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Education for Compassionate Leadership

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Education for Compassionate Leadership¹

Paul Woodruff

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Conference on Public Education in a Democratic Society

*Leaders are responsible for the compassion of those who follow them.*²

Six-year old Billy came home from school “and told his mother that two new students had been surrounded on the playground and taunted by others because they were black. And what did you do, Billy?” asked his mother. ‘I went and stood by them,’ Billy said.” Billy would grow up to be a beloved poet, a poet’s poet, William Stafford.³ Nothing in this story is the least bit surprising, except for what Billy did.

This family legend, as published by Stafford’s son (K. Stafford, [2003](#), p. 7), does not tell us what happened next. Did the taunting stop? Probably not. Billy showed leadership in a gentle way, a way that was open to him as (I imagine) one of the youngest children on the scene. And he may have done some good. Some of the jeering children may well have started to question themselves when they saw him standing with their victims. At the same time, the victims (I imagine) would have felt less alone in the sea of white faces.

¹ This paper was written for the Brigham Young University—Public School Partnership 30th Anniversary Celebration, Provo, Utah, April 2, 2014. Subsequently it has been revised to almost double the original length.

² “Leaders are responsible for the compassion of those who follow them.” This is the theme of my chapter on compassion in Woodruff (2014), 195-211. I have used some material from that chapter in the present paper.

³See also Stafford's poem Serving with Gideon in the same volume, p. 95.

You and I, who care about education, must ask three sorts of questions about events of this sort. First question: why did the jeering children not feel compassion for the new students in the school? What was missing in them, or in their education? What bad lessons had they learned? Ideally, all the children would have had a capacity for compassion equal to that of Billy. But that is a very distant ideal.

This leads to the second question: Where were the teachers when this happened? They might have seized this opportunity to model both leadership and compassion. And where were the older children who might have done the same, had they been educated for leadership?

And the third: what might parents or teachers have done, long before this event, to give these children a better chance at being compassionate?

Why Leadership?

In real life, neither adults nor children are likely to think of being compassionate in such a case, once the jeering starts, unless someone shows leadership, sounding the call for compassion and shaming those who are ruthless. Human beings form groups—like the gang on the playground—and groups build their sense of solidarity by excluding outsiders. Compassion for people recognized as outsiders is hard to come by. That puts the burden on leaders; in Billy's case, it puts a burden on the teachers and older children. Being older, knowing better, they should have known enough to feel compassion and to speak up for it.

Compassion starts with a leader; in the absence of a leader, the loudest voice sets the tone. Often this is the boss. A boss may or may not show leadership. Leadership, as I understand it, is an ethical concept. Not every boss is a leader. The essential features of leadership are two: First, a leader influences others in a context of freedom; if you don't have to follow someone, but you follow anyway, you are probably following a leader. A boss has ways of making you follow him,

including the use of penalties and rewards. That is not leadership. The ways of the boss will not lead you to compassion, though they may force you to act compassionate. These are not the same thing.

Second, a leader works towards goals that the team shares (or comes to share). A boss may impose goals on the team, whether they like it or not. The boss may be efficient at meeting the goals he or she sets, but these goals will be limited by the limits of the boss's vision, and his success will be limited in the same way. Under leadership, a group may achieve successes that no individual member of the group could imagine. A boss may care only about his or her own advancement; the group that recognizes this will ask why they should make sacrifices for the profit of this boss. Asked to be compassionate by a boss, they may ask what's in it for the boss, and do nothing—or at least feel nothing. Under leadership, group members can care about a great many things together. They can care, for example, about the suffering of an outsider.

Setting this distinction to one side, we often see that the attitudes of a boss or commander are mirrored in the behaviors of underlings. When the dean in charge of advising is compassionate, the advisers are compassionate. When the dean is ruthless, the advisers are ruthless. This is familiar in any kind of organization. The abuse of prisoners at the prison of Abu Ghraib was due, as the Schlesinger report (2004) demonstrated, largely to a failure of leadership at all levels. We know from the Stanford prison experiment that when young people are placed as prison guards they tend to turn abusive (Zimbardo 2007)—a tendency that leaders can counter through training and discipline. But leaders will not do this effectively unless they satisfy three conditions: they must be compassionate themselves, they must accept compassion as part of their responsibility, and they must understand how easily guards can turn cruel if they are not well led.

