

Knowledge Studies in Higher Education 15

Kathryn Waddington
Bryan Bonaparte *Editors*

Developing Pedagogies of Compassion in Higher Education

A Practice First Approach

 Springer

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Editors

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Kathryn Waddington 
University of Westminster
London, UK

Bryan Bonaparte 
University of Westminster
London, UK

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A Note on Confidentiality: Examples used in the book have been selected because they are typical of situations and issues that challenge us in the practice of compassion in higher education. To ensure confidentiality, authors have followed American Psychological Association (APA) guidance by altering specific characteristics and using composite descriptions.

This book is dedicated to all who enter higher education to learn, develop, and educate as compassionate global citizens. Future generations will face difficult realities, made worse during times of crisis and uncertainty. We hope that what they learn in compassionate higher education cultures and communities will equip them well for their own futures and that of humanity.

Foreword

Dear reader, I am delighted you are here!

I am Despoina, a first-generation graduate of Psychology and Criminology who, in a true sense of centring authentic student voices, has the great honour of being invited to write this foreword. My personal connection with the book in your hands was formed of the rare and beautiful privilege I had to participate as an undergraduate student co-researcher in a study investigating the development of compassionate pedagogical practice, funded by the UK Society for Research into Higher Education. The study, encompassing the values of the ‘thinking environment’ approach was based on mutual respect, equality, appreciation, and ease, creating a space where teachers and students worked together as ‘co-creators’. Consequently, by deconstructing the hierarchical structures that often define academia, and the reassembly of the team as ‘equal thinking partners’ we created a bilateral learning-teaching environment, led by an original heterarchical democratic spirit of shared inquiry. It was a space where vulnerability was met with compassion, allowing every voice to be heard, every thought to be explored, and every perspective to be celebrated; guiding a paradigm shift in the way teachers and students engaged with one another, but also tapping into the nurturing effect of compassion in pedagogy for all of us.

As a life-long learner I have navigated the educational system from an era of corporal punishment in primary school to attaining a first diploma in early years education at night school; I subsequently progressed from the period of supporting my child through their educational journey to guiding myself to a first-class honours degree. I have been in contact with education across different countries long enough to have witnessed the positive results of transformative ideas. I imagine dear reader, you may have too! However, as the educational system still operates within the limitations of a world where inequalities abound, there is a great need to adopt compassion in pedagogical practice, not only because compassion acknowledges the barriers that impede academic success but also because it bears the commitment to address them. Compassionate pedagogy thus, besides supporting academic achievement, holds the promise to holistically embrace the well-being of students in higher education by fostering spaces of trust that empower students to build the social and emotional skills needed to reach their self-actualisation.

It is therefore with great enthusiasm that I introduce you to this book which is an anthology that celebrates the art of teaching with compassion, crafted by the capable hands of an interdisciplinary team of global experts and student participants. You are invited to join in on a journey exploring how the idea of compassionate pedagogy has the power to reshape our approach to teaching and learning in higher education. A foreword is usually written by an authority on the subject so it is a privilege to be considered a ‘student expert’ and contributor to this book. I hope that my words and reflections will reinforce the importance of foregrounding students’ voices in the exploration of compassion on campus and in the classroom—as now experienced in multiple online, virtual, digital, physical, and relational spaces.

The authors in this book draw from a wide range of interdisciplinary, theoretical, and professional expertise, with contributions from students whose voices and practices on compassion have powerful perspectives to share. They invite us to navigate the complex landscape of education in the twenty-first century; encourage us to deconstruct institutional cultures in universities; and ask us to take a closer look on human relationships in higher education. However, following the significant social, economic, and technological transformations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, they critically discuss whether the academic practices of the past may be unbecoming to the vision of creating the global citizens of tomorrow. This will ultimately support the need for compassionate pedagogical practice to be extended into every evolving space where learning unfolds.

One of the core beliefs of compassion in pedagogy is that students benefit immensely when their educators and those leading and supporting learning find profound meaning in their work and extend compassion to all. A focal point in this book is to highlight how compassion in the sphere of academia is an inclusive practice that can positively impact educators and students alike. This collection contains important messages for everyone involved in supporting pedagogies of compassion in higher education. Key messages for educators that need to be heard and acted upon include: noticing suffering; being aware of students’ needs and responding accordingly; avoiding unhelpful practices (such as ‘death by PowerPoint’ and ‘information bombing’); and promoting positive practices such as rapport building with students and use of diverse perspectives and course materials.

