Book Review

Teaching compassion: Humane education in early childhood
by Mary Renck Jalongo (Ed.)

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Teaching Compassion: Humane Education in Early Childhood is a collection of 15 perspectives, edited by Mary Renck Jalongo. It is organised into three sections, with Part One introducing readers to the notion of Humane Education. In the first chapter, Mary Jalongo has defined key terminology, such as humane education, compassion and empathy, followed by the importance of integrating humane education concepts in early childhood. She also draws our attention to the significance of the child-animal bond in developing empathy amongst young children, and highlights the role of early childhood educators and professionals in fostering empathy and kindness through the use of different strategies and resources.

In another chapter, Wanda Boyer highlights the benefits of positive interactions with animals and the development of self-regulation and emotion regulation skills when children and animals develop a bond. The chapter brings readers’ attention to the developing need of enhancing skills that will facilitate children to be thoughtful of others as well as themselves. Another noteworthy chapter is Tunde Szecsi’s discourse, Teaching preservice early childhood educators about humane education. The author has proposed to introduce humane education courses in early childhood teacher education programs to train future teachers into merging humane education values with the curriculum. Additionally, a project describing the inclusion of humane education in early childhood teacher education and its outcomes on children and future teachers has been presented.

The second part of the book addresses the role of homes and communities in promoting humane education. Marjorie Stanek’s chapter focuses on the relationship between the treatment of animals in young children’s homes and its effect on the development of compassion and/or cruelty. The author has presented a range of research on the impact children’s exposure to violence against animals has on their development and has highlighted the role of early childhood educators in the prevention of abuse and cruelty. Risë VanFleet and Tracie Faa-Thompson’s chapter presents an in-depth study on Animal Assisted Play Therapy (AAPT) to support children in developing humane attitudes and skills, as well as overcome developmental/mental health difficulties. I particularly enjoyed reading the authors’ own experience of holding AAPT sessions for Manny, a five-old boy displaying challenging behaviour. In another chapter, Nancy Bires and Dana Schultz have focussed on “the importance of developing a love of nature and affinity for animals”. The authors have brought the reader’s attention to the disconnect children are facing with nature and its possible consequences to the environment and highlighted the benefits of children connecting with nature, especially in the early childhood years. Finally, a range of activities suggested by the authors will help the reader in planning experiences with nature, wildlife as well as companion animals.
Section three focusses on the importance of humane education in early childhood curriculum. Patricia Crawford’s chapter begins by introducing the reader to the importance of supporting children in developing compassion. The author has discussed the role of literature in teaching compassion to young children. Similarly, the significance of guided language and writing experiences in teaching compassion is highlighted. In the Appendix, a list of picture books that model compassion has been presented, which would be a helpful resource for educators. Audrey Rule and Ksenia Zhbanova’s chapter presents an overview on teaching children to care for all living beings. They have presented a review of research on children’s love for nature across cultures and the role of nature on children’s development. Finally, Amanda Onion, in her chapter, has explored the common links between four guiding principles of science education and the crucial elements of humane education.

References