Compassion is needed wherever one person has power over another: Teachers, guards, deans, and health professionals are obvious examples. In the schoolyard, children who are older or simply bigger and stronger than others need to have compassion for those they might hurt, physically or emotionally.

Even people who are usually compassionate to a high degree can easily fail at compassion, as the parable of the Good Samaritan and recent psychological experiments illustrate. The parable (Luke 10.29-37) tells of a traveler who is robbed and left half dead. A priest and a Levite (a member of the priestly caste) see him, but pass by on the other side of the road. A Samaritan, who is himself an outsider to the community of Jews, shows compassion, taking the wounded traveler to an inn and paying for his care. For all we know, the priest and the Levite were good and compassionate people on the whole, but were simply too busy, or too preoccupied, to stop and give help.

So you can be too busy, too preoccupied, or in too much of a hurry for compassion. In a combat zone, you may be too frightened. Or you may be insecure and fall under the influence of a group with values very different from your own. Such stories are all too common. Otherwise good people who are insecure may be swept away by a group's enthusiasm for cruelty, or they may want to prove that they really do belong to the group by joining in the group's cruelty. Such insecurity is often at the root of hazing. There are many ways to lose compassion, many pressures, and many temptations to be cruel.

If we recognize our human weakness, we must admit that none of us is totally immune to a loss of compassion. That is one reason why we need each other's help to stay healthy in the moral sense. Anyone who reminds you in time of stress or temptation not to lose compassion is functioning as a leader. You would not have to be a teacher or a teacher's aid to speak up against

heedless cruelty on the playground, and if you did so you would have been a leader. Leaders are not appointed. They arise, if we are lucky, when we need them.

When groups start to go wrong, wise heads are needed to call them to order. The wise heads are often old ones (though not all old heads are wise). Older people have more experience of life. They are in a position to know how easy it is to do wrong, and they may know what it is to suffer through more sad experience. But wise heads may be young, and some young people must be wise if they are to be leaders in the full ethical sense. For them, education must make up for lack of experience—if education can do that. Every leader-to-be should receive some education for compassion—if compassion can be taught. And every student is a leader-to-be. So how can we help our students put wise heads on their young shoulders?

We need to ask what compassion is, and whether it can be taught, before asking how we might teach it.

Defining Compassion

Compassion, as a virtue, is the ability to understand the feelings of others. You must have both emotional and cognitive powers if you are to know how it feels to be someone else. The Greek word is *syngnomê*, “with-knowledge.”

The ancient Greeks generally believed that their gods could not be compassionate. Not only were these gods barred from suffering what humans suffer, but they lacked the imagination to put themselves in human shoes. The opening of Sophocles’ play, *Ajax*, shows the contrast between the god Athena and the human being Odysseus. Odysseus, the human, feels compassion for Ajax; Athena, the god, feels none.

Sophocles makes the point explicit in the last lines of his least known play, *Women of Trachis*. The son of Herakles speaks of his father’s miserable death:

Raise him up, my friends, and to me
 Grant for these things great compassion (*sungnômosune*),
 While the gods' great ruthlessness (*agnômosune*)
 In what they have done is plain to see.
 They plant children, we honor them as our fathers,
 And yet they oversee so much suffering.
 . . .
 And nothing in this is not Zeus. (*Trachiniai*, qtd. from Meineck & Woodruff, 2007, pp.
 1264-69, 1278,)

There is no sacrilege in what Hyllus says. Sophocles' audience believed that the gods are too powerful, too secure, and too confident to feel our pain.