On a personal note, even though I am still a novice in the theorising of compassionate pedagogy, compassion for me translates as the act of radical love. It brings to mind the South African term of ‘Ubuntu’ that in its various translations means: ‘My being is tied to your being’ and ‘I am because you are’. Ubuntu encompasses the interconnectedness that all humans share and the capacity to recognise each other’s humanity beyond the invisible barriers; to notice ‘suffering’ and act within your level of capacity to alleviate the suffering of others. However, it must be kept in mind that it also means remembering to extend the same grace to yourself.

This is my story (so far) dear reader, but remember, everyone has their own. I hope that as you embark on the journey of compassionate pedagogy, you may find inspiration to champion compassion within your sphere of influence. Because even though an education can feed the mind, compassion feeds the soul.

BSc (Honours) Psychology and Criminology
Alumna, University of Westminster
London, UK

Despoina Messinezi

Preface

This collection marks an important step towards compassion in higher education, which will hopefully further pave the way for a better future. We use the term hopefully with care. There are still some harsh realities to be faced. The move towards compassion in universities requires a radical shift in order to address external pressures of marketisation, student and staff wellbeing and welfare, and the impact of climate change. This requires hope without illusion, and hope that is anchored in practice. This book is an important resource for educators, researchers, policymakers, and university leaders. It provides a map to guide readers through the challenges of the first quarter of the twenty-first century towards a new reality. A reality where a compassionate university is the everyday university of tomorrow.

London, UK

Kathryn Waddington

Bryan Bonaparte

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As editors we would like to thank all the students we have taught and learned with, and we value the compassionate conversations shared with colleagues and all the contributors to this volume. Paul Gibbs as a co-author and contributor has also provided wise counsel and inspiration for our thinking. We hope that all of these influences will continue to combine and create the ripples of compassion needed to radically re-shape universities of the future. Astrid Noordermeer and Deepthi Vasudevan at Springer Nature have provided essential and helpful ‘behind the scenes’ support and advice in order to bring this collection to publication in a compassionate manner.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Core Principles and Practices



Kathryn Waddington , Bryan Bonaparte , and Paul Gibbs

Abstract This introductory chapter takes as its starting point the fundamental assumption that compassionate pedagogies should be at the heart of higher education and universities of the future. The plurality is because there are potentially many representations of compassionate pedagogies, but these are not necessarily ‘new’ forms. They develop from existing critical, inter/disciplinary and professional practice pedagogies that play explicit attention to the core concept of the pedagogy of compassion. Following the COVID-19 pandemic this now extends beyond the classroom (virtual and/or physical) to encompass the multitude of places and spaces where learning occurs. The chapter sets out principles for creating practice-based knowledge and new ways of knowing. The higher education policy themes that this collection addresses are: (i) belonging; (ii) caring; (iii) emotion; (iv) human relationships; (v) kindness; and (vi) respect. These themes will be used to weave a coherent policy narrative throughout this volume. The chapter concludes with summaries of chapters which follow, which are grouped into three parts. Part I: Pedagogies of compassion—insights from practice; Part II: Theories and models of compassionate pedagogy; and Part III: Critical reflections on practice.

Keywords Compassionate pedagogies · Practice-based knowledge · Policy narrative · COVID-19

K. Waddington (✉) · B. Bonaparte
University of Westminster, London, UK
e-mail: K.Waddington@westminster.ac.uk; b.bonaparte1@westminster.ac.uk

P. Gibbs
East European University, Tbilisi, Georgia
e-mail: p.gibbs@mdx.ac.uk

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Background to the Book

In the edited book *The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education* (Gibbs, 2017a), the nature and role of compassion was discussed rather fully. In that book, Waddington wrote an inspiring chapter on creating the conditions for compassion in university culture and this book owes much to the insights from that chapter. This work was developed further in Waddington's own edited volume *Towards the Compassionate University: From Golden Thread to Global Impact* (2021a). Both have made significant contributions to the need for compassion in the twenty-first-century neoliberal university while understanding the restriction that such a structure offers to the development of compassionate pedagogy in ways that Killam (2023, p. 35) suggests:

Offering compassion as a throughline of inquiry, I wonder if/how it is possible for compassion to disrupt neoliberalism through the precarity of individual and systemic enactment. ... Can/does compassion create breaches [sic] for new possibilities?

