedagogy

Introduced to last two cohorts of our PG Cert in Learning and Teaching for colleagues in

Law, Computer Science, the Humanities, Nursing, Social work, Business, Pharmacy, People Development Unit, Educational Technologists

In use:

– Within core staff CPD module
– Student induction
– Seminars on undergraduate programmes, e.g., ALL Humanities 1st year undergrads
– Inter-professional education in health
– NHS workplace – nurse practitioners taking it back out to community
External Examiners’ Reporting on Compassion Focussed Assignments

Re: the rewarding of inclusivity skills:

"I don’t have an issue with that at all."

“Some of the questions I had have been addressed; the context and the application is clear”

"I do like to see empirical evidence that this is working."

“I have no concerns whatsoever.”

"The ability to understand and integrate yourself into other cultures may by higher priorities now."

Robert Graham
Director of Undergraduate Teaching Programmes (Business Management)
Heriot - Watt University
External Examiners’ Reporting on Compassion Focussed Assignments

“There is excellent, innovative and distinctive work across the program”... “the student work demonstrates substantive learning even at the weaker levels, and sophisticated excellence at the top.”

“I was particularly intrigued this year by the assignment which combined primary source analysis with group work and seminar management. It challenged students to work as a panel....” “I can only add my congratulations and my encouragement to continue to ensure students experience both the traditional essay/exam format and other verbal, digital and textual applications of historical knowledge.”

Professor Elaine Chalus, Head of History, Liverpool University
External Examiners’ Reporting on Compassion Focussed Assignments

“I think that this is an interesting way to assess students that does satisfy the requirements of the module.”

“This is where it [the CfP] is most valuable … best practice is shared...without me getting the sense that anyone overly-dominated”

“It is sensitive and innovative.”

Professor John Gardener
Faculty of Arts, Law and Social Sciences
Anglia Ruskin University
“There needs to be a positive emphasis on effective teaching AND assessment types and methods to ensure that students are:
- engaged
- included
so that they can continue with the ever present need for effective communication skills.

[The CfP] assessment approach was very positive and directed.”

Dr Don Burton
Open University
Staff response to Compassion Focussed Pedagogy

“[CfP] is very relevant for me and I hope it will help others like me”

Educational Technologist (with reference to her Sri Lankan heritage)

“This work is great – it is the kind of work that I am constantly engaging with in an adult education setting and it makes sense to apply it to HE.”

Development facilitator

“For me, these are really important aspects to consider and clearly link to the levels of stress students are experiencing… The notion that we can introduce the use of microskills to make seminars and group work a more supportive, kind and equal experience for all students is simple yet massively important for reducing stress levels, getting students listening to each other, reducing competitiveness and giving them skills for the workplace when they are expected to work in teams.”

Social work lecturer
S13: And ....you realise, "Well no, we’re also responsible for making sure other people have things to say and want to talk."

S13  PG female, second year/run of stage three, focus group transcript, p9, lines 294-297
S28: “When I go into seminars I find any other Muslim people there…. Most of the others, I’m probably not gonna talk to them to be honest. So I was thinking, ‘Oh my God. What if no-one talks to me?’ But as soon as I got into a group I was fine, I was fine. … I did the research so I was really lucky [sic]. We just got into the discussion and took it from there. It flowed really well.”

S28 Local ethnic minority female, stage three, mid module focus group transcript, p5, lines 133-135
S29: I felt not as one person but I felt as a person within an entity and the entity was my group. .. . I felt that I was part of the group and I didn’t feel like an individual at that point. It didn’t make me feel like I’m focused on it. It made me feel like we’re all focussed on it.

S29 Local ethnic minority male, stage three, post assessment focus group 3 transcript, p15, Lines 491-494
References


The Compassionate Mind Foundation. Available at: https://compassionatemind.co.uk/