

# Compassionate pedagogies at the heart of DMU?

*Starting a discussion*

Nicola Ward

Zoe Allman

# What is compassion?

- A motivation to notice, not normalise, one's own distress or disadvantaging, or that of others and make a commitment to reduce or prevent it (Gilbert, 2005)
- “To suffer together”
- Empathy can be passive, compassion has to be active

# Compassionate pedagogy

- More than a framework or model of practice: day-to-day choices
- Ensuring teaching and interactions with students and colleagues is based on kindness
- Has to be followed through with actions and practices that promote wellbeing and allow all to thrive
- Requires motivation and awareness of others
- Critical evaluation needed:
  - “A pedagogical commitment that allows educators to criticise institutional and classroom practices that ideologically underserve students at disadvantaged positions, while at the same time be self-reflexive of their actions through compassion as a daily commitment” (Hao, 2011)

# Question: What is your current level of understanding of compassion and compassionate Pedagogy?

1. Not a clue
2. I understand what compassion is but haven't really thought about how it is relevant in teaching and HE
3. I have heard of Compassionate Pedagogy and am interested about how it might be relevant in my practice
4. I have read about compassionate pedagogy and am already actively trying to apply it in my own practice

# Examples of Compassionate pedagogy in HE

- University of Virginia
  - Building a compassionate University  
<https://jpaap.napier.ac.uk/index.php/JPAAP/article/view/358/511>
- University of Hertfordshire Assessing compassion in HE  
<https://www.herts.ac.uk/link/volume-2,-issue-1/assess-compassion-in-higher-education-how-and-why-would-we-do-that>
- University of Stanford
  - Compassionate University
- University of Exeter
  - Compassionate campus

# Is compassion already evident at DMU?

Decolonising  
DMU

Healthy DMU

Staff training

Employee Assistance  
Programme

UDL

Personal  
tutoring

Flexible working

Embedding mental  
wellbeing  
in the curriculum

Staff networks

Sustainable  
Development Goals

Mandala project

DMULocal

# If compassion is lacking.....

Healthy I

Staff training

UDL

Fle

Embedding MH and wellbeing in the curriculum

Decolonisir  
DMU

Personal  
tutoring

working

# How do we demonstrate compassion (or a lack of it)?

- **Some examples:**

- Student-centred teaching
- Written communications
- Support of students and staff
- Disciplinary processes
- Attitudes: intersectionality, cultural awareness
- Adjustments and consideration for disabilities, personal circumstances, home environment
- Humanising learning



# Points for discussion

## **Institutional**

- Is it realistic to expect an institution such as DMU to be compassionate?
- How do we create a culture of compassion within DMU?
- Is compassion seen as a weakness within DMU?
- Any existing areas of good practice?

## **Individual**

- How do we create a culture of compassion inside the classroom?
- How do we humanise learning?
- How do we prioritise the wellbeing and development of staff in the midst of a crisis?
- Any examples of where compassion has been lacking?

# Feedback and summary

- Feedback from group discussions
- Should DMU be seeking to engage in this dialogue?
- What are our next steps?

# “You See Me”

*Do you remember me?*

*Remember when I spoke to you and expressed the struggles going on with me?*

*Or that one time when I had that anxiety attack in the middle of class,*

*You told me, “It’s okay, go take five minutes to yourself and come back to reconvene.”*

*Or maybe you remember when I told you that my father just died in front of me from COVID-19.*

*Not getting a chance to hold him for one last time.*

*Or when my brothers and sisters are getting shot and killed from the violence surrounding me.*

*Or my mother crying to me when she lost her job and couldn’t help to pay for me to sit in these seats.*

*Well, actually...No.*

*You don’t even know me but you see me.*

*Physically behind this computer screen, with my covered background hiding my reality.*

*Missing an online lesson because I have no access to Wi-Fi and couldn’t afford to pay the electricity.*

*Having to mute the microphone because of the police sirens in my community.*

*My parents outside, fighting about feeding my family and figuring out how to make ends meet.*

*But still. No compassion.*

*You see me.*

*But you still failed me.*

[Dr Racquel Wright-Mair, Rowan University, USA]