Both Gibbs' (2017a) and Waddington's (2021a) books have a meta-goal of drawing upon a wide range of interdisciplinary, theoretical and professional perspectives to investigate the ways in which compassion can be an enframing ethos for a different form of university and campus. Additionally, and perhaps more feasibly, how compassion can become contagious in current organisational structures. Within these two books a need has emerged to better understand the notion and practice of a compassionate pedagogy, and this is the aim of the current volume. It assumes at its core that students benefit from faculty members who find meaning in their work, and who have compassion for others. Moreover, the book intends to take a predominantly practical approach to building compassionate pedagogies, and praxis based on experiences of practitioners from around the world. We use compassion in the sense of recognising the suffering of others, considering the seriousness of it and having the intent to do something about it. It is not pity, with the potentially patronising consequence of that, nor sympathy nor empathy. Hoggett (2009), for example, identified compassion as a fundamentally different quality to empathy, which he argued requires a degree of pity towards the object. The empathic process becomes a one-way process from subject to object, running the danger of projecting unwanted and unnecessary thoughts and feeling into that other person. Compassion, on the other hand, requires the participation of that other person. Hoggett calls this 'intelligent compassion whereby one can feel the pain and think critically about the injustice, thereby fusing an ethic of care to an ethic of justice' (2009, p. 147). Although pity, sympathy and empathy may each have a role in how we arrive at compassionate action, it is the sense one has for the plight of others and the desire to change that situation for the betterment of others that is at the heart of compassion.

In this volume the term 'pedagogy of compassion' is used as an overarching philosophical and moral position, based on the following core principles from Gibbs (2017b, p. 232, emphasis in the original):

1. *Compassion is founded on the dignity and limitations of humanity.*
2. *Compassion is universal; it is for and with everybody and must be given unconditionally.*
3. *Compassion inevitably expresses itself in the fight for justice.*
4. *Compassion is for the weakest, for those whom society condemns to misery and to the status of outcast, and for those whose dignity has been taken away.*

The term ‘compassionate pedagogy’ is used in both the singular and plural to denote the practice/s and concepts that embody the art and science of teaching with and about compassion in higher education.

A Reflection: The Impact of COVID-19

The context of compassion in higher education has much changed since the above books’ publication: the world began to feel the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its agency and specifically on the modes of teaching in university. Distance rather than close proximity became the dominant form of interaction, with technicality rather than physicality becoming the primary form of engagement and of belonging. For example, Vandeyar’s (2021) qualitative case study of a large South African university explored how the pandemic had influenced the educational practice/s of academics. It revealed a shift towards the pedagogy of compassion, which had ‘moved education beyond the curriculum and educational strategies to cultivate social capital and equal life chances for all’ (p. 1). While Denney’s (2023) (also qualitative) study into the compassion experience during the pandemic in UK universities found that although compassion was structurally embedded for students in ‘formalised’ policies and practices, this resulted in staff suffering:

Most universities produced *no detriment policies* which enabled students to make multiple claims for the impact of COVID on their assessments. Whilst this was a way in which suffering of students was recognized and alleviated, it had a negative impact on staff, who had to deal with an almost continuous marking load and felt significantly let down by management. (p. 7, emphasis in original)

The pandemic has given us an opportunity to reconsider what higher education is, what it is for and what it might be. This opportunity, woven into the growing complexity of the sector, also gives us a chance to rethink how compassion can be a core principle of what it means to be in, and teach within, higher education. Dingle et al.’s (2022) quantitative study into loneliness, belonging and mental health in Australian university students pre- and post-pandemic illustrates how the emotional and the tactile were often disengaged and the loneliness of the students exacerbated. All suffered consequences to their physical and/or mental health, and to their enjoyment of others and to their lifestyles. Empathy, help and compassion remained central to the way teaching was delivered, and a focus on student well-being became an ever-present institutional and personal concern. As we move away from those days (which are far from over for many countries of the world) it is time to relook at,

reshape and redesign curriculum and its delivery; not with an eye to our contractual obligation to students but to an ontology of compassion at the heart of our higher education practice.