The Greek gods lack the cognitive element in compassion, but not the emotional one. They are capable of huge emotions, but they have a knowledge deficit. Their problem is that they don't know, and cannot know, what it is like to be human. That is because they feel invulnerable. In our own experience, we encounter people who feel as invulnerable as the gods of Greek myth. They are usually young and male, and they have no sense of their own mortality or vulnerability. No wonder they are the ones from whom we can expect the most cruelty on college campuses. The ruthlessness of young male hazing is well known.

By compassion I do not mean pity or clemency or mercy, although these are related concepts.⁴ The differences become clear when we apply these concepts to wrongdoers, who deserve to be punished:

⁴ On these terms see the longer treatment in Woodruff, 2011, pp. 98-109.

Pity is feeling sorry for someone who suffers. You could feel pity for wrongdoers as they undergo punishment and still insist that the punishment was just. You could feel pity for people without understanding their feelings. But compassion entails understanding.

Clemency is letting a wrongdoer go without punishment. Clemency can be given without compassion, and compassion is not a general reason for clemency.

Mercy often means the same as clemency—letting someone off the hook—but mercy seems to entail compassion.

Compassion for a wrongdoer would include understanding the feelings that led to wrong action. For example, in *Billy Budd, Sailor*, Melville shows us the facts behind a killing. Young Billy Budd has killed the master-at-arms in front of their captain. Billy Budd had been sorely provoked, and because of his speech defect he is unable to respond except by violence. The captain has known a boy with such a speech defect, and he understands Billy's emotions very well. He concludes that Billy is morally innocent, but must nevertheless be punished. "Struck dead by an angel of God!" he exclaims. "Yet the angel must hang" (19.232/101). His compassion does not entail clemency, but it does entail regret. The execution will be a necessity of war; the captain does not believe it serves the cause of justice. Justice would call for a lesser sentence or none at all.

If you understand the feelings that led a criminal to crime, you can come to a more just appreciation of how bad a person the criminal really is—and therefore to a better sense of what justice demands. Experience helps.

The Christian God is believed to have lived and suffered as a human being. He did so out of compassion, and, indeed, He suffered into compassion. That is one of the many factors that make Him different from the pagan gods. The Kwan Yin of Buddhism is compassionate because

she (or he) is believed to have been a human being, and to have chosen to hold back from Nirvana out of compassion. Compassion rides on experience, real or imagined. Experiences can be had, or learned about, or imagined. Education includes giving, learning about, and imagining experience. Can we teach the experience that grounds compassion? And if so, how?

Can Compassion Be Taught?

William Stafford was born with natural compassion, or so his family believed; he was, apparently, an outlier in his family. No doubt, as with any ability, some people are born with higher levels than others. So it is with music: Some people are born with higher levels of musical talent. But that does not mean that music is not teachable. No one is a violinist from birth. When Socrates asked whether virtue was teachable, he gave this preliminary answer: “Yes, virtue is teachable, if it is a form of knowledge.” Courage, he suggested, is the knowledge of what is and is not to be feared. If that were right, then courage would be a kind of knowledge and would be teachable. This preliminary account of courage as a form of knowledge will not stand up under scrutiny. Nor will the assumption that knowledge is teachable. Not everything that can be learned can be taught; there are many things we must learn for ourselves. But these points about Plato need not detain us here.⁵

The case of compassion is complicated by the fact that compassion has both cognitive and emotional aspects. Knowing what it is like to be someone else will have little influence on someone who has a weak capacity for emotions. But outsize emotional muscles will not help you toward compassion if you cannot imagine yourself in someone else’s shoes.

⁵ Courage cannot be knowledge, because Socrates evidently has courage but not knowledge. The Guardians of the Kallipolis (the ideal city) described in the *Republic* will have courage but not knowledge. They will depend on the knowledge of the philosopher rulers—knowledge acquired but not taught, as is clear from the allegory of the Cave.

