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CREATING COMPASSIONATE CHANGE IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

**LEADING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS
EVERYDAY SUFFERING IN SCHOOLS**

JOSSEY-BASS
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Praise for *Creating Compassionate Change in School Communities*

“Education has changed drastically in the past five years. This book humanizes the difficulty of the changes and provides tangible steps educators can take to support their students and the people many often overlook—themselves.”

—**Autumn Rivera**, 2022 Colorado Teacher of the Year and
2022 National Teacher of the Year Finalist

“This exceptionally written book reminds us to engage our work in education with our heads *and our hearts*. A much-needed text during these times of intensified stress, anxiety, self-doubt, and blame, these authors shepherd readers through strategies and tools to help us heal individually as we renew and reset our commitments to practices of listening, compassion, empathy, and understanding, in service with and to others. An accessibly written book, grounded in transformative and rigorous research, this book should be read by any of us determined to keep pressing and fighting for education for all.”

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—**Antero Garcia**, Associate Professor, Stanford University

Creating Compassionate Change in School Communities

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*Leading Together to Address Everyday
Suffering in Schools*

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
Published simultaneously in Canada.

ISBNs: 9781394265220 (Paperback), 9781394265244 (ePDF), 9781394265237 (ePub)

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2025008658 (print)

Cover Design: Paul McCarthy
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We dedicate this book to you, dear educator, and to all those reading this book who care for and tend to the hearts and minds of young people. It is our genuine wish that whatever benefit this book brings to you ripples out to benefit the communities of which you are a part, to help bring about a more just and compassionate world.

May you be happy.

May you be well.

May you know peace and dignity.

May you lead with curiosity, courage, and compassion.

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to the educators who joined us in collaborative design to develop the arc of the digital compassion and dignity certificate: Adrienne, Ambika, Amy, Cindi, Dana, Halie, John, Karen, Katie, Lindsey, Loren, Naomi, Nikki, Max, Michelle, Stacy, and Taylor. Your thoughtfulness, commitment, and care for one another, your students, and the future educators in the digital certificate during a particularly challenging year continues to motivate and inspire us.

We wish to thank all of the educators who found their way to our compassion and dignity community, who enrolled in our programs, and who supported our efforts through showing up, providing feedback, and spreading the word. In particular, we want to thank those educators who gave voice to many of the ideas within this book, and who so often said it better than we ever could: Adam, Adrienne, Ben, Brittany, Colleen, Crystal, Emma, Fabi, Gricel, Kaelyn, Karen, Kendra, Madison, Maggie, Meaghan, NB, Raquel, Samila, Sara, Sarah, Stephanie D., Stephanie P., Taryn, Tina, and Vincent. You are the heartbeat of this book!

Thank you to our district partners, especially Anna and Lora, for their commitment to the well-being of educators and students and for their ongoing support of compassion in their schools.

We wish to express our gratitude to our community at the Renée Crown Wellness Institute for showing us what a compassionate community looks and feels like. Thank you to Julia Zigarelli, Leah Peña Teeters, Michele Simpson, Donna Mejia, Michelle Reininger for their enthusiasm, friendship, and support. We would also like to thank our incredible Compassion & Dignity for Educators team who were involved in various

stages of envisioning, designing, revising, and teaching the digital certificate: Michelle Shedro, Caitlin McKimmy, Erica Van Steenis, Jovita Schiffer, Irfanul Alam, and Marisa Mendoza-Mauer.

We also wish to thank Caroline Pfohl and the Hemera Foundation for their generous and abiding commitment to contemplative practices that promote compassion and dignity in the world broadly and among educators specifically. Our partnership has helped to grow healthy, nurturing, and creative environments for educators and young people to thrive. Thank you, also, to the team of compassion and dignity meditation coaches who facilitated coaching and practice sessions with such care for educators enrolled in the certificate: Carla Burns, Sumi Kim, Amy Kisei Costenbader, Jeremy Lowry, Charlotte Rotterdam, Jogen Salzberg, and Claire Villarreal.

Thank you to the CU Boulder Teacher Leadership Program team for their ongoing support and encouragement of the compassion and dignity certificate: Kathy Schultz, Emily Gleason, Paula Battistelli, and Tyler Caldwell.

Thank you also to early advisors to this work, Kimberley Schonert-Reichl and Rob Roeser, and for championing the wellness of teachers through their work and service in the world.