Unfortunately, the complexity of the world and our focus on innovations in online teaching, our relationships with artificial intelligence (AI) and how that affects our students, their lives, and their opportunities, and the way we demand change, has segued into doing what we *can do* rather than what we *ought to do*. We have done this by encouraging a higher education credo of personally flourishing endeavour, not to be sacrificed on an efficacy and cost-effective model of higher education which needs to be looked at again from a compassionate stance. This stance needs compassion pedagogies, not one where we humans are seen as some sort of elite entities in a world provided as a gift to them, but one where we are considered an implicit part of that world where social justice for all are the conditions that encourage compassion for all, both within, and external to, our higher education institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how compassion could, revitalise and support those in academia but, without any significant structural changes within the sector, it is highly feasible that these gains may slip away. Indeed, we are far from confident that such an opportunity will be taken, especially if the dominant neoliberal model of the university continues with its focus and the institutional ethos of self-interest is not checked and reviewed. However, trajectories for embedding compassion in the post-pandemic world do exist and, as Parfitt et al. (2021) suggest, 'that acknowledging and responding compassionately to feelings of vulnerability can offer a lifeline for individuals' (p. 178). Certainly, Vandeyar's (2021) study of how the pandemic influenced the educational practice of academics, argues that changes to university education may be altered in ways built through the pandemic's experience which could engender change that emphasised concern for students and academics. These might emphasise personal well-being that 'seems to be informed by an ethic of care, compassion, and social justice pedagogies that move education beyond the curriculum and educational strategies' (Vandeyars, 2021, p. 11). Moreover, the notion of compassion satisfaction has emerged as a driver of academics' ability to be compassionate to themselves and others. The concept first suggested by Ledoux (2015) is seen when individuals assist or care for others and end up feeling satisfaction from their work. Its opposite is compassion fatigue. In a recent study by Velez-Cruz and Holstun (2022) they found that during the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA, when emotional self-care increases, compassion satisfaction in turn increases the propensity of academics to offer compassion to others.

A recent special issue of *Higher Education Policy* (2022, Vol. 3, Issue 3) examined how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected higher education development and governance. It concluded that although the pandemic had disrupted the 'normal operation' of universities, it had also opened up new opportunities:

For university teachers and leaders for exploring innovative modes of teaching and student learning, moving beyond the conventional models in developing new forms of inter-university collaborations. ... university leaders should be humbled to learn from the global health crisis resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19, seeking appropriate ways for closer and deeper collaboration for the betterment of the humanity. (Mok, 2022, p. 566)

This provides a strong endorsement for this volume, and the overarching higher education policy themes addressed within it. These are considered next, beginning with a very brief history of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism: A Brief History and Higher Education Policy Context

Weintrobe (2021), in the *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis*, notes that the word ‘neoliberal’ can be off-putting, and somewhat of ‘a dry mouthful’ (p. 2). Yet it is important to understand the forces shaping and affecting physical and social climates, and higher education landscapes. She points to three distinct phases in its history.

Phase one (1940s to 1970s): This saw the rise of an ideologically rigid mindset, which Weintrobe argues is largely responsible for the current climate crisis. People caught up in this mindset falsely believe that they are entitled to: (i) see themselves in idealised terms; (ii) have whatever they want (because they are ideal); and (iii) dispense with practical and moral practicalities by omnipotently ‘rearranging reality’.

Phase two (1980s to present): Began with the neoliberal economic reforms of the Reagan administration in the United States and Thatcher government in the United Kingdom. This resulted in a ‘culture of uncare’ (Weintrobe, 2021, p. 3) which promoted the false belief that any inconvenient costs and/or harmful consequences of the neoliberal economy could be discounted, or quite simply did not exist.

Phase three (the present and future): Where more and more people are stepping out of denial and confronting the reality and harm caused by neoliberalism. Or as Gibbs et al. (2019) put it, writing in a more specific higher education policy context:

The neoliberal context woven into the post-truth media has placed the self-interested economic focus at the fore and with it the *personal good* of education rather than the *moral common good* that universities can and do provide. (p. 6, emphasis added)

The chapters in this collection will illustrate how moral values in higher education can shape core higher education policy themes both now, and in the future.

Higher Education Policy Themes

Box 1.1 illustrates the core policy themes addressed in this volume.

Box 1.1: Higher Education Policy Themes

<i>Belonging</i>	<i>Respect</i>
<i>Caring</i>	<i>Kindness</i>
<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Human relationships</i>

Source: Blake et al. (2022), Bovill (2020), Chankseliani and McCowan (2021), Okanagan Charter (2015), Unwin (2018), and World Universities Network (n.d.)

The policy themes addressed in this volume make an important contribution to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021). Of particular relevance is SDG4:

- *Quality education: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning*—which identifies higher education as a key contributor to educational progress at all levels.

The World Universities Network’s (WUN, n.d.) Global Challenge in Higher Education and Research initiative addresses the sources, mechanisms, and social structures that give rise to today’s higher education challenges. We contend that developing and supporting pedagogies of compassion is crucial to the World Universities Network’s ambition to:

- Promote, through research and scholarship, the ongoing development of equitable, contextually relevant, high quality and accessible higher education throughout the world.

The book uses the metaphor of ‘weaving a policy narrative’ to bring a combinatory view, whereby policy, practice, theory and research are synthesised into a coherent body of knowledge. The art of weaving is the creation of fabric using intersecting threads and materials and is used as an organising principle for this book.