The Chinese philosopher Mencius forged the Confucian answer to the question whether virtues can be taught. He argued that compassion is natural to all human beings, but like all the virtues, must be cultivated through education. To show that all people have the capacity for compassion, he used various thought experiments (see Ivanhoe, 2000, pp. 18-22).

We are now in a position to go beyond Mencius' thought experiments and consider empirical science. We can try to measure students' capacity for compassion before and after educational experiences. The Jefferson Medical College has developed an instrument to do just that. They define empathy in patient care much as I have defined compassion: "*a cognitive attribute that involves an ability to understand the patient's experiences, pain, suffering, and perspective combined with a capability to communicate this understanding and an intention to help.*" The Jefferson Scale of Empathy was designed for the medical profession in versions for both practicing doctors and for medical students.⁶ The results show which elements in medical education promote compassion and which do not (see Schwartz & Sharp, 2010, p. 131).

We already have abundant evidence that people can be taught to lose compassion. That has been one of the aims of military training for generations. People can be taught to kill without mercy.⁷ More surprising is the result that medical school training, in its current form, lowers the compassion of medical students. They are more compassionate when they start than when they

⁶ The Jefferson Scale of Empathy was developed by researchers at the Center for Research in Medical Education and Health Care at Jefferson Medical College to measure empathy in physicians and other health professionals (HP/Physician version), medical students (S-version), and health professional students (HPStudent version).

http://www.jefferson.edu/jmc/crmehc/medical_education/jspe.html

⁷ After studies showed that many American soldiers did not shoot to kill, the U.S. Army introduced new training methods (which I have undergone) to make soldiers more lethal. On this see Grossman (1996, esp. pp. 141-92) and LeShan (1992, pp. 114-16).

finish. Looking at such data, planners of medical curricula are seeking ways to counter the trend. How should we train doctors so that at least they are no more ruthless on graduation than when they began? If we are able to teach people to lose compassion, are we also able to teach people to gain it?

Education for Compassion: Ancient Athens⁸

The ancient Greeks provided education for compassion through public supported theater, which all citizens were encouraged to attend. Sophocles' surviving plays in particular, with one notable exception (the *Electra*), all celebrate compassion. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Theseus sets an example of compassion for the people of Colonus, and he enjoins them to be responsible for the welfare of Oedipus—the homeless wreck of a man who has come among them uninvited. The people of Colonus are old men, but behind their masks they are very young performers— young men just entering the age to be soldiers. Singing and dancing in such a chorus is part of their education as Athenians. Almost all Athenian males had this experience. Through music and dance they are developing a sense of solidarity with each other and with Athens. At the same time they are close witnesses to the deepest suffering that a stage can show. This makes up for their lack of experience. And above all, they have been trained as spokesmen for the shared wisdom of Athens.

In another play of Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, the chorus takes the lead. Faced with a helpless invalid who is a former soldier in the Greek army, the chorus members are the first to feel and show compassion. They tell their commander, who is only eighteen,

Have a heart sir. He's told of such suffering.

⁸ This section is partly drawn from Woodruff (2014, pp. 201-06).

An ordeal I'd wish on no friend of mine.

And the young officer replies:

It would be shameful for me to seem less

Considerate than you in helping a stranger in need.

(Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 507-8, 524-25)

In all Greek tragic plays the chorus shows compassion for the sufferings of the main characters.

In this they take the lead for the audience. Our games today have leaders in cheer, cheerleaders; ancient Greek theater had leaders in grief, grief leaders who gave the audience their cues to share the mourning of others.

The core of tragic wisdom is that no one is immune to suffering:

The bright stars do not linger over mortals in the night;

Both poverty and wealth shall fade away.

They move in turn, joy and loss

Arriving at the same door.

(Sophocles, *Women of Trachis*, 131-35)

In those few lines are reasons for hope, dread, or compassion, depending in your position in the cycle of joy and loss.

The young men of Athens perform lines like these and stand close to enactments of the greatest suffering that a poet could imagine. This gives them the opportunity to learn reverence and compassion, riding on the experience of the poets and the collective wisdom of Athens.