Ashley: Thank you to Tom for his generosity, patience, steadiness, support, and compassion and to our girls for teaching me to find joy in life's smallest moments. I am also so grateful to my parents, Mary and Fred, who were my first teachers and the first people who loved me into being.

Bill: Thank you to Edie for her incredible support in always inviting me to pursue work that reflects who I am and want to become and to my spiritual teachers who have provided guidance and wisdom to help me cultivate an open mind and heart, especially the Ven. Dhyani Ywahoo, Gil Fronsdal, and Peter Williams.

Sona: I express my deepest gratitude to my friends and colleagues in the Crown Institute and all the young people, families, and teachers with whom we have the honor to work. I thank all the teachers who have supported and guided my learning and my crescent family for holding compassion, dignity, and love at our core.

Jinpa: First and foremost, I would like to express my deep gratitude to His Holiness the Dalai Lama to whom I owe much of what I know of compassion. I thank my co-authors for inviting me to be part of the team, my colleagues at the Compassion Institute, and, last but not least, my wife Sophie for sharing insights gained from her years of offering workshops on Social Emotional Learning to teachers.

Collectively, and finally, we express our deepest gratitude to Dr. PC Crown for her visionary commitment to the wellness of educators, kids, and families and the reminder to lead and teach always with heart.

About the Authors

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Ashley earned a B.A. from the College of the Holy Cross, an M.Ed. in Secondary Education from Providence College, and her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on teaching and teacher education from the University of Colorado Boulder. She is a former middle and high school teacher and has experience supporting teachers in various roles as curriculum leader, coach, mentor, and university instructor.

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She is the co-author with Sherryl Goodman, Ph.D., of a book for new and expectant mothers, *Expecting Mindfully: Nourish Your Emotional Well-Being and Prevent Depression During Pregnancy and Postpartum*. She is also the co-author of *Behavioral Activation for Depression* and *Behavioral Activation with Adolescents* and the editor of *Evidence-Based Practice in Action: Bridging Clinical Science and Intervention*. She is the recipient of numerous awards acknowledging her teaching and clinical research, including the Dorothy Martin Women’s Faculty Award, the Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award,

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Thupten Jinpa, Ph.D., is the Founder and Chairman of Compassion Institute, and the principal author of Compassion Cultivation Training™ (CCT®), the Institute's flagship compassion education offering, developed while Jinpa was at Stanford University. Jinpa also serves as an adjunct professor at the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University, Montreal, and is the founder and president of the Institute of Tibetan Classics. He has been a core member of the Mind and Life Institute and its Chairman of the Board since January 2012.

Jinpa trained as a monk at the Shartse College of Ganden Monastic University, South India, where he received the Geshe Lharam degree. Jinpa also holds a B.A. in Philosophy and a Ph.D. in Religious Studies, both from Cambridge University. Jinpa has been the principal English translator to H.H. the Dalai Lama since 1985, and has translated and collaborated on numerous books by the Dalai Lama including the *New York Times* bestsellers *Ethics for the New Millennium* and *The Art of Happiness*, as well as *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*. His own publications include *A Fearless Heart: How the Courage to be Compassionate Can Transform Our Lives* and translations of major Tibetan works featured in The Library of Tibetan Classics series.

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Creating Compassionate Change in School Communities

Introduction

I hope that everyone feels seen and heard. And that they have people there who are supporting them and people who love them. And that every kid and every staff member has someone whom they trust. And hopefully more than just one person, someone whom they can go to and know that they're there for them. And I would just hope that all the families too feel like we're really there for them to support them and to help them in any way. And that there's no division, and everyone just feels together and welcome.

—Taryn, First Grade Teacher

I hope that school's a place that people want to be, that they feel safer there than anywhere else or as safe as they do anywhere else. And that is created by a staff that is patient with each other and themselves and the kids and understands that big picture of common humanity and common suffering. I think that for my school, we feel it. There are some days that it feels like that, where it just feels like love and support all day, and you don't hear any enraged comments. In a great world, it would just be that warm, positive, supportive environment. We're going to acknowledge the difficulty and we're still going to try to be positive and supportive.