The COVID-19 pandemic has offered some hope for permanent positive change, yet we believe that, to be realised, that compassion might have a more central part in higher education. Against these positive trends, the neoliberal consensus on the necessity of market capitalism has led to the dominance of values around choice, independence and personal achievement, as well as competition, selfishness and the pursuit of profit, status and power. These, as Spandler and Stickley (2011) suggest, appear ‘diametrically opposed to qualities associated with compassion’ (p. 557). This is a point echoed powerfully by Parfitt et al. (2021, p. 188) who write that ‘to carry compassion forward into the post-pandemic university, taken for granted individualism and self-seeking behaviours have to change, and a new stance towards our relational selves be adopted’. Much—or indeed any—evidence of such changes being systematically embedded in higher education institutional practices seem slight. There are discussions on well-being or relational teaching or student-centred learning and student voices or the slowing of paces with the universities to open spaces for compassionate engagement which offer hopeful signs or glimmers of

hope (e.g. see Berg & Seeber, 2016; Bovill, 2020; Bozalek, 2017; Klemencic, 2017; Mountz et al., 2015). However we have yet to see reshaping of the core economic purpose of higher education.

Competition within and between universities continues at pace, enrolment targets push resources to their limits and academics, in large part, feel undervalued. As Spandler and Stickley (2011) state, compassion is the recognition that it operates in and through social relationships, and social relationships are in turn shaped within the specific social milieu that may (or may not) be conducive to compassion. This means that compassion can be facilitated or significantly inhibited within different social and cultural value systems. It is for this very reason that universities and institutions of higher education ought not be conceived of, or run as, businesses. If we step back from the marketisation of these distinctive institutions and resist them acting as mirrors upon it or as justifiers of the anxiety of our communised identity, then their structure and purpose might be anything other than economic, and even educational! In a different world, where universities lead, not follow, the ethical trends in which their communities speak up and rebel against injustice and against a culture of post-truth, there is space for compassion to be an intrinsic contribution to how these organisations, and those within them, behave. Compassion, we will suggest, is not the packaged variety dogged by compassion fatigue, and predominantly and historically addressed in higher education through the training of nurses, physicians and other healthcare professionals. Instead, it is the compassion inherent in our being as one with others and a compassionate ethos that changes the core ways in which we teach, research and conduct ourselves with others across our higher education systems. Indeed, Haynes and Macleod-Johnstone (2017) have spoken of the work of compassion and functionality which seem at odds with a notion of existential caring.

What is needed is a radical revision of the university where care and compassion are interrelated concepts that need to be infused into our institutional cultures and practices. Our discussion starts from the way in which a praxis compassion teaching can be grown in institutional settings that encourage this and, more importantly, are structured to enable compassionate practices. There have been important studies which point to development in compassionate pedagogy/pedagogies, and many will be discussed in this book. This requires spaces which are caring, where empathy is considered in all aspects of the curriculum and where compassion and care is provided for students and staff. It is where, according to Clouston (2018, p. 1018), academics ‘embody their own caring values in terms of care and compassion toward the student body and their colleagues’.

We have not dwelled here in any depth on the forms of educative cultivation of compassion for others and for oneself that Rashedi et al. (2015) suggest community learning might engender. Neither do we dwell on the acceptance of the humanness of distress and suffering that mindfulness—as proposed by Tirsch (2010) and more recently Egan et al. (2022)—might offer as a means of cultivating compassion, self-compassion, and enhanced academic performance. Nor what ‘acceptance-based behaviour therapy’ might produce (Roemer et al., 2016) to assist in opportunities to enrich curriculum and research experiences in ways of behaving as individuals and

as organisations; however, these are addressed in a later chapter (see Chap. 11, Kaplan & Nowlan, [this volume](#)). We turn now to principles for building compassionate pedagogies.

Principles for Building Compassionate Pedagogies

One starting point could be Zembylas' (2017) notion of 'critical and strategic pedagogies of compassion', conceptualised as the pedagogies that engage students and educators in a critical interrogation of the intersections among power, praxis, and emotion in both society and education. Zembylas argues:

Critical and strategic pedagogies of compassion in higher education ... in the plural, because there are potentially many possible manifestations of such pedagogies [which] are not "new" forms of critical pedagogies. Rather, they are existing critical pedagogies that play explicit attention though to the emotional complexities of the narratives of suffering that enter the classroom and interrogate in particular the trappings of narratives of pity and sentimentality. (2017, p. 183, emphasis in original)

While Hoggett's (2009) interrogation of narratives of pity refers to the distinction and difference between compassion and pity, arguing that pity can be seen as a 'falsifying projection':