Witness and performance go a long way to make up for lack of experience. Nothing will force these young men to be reverent or compassionate against their will, but they deserve an opportunity to learn, and Athens has given it to them. Their protected young lives would never have given them such an invitation for learning.

We cannot claim, however, that education for compassion was successful in Athens. The imperial city was often ruthless in dealing with its allied and subject states, or with states such as Melos that resisted Athenian expansion. Would the Athenians have been more ruthless in the absence of this education? We have no way of telling for sure, but we have some evidence that Athens was far from the worst offender among ancient Greek city-states. We know that the Athenians treasured plays like Sophocles', perhaps because they felt the burden of their own ruthlessness and wanted to do something about it. Had it not been for such plays, perhaps the Athenians would have been far worse than their peers. After all, as an imperial power, they had greater opportunities for cruelty than did their neighbors. Similarly, the United States has had greater temptations for ruthlessness in its treatment of prisoners and detainees taken in the wars against terrorism—simply because the country has had more wars and more prisoners. But, unlike Athens, the United States has not developed a culture of education for compassion.

Education for Compassion: Our Challenge

So much for ancient Athens. What about us: What can we offer by way of education for compassion? Not what we are offering now, in either college or secondary school. Whatever we do offer will have to be powerful enough to counterbalance the increasingly ruthless tone of American civilization, which our students pick up from movies and video games and, worse, from parents and politicians. In some cases, education for compassion will come from home or

church, but such education has not been sufficient to move American culture toward compassion. Meanwhile, the technical and vocational training that is so heavily supported by politicians is at best neutral for compassion. On the whole, I suspect that vocational education pushes in the opposite direction, as it inevitably puts more emphasis on results than on the moral qualities of the ways those results are obtained.

Our hope must lie in the humanities and social sciences. After all, compassion rides on the knowledge of what it is to be human—to suffer as a human, to be tempted as a human, to stray as a human. To make up for lack of experience—lack of suffering and a dearth of opportunities to go wrong—leaders-to-be should have a broad education in the humanities, including both classic and recent texts. Ancient texts provide a useful distance that opens the most delicate issues to discussion. But whatever students read and discuss, they will have to see it as applicable to their own lives. Most of us who teach in the humanities will have to change our ways in order to meet this goal. Few of our students will have any use for academic disputes about manuscript readings in the Greek plays, but all of them have something to learn from Sophocles' treatment of Oedipus.

We can't make our youngsters play roles in Greek plays, but we can ask that they read the plays, discuss them, and apply them to their own lives. In my experience good teaching never leaves students passive, but engages them. One of the best ways to engage students in the humanities is through performance. When you perform a text, you make it your own, and you are more likely to keep its wealth in the treasure house of your mind.

How to Teach Compassion

We can't teach compassion the way we teach algebra. Compassion is like a skill in many ways. Suppose you are an experienced and skillful cabinet-maker. You know which chisel to use for cutting a mortise and which saw works best for the tenon that will fit into that mortise. You recognize the properties of the wood you are working with and choose the best way to give it a smooth surface. You know without thinking how to take into account shrinkage and expansion across the grain of your stock. In sum, you are sensitive to your materials and your tools. You do not need to ponder or deliberate at length; when a piece of wood starts to splinter or chip you take the appropriate action without conscious thought.

So it is with people. Compassion comes as easily to the mind of the compassionate person as the right cutting tool does to the experienced craftsman. How is such a skill to be learned? The cabinet-maker pays attention to tools and materials. The compassionate leader pays attention to people. A teacher cannot take a skill of this kind and plant it in a student. No one can force another person to pay attention to anything. The student must take charge; but teachers can help by inspiring, setting examples, and sharpening the tools.

The foundations of compassion are capacities for **listening, imagination, reverence, creativity, and understanding one's humanity**. Along with helping students lay those foundations we need to give them opportunities for **practice**. To achieve this we need to do what all educators should do—promote active learning. A good education will support compassion whether or not it has that stated intention. Here are seven recommendations for teachers who wish to help students cultivate compassion.