—Adam, High School English Teacher

Our schools today need to become spaces of healing, like the schools envisioned by these educators. Spaces of healing for young people from marginalized and minoritized communities, who are often asked to prove their humanity and worth just to gain access to a meaningful education. Spaces of healing for parents and families, who had to carry heavy burdens of teaching and caring for their children during the pandemic and who may be still carrying grief and wounds from that time. Spaces of healing for educators who have been asked to transform their teaching to meet the twin realities of the pandemic and racial reckoning and then have been criticized for teaching truths about our nation's injustices. Healing cannot come soon enough, and a key premise of this book is that you are the leaders who can help bring it about.

The healing we need requires courageous attention and care for ourselves and others to address everyday suffering in schools. As leaders, we need to address the manifestations of suffering that are in our own hearts and minds: the fatigue we feel from the empathy we hold for our students' suffering, the distress we feel from not being able to do what is right by our students or protect them from harmful systems, and the agitation and resentment we feel from difficult interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, and parents. We also need to address manifestations and the root causes of suffering that are present in our schools, by introducing new policies, practices, and routines that center caring relationships and that honor the dignity of each person who walks through the doors of our schools every day. We need especially to address policies and practices that cause harm to those students who are most vulnerable in our schools and in our society, including newcomer students impacted by immigration policies that threaten to separate their families or LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual or agender, and two-spirit) students and many others whose very identities are made invisible in our curriculum. And we need to maintain hope that this kind of healing is possible, that it's possible to create compassionate and dignity-affirming schools where children, families, educators, and communities feel seen, heard, and valued.

For this difficult work, we all need support to move past our own fatigue and overwhelm and resource ourselves for the long haul, and we need tools for transforming schools to eliminate everyday suffering in schools. To that end, this book presents a set of foundational ideas, practices, and educator experiences that can help prepare you to work with others in your school to create more compassionate, dignity-affirming schools. Our book is different from most books on self-care for educators and books on leadership. While other books focus on the power of contemplative practice for helping individual educators become more skilled at caring for themselves and others, our book is unique in its focus also on transforming schools into compassionate organizations. It takes up opportunities both within and beyond the classroom to promote compassion by changing policies and practices within schools that can be sites of suffering. Our aim in this book is to inspire educators like you to take up compassion as a focal point for collective leadership, to provide hope for compassion's power to rejuvenate educators

as professionals in a time of difficulty, and to offer a pathway toward healing in schools through creating compassionate change.

We wrote this book for people in and around schools who are especially concerned with addressing the everyday suffering in schools that are experienced inequitably. That includes teachers in schools and other educational settings at all grade levels and content areas, school leaders, counselors, mental health professionals, social workers, librarians, and student support staff. This also includes teacher educators, preparing the next generation of teachers and current teachers for the classrooms of today and tomorrow. In many ways, we wrote this book as an act of love for educators—including you—who do such important and difficult work every day.

Origins of This Book

The book's content draws on a coherently crafted integration of contemplative practices, psychology and the science of compassion, theories of learning and organizational change, and experiences of educators, an integration that is reflected in a course of study we co-designed with educators to prepare educators to be changemakers in their schools. That course of study exists as an online master's certificate, *Cultivating Compassion & Dignity in Ourselves and Our Schools*, developed by the Renée Crown Wellness Institute in partnership with educators and the Compassion Institute and offered through the University of Colorado Boulder. It is a four-course certificate that begins with three asynchronous courses and concludes with a synchronous capstone course. In this book, we offer a synthesis of the ideas and practices of the program, along with educators' experiences and insights from the course, with the aim of making its lessons accessible to a broad audience.

During the 2019–2020 school year, we collaboratively designed (co-designed) with a group of educators—including teachers, counselors, administrators, librarians—the arc of the year-long digital compassion and dignity certificate for education leaders. Little did we know when we began this work that a pandemic would sweep the globe in the middle of the school year, soon to be followed by racial uprisings in the wake of the murders of George Floyd and others. The need for compassion, care, and connection was acutely felt both within our team and around the world as many suffered from illness, isolation, grief, confusion, and loneliness, as well as anger and frustration.

We began the co-design process by completing Compassion Cultivation Training® (CCT™) together to ground our work in a shared experience, to develop common language, and to be inspired. CCT is an 8-week evidence-based training program developed by Jinpa, in collaboration with Founding Faculty from the Compassion Institute. CCT integrates the science of compassion with secular approaches for cultivating compassion adapted from Tibetan Buddhist practices (Goldin & Jazaieri, 2017). Now taught around the world by certified teachers, CCT offers tools and resources for relating to oneself

and others with empathy, compassion, and kindness. Following the 8-week compassion training, our co-design team met weekly to adapt, extend, and apply core content from CCT to design a digital certificate for educators. Educators drew on their experiences, including their joys and struggles, to contribute to the design of the compassion certificate to benefit other educators and ultimately their schools.