When we feel pity, because the nature of the other required for pity to find realization, we load upon the other an impossible identity, something he or she cannot live up to, since no one can be that virtuous. ... this is what the Kleinians call *projective identification*, in which part of self becomes located in the other. (pp. 145–146, emphasis in the original)

Zembylas' and Hoggett's arguments reflect two theoretical positions: (i) the affective turn in educational theory (Boler & Zembylas, 2016); and (ii) systems psychodynamic thinking and theory (Lawler & Sher, 2023; Obholzer & Zagier Roberts, 2019). Waddington (2017) argued that theoretical perspectives from psychodynamic psychology can be used to understand the 'dark side' of organisational experience in universities, helping 'individuals and organisations to gain a better understanding, and new ways of thinking about, emotions, identity, inter-personal relationships, group dynamics and organisational culture' (p. 55).

However, twenty-first-century universities, can no longer rely on last century's ways of theorising, knowing and researching (St Pierre, 2021). Mulgan (2020) sees the COVID-19 pandemic as a spur to thinking again about what is changeable and worth changing, asking: 'Could we use the crisis to rethink systems that are no longer fit for purpose, and discard zombie orthodoxies that have outlived their usefulness?' (p. 15). As the title of Mulgan's more recent (2022) book suggests: *Another World is Possible*, this is a world where we can imagine and create change, rather than complain, or try and fix what is broken. We believe a practice first approach to building compassionate pedagogies offers a different starting point, and new ways of navigating, and disrupting the landscape of neoliberal oppression in higher education.

A Practice First Approach

A practice first approach is about understanding compassion in a lived and embodied way. Haroun (2021, p. 113) positions compassion as a core university skill, aptitude and practice, arguing that:

Compassion cannot be understood purely as a theoretical concept. To truly grasp it, we need to understand it in a lived and embodied way so that we can notice when it's missing and have the skills and attributes to practice it actively.

The principles of a practice first approach to building compassionate pedagogies begin with: (i) walking the terrain of compassion—practice—then; (ii) moving to studying the map—theory; and (iii) making it relevant for current and future professional and personal life (Haroun, 2021). These three principles informed Waddington and Bonaparte's (2022) research into developing compassionate pedagogical practice with undergraduate psychology students as co-researchers (discussed further in Chap. 3, Waddington & Bonaparte, [this volume](#)). Godfrey et al. (2018, p. 57) advanced the idea of 'intersectional compassionate pedagogy', which focuses on: 'creating authentic intimate connections and community as our pedagogy' (Godfrey and her co-authors develop these ideas further in Chap. 5, [this volume](#)). The notion of intimacy in higher education can be traced back to the work of Giddens' (1990, cited in Thaver, 2010), and institutional imperatives of trust, intimacy, and fundamental notions of 'feeling at home' and 'belonging' (Thaver, 2010, p. 148).

Compassionate pedagogies comprise: (a) core principles and concepts such as those identified above; and (b) differentiating features that will depend upon context and disciplinary/practice focus. For example, different types of teaching are required in order to organise ways in which students are educated for future professional practice; a concept that Shulman (2005) calls 'signature pedagogies'. Thus undergraduate research skills teaching may differ between vocationally oriented higher education preparing students to use research competencies in their future professional practice, and research-intensive institutions, where teaching may be more laboratory based (see Griffioen, 2019). A signature pedagogy has three dimensions: (i) a *surface structure*, which consists of concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning; (ii) a *deep structure*, which is a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how; and (iii) an *implicit structure*, which is a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values and dispositions. Pedagogical principles and dimensions can be developed further to include—and be *infused* with—compassion, at every level. This should not be a 'bolt on' approach, nor something used as a checklist that is then pasted over existing courses/modules. It requires what Schwittay (2021, p. 11) refers to as 'pedagogical creativity', which comprises: (i) *imagination*—move beyond the obvious; (ii) *exploration*—be open to the emergent; and (iii) *analysis*—think critically about new ideas. It also requires radical reform, and creation of compassionate institutional cultures and practices (Waddington, 2017, 2019).

Finally, an understanding of a practice first approach to seeing compassion in a lived and embodied way requires adoption of a 'practice lens' (Bain & Mueller,

2016). This, we contend, will help scholars and policy makers find their way to new horizons, and innovative and inclusive research agendas (see also Waddington et al., 2023). Key assumptions of a practice lens are that:

- The social world (including universities as a microcosm of our wider society) is understood to consist of practices, activities and performances.
- Practices involve bodily action, mental activity and material things.
- Knowledge is understood differently and knowing is a social phenomenon shared with others.