First, help students learn to listen to others, in and out of the classroom. **Listening** is the beginning of most wisdom. "Turn your megaphones into hearing trumpets,"⁹ wrote William

⁹ "Megaphones into hearing trumpets" (Stafford, [2003](#)), p. 360).

Stafford. Inside the classroom, a teacher can have the most powerful effect by setting a good example, listening to students, modeling good listening behavior. A weaker tool is incentives. A teacher can base participation scores not on how much a student says, but on how much a student makes use of what others say. Some students are silent in class, some even as a result of insurmountable psychological causes; they may nevertheless be listening well and should be recognized for this. They may be wiser than the heavy talkers.

Students at a very early age can be encouraged to listen to older relatives or neighbors. Different ages should probably ask different questions, but even five-year olds could learn something about family history from their parents or grandparents. Older students could gather oral history not just from neighbors and relatives, but also from people with very different backgrounds—veterans of wars, refugees from war-torn countries, victims of intolerance at home, the very poor or the homeless. Few of my students have ever had a conversation with a homeless person, though opportunities are close by. Some of my students have been homeless, but are quiet about it, not expecting that anyone will want to listen to them. One pitfall to avoid: turning students into representatives of their downtrodden groups. This is not fair to the students, who in most cases would prefer to be taken as the individuals they are. Good listeners do not put people on the spot when they would rather not talk, or rather not talk about a certain subject.

Second, foster **imagination** in the classroom. What you don't hear, you might imagine. In the play I mentioned earlier, Sophocles' *Ajax*, Odysseus could imagine a future in which his position was reversed with that of Ajax. His experience helped him do that, but he used more than experience. He used his imagination. He had a mind that was creative enough and reverent enough that he could imagine himself in Ajax's shoes.

We can encourage students to imagine what it is like to be in someone else's shoes. They could begin by reading. Reading slave narratives can be a life-changing experience, but few students come to college with such reading behind them. A little reading would jump-start their imaginations. After reading Frederick Douglas, for example, they could be asked to imagine facets of his life that he does not describe.

They might practice imagination in writing, in speaking, and in role-playing. This could be a lot of fun. Young students might be thrilled at being asked to impersonate a teacher; beyond the comic effects that will arise, they may develop a sense of what it is like to be a teacher. Medical students should be asked to role-play as patients. The possibilities for role-playing are unlimited—though some are dangerous.¹⁰ Students might also practice imagination by considering ways that history could have gone, had decision makers been wiser or more foolish. War is not inevitable; if kings and prime ministers had had more imagination in 1914, perhaps the Great War could have been avoided.¹¹ American independence was not a foregone conclusion. Had Washington not taken the advice that allowed his army to escape the British at Trenton, the French would not have entered the war, and (probably) all would have been lost.

Third, cultivate **reverence**. A reverent mind recognizes that we are all prone to failure. In Odysseus' terms, any one of us could be laid low by the gods—or, in our terms, by forces outside our control. Odysseus knows he is not invulnerable. Young people, especially young males, are often reluctant to admit vulnerability. How can they learn to change? Reading ancient Greek tragedies is a good start, but only a start. They need to realize that the tragic story could be theirs.

¹⁰ Zimbardo's (2007) experiment is a good example of a role-playing exercise not to do.

¹¹ "Going to war shows a lack of imagination" (Stafford, [2003](#), p. 153).

Very bright students may believe that they cannot give a wrong answer, or earn less than an A. These are the students who dominate discussion, listen poorly to others, and have contempt for the slower learners in the class. (I confess was a bit like that in childhood.) We can help such students by giving them assignments in which they may not do better than other students. The sooner they earn only a B, or even fail, the better for them. I can report that my ROTC courses were good for me in that way. I could earn an A in anything academic, but not always on assignments that called for rigorous attention to military details that seemed unimportant to me. But it was good for me to be humbled, and of course I came to see in the end that attention to details may save lives.