We are filled with gratitude for these educators who dedicated nearly 60 hours of their time during an extremely challenging school year to help create the compassion and dignity certificate with us, signaling to us the urgent need for compassion in schools. We know that as we struggled together to make sense of and make do with the challenges presented by the pandemic, we and our educator partners were transformed through the co-design process. One of the co-design teachers, Karen, reflected on her experience:

This process has been life-changing in that it has brought consistent mindful practices into a space that is usually so full and stressful. This process has transformed me, bringing self-compassion into a place that is often full of self-criticism. All of this allows me to step into my role as educator with more awareness and the ability to have compassion for others. I hope that this [certificate] brings such insights, awareness and consistent practices fully alive for educators in a profound and powerful way. Just maybe, we can make the world a kinder, more responsive place for everyone.

Another educator shared their wish with the group:

It will help [educators] to take a step back from things that have become routine and expected, and to look at their students with fresh eyes, to identify our intentions in the thousands of difficult decisions and interactions we have each day, and I think this will go very far to bring more compassion into the world.

Since launching our compassion and dignity programs for educators in 2020, we have engaged nearly 550 educators in our courses, training sessions, and workshops. The educators teach and lead at all levels from PK-20 and represent all content areas. The educators are classroom teachers, principals, superintendents, district leaders, librarians, counselors, school-based mental health professionals, social workers, interventionists, paraprofessionals, researchers, and university instructors. While many participants in our programs live and work in Colorado, through our virtual programs and courses we also engage educators living across the United States and internationally. Our hope is through this book we can reach thousands more educators, providing them with ideas, practices, and tools to create more compassionate schools.

We are also educators and scholars who bring our own experiences, perspectives, and investigations to bear on the content of the book. Ashley is a researcher in the Renée Crown Wellness Institute at the University of Colorado Boulder, where she works in

partnership with educators and co-teaches our certificate program with Bill. She is a former middle and high school teacher, curriculum leader, and instructional coach who has been dedicated to creating caring and inclusive classrooms and schools and supporting the well-being of educators. She brings the perspective of both a scholar and educator-leader to this book.

In addition to co-teaching the certificate program, Bill is a faculty member at CU Boulder in the learning sciences. He has devoted many years to building and studying how educators and researchers can work together to design curricula and programs like ours. In addition, he is a long-term practitioner of meditation, and he has engaged for many years with the practices included in this book.

Sona is Director of the Crown Institute and Professor in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience. Her research focuses on cultivating mental health and wellness among women, children, and families by engaging people's capacities for learning to care for themselves and their communities. Her career has been dedicated to the science of contemplative practices like compassion and mindfulness among youth, families, and educators and to teaching these practices as an educator and clinical psychologist (and in her own life).

Jinpa is the Founder and Chairman of Compassion Institute, and the principal author of CCT, the Compassion Institute's flagship compassion education offering, developed while Jinpa was at Stanford University. He is also an adjunct professor at the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University and is the founder and president of the Institute of Tibetan Classics. Jinpa trained as a monk at the Shartse College of Ganden Monastic University, South India, where he received the Geshe Lharam degree. Jinpa has been the principal English translator to H.H. the Dalai Lama since 1985 and has translated and collaborated on numerous books by the Dalai Lama. Jinpa and Sona began working together as Board members at the Mind and Life Institute, a beautiful and rich context for a long-term collaboration dedicated to the wellness of educators and our world at large.

What We Know About the Power of Compassion

As this book is centered on compassion, we start with a definition that can provide a common starting point for exploring how to cultivate compassion in ourselves, our relationships, and our schools. We know there are lots of ways that we talk about compassion in everyday conversation. But as the research base for compassion has expanded over the last two decades, some general agreement on a useful definition has emerged (Mascaro et al., 2020). Drawing from scientific and contemplative approaches, we define *compassion* as having four basic components: (1) an awareness of suffering; (2) a feeling of concern and connection to one who is suffering (empathy); (3) a desire to relieve that suffering (motivation); (4) a willingness to respond or act to relieve suffering (Gilbert,