These assumptions challenge the supremacy of deductively derived theory, and research that is not actionable in practice. Latham (2019) writing ‘in praise of practice’ argues that theory should not dictate empirical questions and research methods; instead, ‘real world questions should come first, and theory and methods should follow’ (p. 13). The three overarching ‘real world questions’ that this collection addresses are:

1. How do we work with and research compassion in ways that are meaningful and applicable to students, staff and society at large?
2. How do we avoid compassion being talked about and taught in ways that are theoretically sound but largely irrelevant in practice?
3. What—and where—are the post-pandemic opportunities to ask big questions that will make a positive difference to the future of higher education and compassion?

How the Book Works

The book is divided into three inter-related parts:

- Part I: *Pedagogies of Compassion—insights from practice*
- Part II: *Theories and models of compassionate pedagogy*
- Part III: *Critical reflections on practice*

Part I draws upon pedagogical research and scholarship that is grounded in practice, with chapters written from both academic and student perspectives. It begins with a chapter by Bryan Bonaparte that questions the language of compassion, with its use of terms like suffering and pity when used in a higher education context. Do students want to be seen as suffering? As victims? What does compassion mean to students? This provides the backdrop to Chap. 3, co-authored by Bryan and Kathryn Waddington, which draws on a small-scale qualitative study into compassionate pedagogical practice with undergraduate students as co-researchers. A notable feature in this study was use of Nancy Kline’s (2015) ‘thinking environment’ and associated concept of students as ‘equal thinking partners’ in the co-creation of practice-based knowledge. Their chapter offers new insights into the practice of research into compassionate pedagogy. In Chap. 4, Elliott Spaeth draws upon his

practice and experience of being disabled, queer, and neurodivergent in higher education to examine the role of compassion in inclusive learning and teaching. His chapter includes frameworks that can be used in practice to promote inclusive, compassionate approaches. Phoebe Godfrey, Jessica Larkin-Wells and Marley Jordan conclude the first section with their chapter on practising intersectional compassion at a student run farm at the University of Connecticut. This chapter brings an international perspective to this collection and their ‘heart to hand to land based ethic’ takes an intersectional lens to create a complex and compassionate and supportive classroom and doing so in place-based sustainable ways. The chapter includes student voices, and Marley’s reflections on the role of farming and social work education in her life.

Part II is based on the assumption that changes in higher education following the COVID-19 pandemic present educators and researchers with challenges in seeking to stay abreast of their fields and navigate new scholarly terrains. Many fields of inquiry and disciplines are beginning to question the relevance of research findings and theorising from studies conducted pre-pandemic, and the value of last century’s methodologies for addressing twenty-first-century challenges. This section of the book draws upon diverse interdisciplinary fields of practice including work and organisational psychology, neuroscience, healthcare and Eastern philosophies of heart-mind.

In Chap. 6, Haiko Ballieux explores what higher education can learn from an evolutionary developmental neuroscience perspective and the relatively new field of educational neuroscience, which bridges the gap between cognitive neuroscience theory, and applied educational practice. He also warns of the dangers of proliferation, and uncritical acceptance, of unscientific ‘neuromyths’. This is followed in Chap. 7, where Frances Maratos and Caroline Harvey draw on an extensive international neuroscience research programme to offer evidence-based directions for compassion curricula in higher education-based pedagogical science. This includes evidence from research undertaken in South America and Portugal, extending the reach of the book beyond a UK higher education readership and context. Their chapter makes a case for universities to build on principles of compassionate pedagogical practice in schools in order to help students make the transition into higher education. Seen together these two chapters give an in-depth account in the science of compassion, with clear examples of how this can be applied in the classroom.

In Chap. 8, Kathryn Waddington introduces gossip into the thinking and theorising around organisation compassion, asking whether—as applied epistemology—gossip can help to reveal what really goes on behind the façade of the neoliberal university. This chapter reflects the positioning of this collection in the Springer ‘Knowledge Studies in Higher Education’ series. It examines the characteristics of compassionate and inclusive universities, drawing on an eclectic range of interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives. It considers gossip as a form of organisational knowledge from a communicative constitution of organisations (CCO) perspective and introduces a conceptual framework to guide future theorising and research.