Fourth, foster imagination through **creativity**. We are losing ground in this area, as school boards and examiners push the arts to one side in favor of learning that can be easily measured in tests. Meanwhile, public interest seems to be shifting away from the arts and humanities toward the short-term gains expected from technical and vocational training.

Creativity is valuable in every discipline (even accounting, I would contend). Teachers in every field should find ways to give assignments that allow for creativity. I have no rules to offer for this.

Fifth, make history and literature come alive at all levels, from kindergarten to graduate school. These subjects should lead students to a better **understanding** of themselves and their neighbors. By this I mean not only coming to feel what it is like to suffer, but also understanding how it is that people like them come to cause great suffering, often feeling that they are in the right. People in power are closing off their compassion every day. How do they do it, and why?

Reading literature and history can be a substitute for listening to living people. The humanities afford us vicarious experience that could ground compassion through history, fiction,

and poetry. For this reason, we must insist that leaders-to-be be exposed to the best of the humanities. If we take this seriously, we will approach literary texts not as ornaments, not as occasions for aesthetic experience, but as windows onto a larger view of human possibility for good or ill. And the same goes for history. Good teaching makes history and literature come to life.

Here again role-playing can be valuable. Students can read scenes from plays dramatically, or even act them out. Imagine putting the script of *Measure for Measure* to one side and asking students to take turns playing a scene between Isabella and Angelo in their own words (say Act 2 Scene 2). Isabella pleads with a puritanical tyrant for compassion; she knows her brother has done wrong, but wouldn't any young man whose marriage had been indefinitely delayed feel like jumping the gun? How can she make this point? And how can Angelo refute it in terms the students understand?

Students may also have fun reliving history by staging great debates. Take the argument between the Athenian generals and the oligarchs of Melos (Book 5, 84-116). The oligarchs ask for justice, and the Athenians offer only the sword. How will our students, taking the part of the Athenians, defend their actions? Will they sound at all like modern politicians proposing to be tough in time of war?

Sixth, is **communication**. Teachers should demand the ability to speak and write clearly and with feeling. What good is your compassion if you cannot pass it on to the people you are trying to lead? Speaking ability is essential, but it has been neglected in American education for most of the twentieth century. Few teachers or professors are qualified to teach skill at public speaking, and all too many students think they already have it.

Students need to be asked to speak and write for each other. They should be given opportunities to evaluate each other's communication skills. Today's students are masters of short communications, texts and twitters especially. They can build on their well practiced abilities here.

*Seventh, give students opportunities to **practice** compassionate leadership.* Leaders-to-be can be leaders now, if they find the right setting in or out of the classroom. In a reverent classroom, students are called on to be leaders, and in their roles as leaders, they are asked to practice paying attention to each other.

You may expect an eighth item—why not require academic ethics courses? Although this is my subject, and I teach such courses through a philosophy department, I have little hope that courses in philosophy will make a difference, not as we teach them now. I am more optimistic about the use of fine-grained case studies that can give students vicarious experience and, at the same time, provide them with opportunities for practicing decision-making. Such courses are most credible when taught by veterans—people who have lived through situations like those to be studied, have made compassionate decisions, have taken risks in order to live ethical lives, and have succeeded in their chosen careers.

In any case, teachers should take my recommendations with a grain of salt. What works for one teacher or class may fail for another. And what sounds good in theory may fail in practice. Following any of my recommendations might make students less compassionate, possibly through a backlash. Before the Jefferson School studies, medical-school teachers did not know that they were teaching the opposite of compassion. Then they developed an assessment method that threw light onto a dark subject. Whatever we do along these lines needs to be tested in some way.

As in the case of Athens, ethical education often fails. That is no reason to give up the effort—no reason to forget about compassion in our classrooms. We owe it to each other to do what we can for compassion, and part of what we can do for compassion is in education. We owe it to each other to give each other opportunities to change for the better, whether we take those opportunities or not. Some people do change for the better. Our job as teachers is to give them a chance.

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