In Chap. 9, Josephine NwaAmanka Bardi extends the UK National Health Service ‘6Cs’ model and values of care and compassion into higher education to

include the concept of kindness. She offers a practice-based model of compassionate pedagogy from healthcare that can be extended and applied in other higher education contexts, highlighting the importance of listening to student voices. This part of the book concludes with Gabriella Buttarazzi's Chap. 10, based on her doctoral research (in China) into classical yoga traditions and cultivation of the heart-mind. This chapter brings an international perspective that challenges Western assumptions of higher education knowledge and practice, and offers thoughtful recommendations and implications for scholars, policy makers, and the development of contemplative pedagogical practice. These two chapters bring frameworks and thinking from outside higher education and offer perspectives which allow staff and students to re-examine their ideas about compassion.

Part III comprises four chapters that critically reflect on aspects of compassionate pedagogy across multiple levels and perspectives. These range from reflections on compassion in the classroom to compassion in the boardroom, as well as the multitude of other spaces and places where learning occurs. This includes students' learning, as well as that of the chapter authors' as practitioners, teachers, researchers and leaders. In Chap. 11, Yusuf Kaplan and Jenni Nowlan bring a practitioner-academic perspective to their reflections on practices of 'everyday awareness', and mindfulness with students and staff. This chapter provides a progression and link with Part II, bringing through the 'narrative threads' from contemplative practices, neuroscience, psychology, but also introducing the conceptual (and contested) thread of 'neoliberalism'. In Chap. 12, Justin Haroun builds upon his earlier thinking on a 'practice first' approach to compassion in higher education, which was one of the inspirations for this collection. Justin uses two reflective narratives to explore the challenges of critically, and creatively, reflecting on his experience of 'swimming in the neoliberal waters of academic life'. In Chap. 13, Mike Thomas gives an account of his experiences of compassion in the boardroom from the perspectives of his previous position as Vice Chancellor in a UK university, and current role as Chair of a National Health Service (NHS) University Hospital. From a higher education perspective, his chapter concludes that university boards have a place in changing practices and perceptions through compassion, fairness and equity in their governance.

In Chap. 14, Kathryn Waddington and Bryan Bonaparte reflect on the themes identified from the viewpoints of diverse student voices that resonate through the book. They also identify gaps in theory and data that the constituent chapters have revealed, including implications for hybrid pedagogy and partnership working in service-learning programmes. This chapter raises key questions that can be used by students and staff wishing to interrogate their universities' compassionate policies and practices, and reflects on the role of mentorship, coaching and compassion in writing, peer review and publishing practices and processes. In the final coda, Paul Gibbs draws together the themes of commonality, if not universality, in the works presented. To this end, Paul's coda makes pedagogical, institutional and policy recommendations that reflect the revealed themes of the chapters.

A Note on the Terminology of Compassion

The term compassion comes from Latin *com-* and *pati* meaning to suffer with/together (Merriam-Webster, 2024); while in the academic literature it is defined theoretically as a four-part social process of: (i) noticing suffering; (ii) interpreting suffering in particular ways; (iii) feeling empathic concern in response to suffering; and (iv) acting to address/alleviate it (e.g. Simpson et al., 2024). However Pietroni (2021, p. 206, emphasis added) has argued that compassion needs to be re-considered, re-evaluated, and integrated into the understanding and practices of society more broadly as:

- A primary value and requirement in a modern world that, at individual, social, institutional, and political levels, *frequently fosters its opposite*—to the extent that fear of annihilation, of valued social institutions, of groups, and of the self—is widespread.
- Treating the other(s) with the same concern, attention, and generosity that one would wish for oneself; refraining from treating them as one would not wish for oneself, being open to, disturbed by, sympathetic to, and moved to respond to the experience and pain of others.

We are mindful that some readers may be more fully immersed in the language and terminology of compassion and the discourse(s) of compassion in higher education. Others may be new to the conversation, and some of the concepts, and wide-ranging approaches included in the book may be unfamiliar. Chapter authors all bring their unique voices, experiences, practices, perspectives and knowledge to this collection. They also bring diverse student voices into their conversations, written in the spirit of working with students as partners, and we offer two pieces of advice at this point. First be open to shifts in perspective—from small to large scale and vice versa; and second, exercise patience and ‘wait and see’. Or as Weintrobe (2021) puts it: ‘Give yourself permission not to feel you have to rush at understanding [everything] or at trying to assemble the bigger picture’ (p. 4).

Conclusion: A Reader’s Guide

We hope readers find what follows in this volume interesting, inspiring, thoughtful and useful. While it comprises three inter-related parts, each chapter constitutes a wholeness in its own right. We suggest you begin each chapter—in whatever order you read them—with compassion, curiosity and critical thinking, in order to begin to weave your own narrative. The threads, as Waddington (2021b, p. 213) notes, involve everyone involved in the task of creating and cultivating compassionate universities being: