

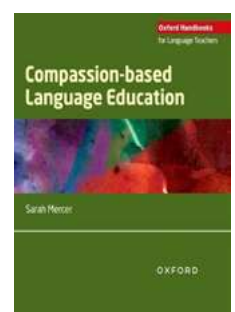
# Materials reviews

## Compassion-based Language Education

Sarah Mercer  
Oxford University Press, 2024  
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[https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/teacher\\_development/oxford\\_handbooks\\_for\\_language\\_teachers/9780194070744?cc=my&selLanguage=en&mode=hub&srsId=AfmBOopPJ-3m1OHlKhmmv5\\_nRv8p71eg-0jOdwFVQ89c-RyjZHN1f4DI](https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/teacher_development/oxford_handbooks_for_language_teachers/9780194070744?cc=my&selLanguage=en&mode=hub&srsId=AfmBOopPJ-3m1OHlKhmmv5_nRv8p71eg-0jOdwFVQ89c-RyjZHN1f4DI)

In a speech criticising the Vietnam War and celebrating the value of social justice, Martin Luther King Jr. stated that 'True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs



restructuring' (The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, 2015). By writing a book on the significance of embedding compassion in language education, Sarah Mercer seems to embrace the idea that compassion can help restructure the educational edifice. In her view, compassion is both an approach to teaching and an aspirational outcome for learners. This dual focus – teaching *with compassion* to create supportive classroom environments and teaching *for compassion* to equip learners with global skills – is one of the most distinctive features of the book.

Mercer starts by defining compassion, reframing it as more than just a moral virtue. It involves not only empathy but also action, a deliberate readiness to demonstrate compassion towards ourselves, other people (whether near or far), non-human life and the planet we inhabit. The emphasis on action leads to the notion of compassion-based language education, which as an approach incorporates cognitive, social and emotional perspectives and is geared towards enabling learners to 'make informed and sensitive life choices now and in the future' (p. 8). Key to this approach are the three Cs: Compassion, Criticality, and Courage. Compassion forms the foundation for understanding and caring for others; criticality encourages learners to question societal norms and systems; and courage empowers them to advocate for justice and stand up against inequality.

The rest of the book is divided into two main parts. The first, 'Teaching with Compassion', explores how educators can build trust, inclusivity and emotional safety within classrooms. This section provides actionable strategies to strengthen teacher-learner relationships, manage group dynamics and reduce learner anxiety, all while fostering positive classroom climates. The second part, 'Teaching for Compassion', focuses on using language education to instil values such as self-compassion, cultural empathy and environmental stewardship. Mercer

seamlessly connects these objectives to global frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), linking language teaching to broader societal responsibilities.

Built on a scholarly foundation, the book balances theoretical insights with actionable strategies, ensuring its relevance for both seasoned language educators and those new to the field. It contains a range of practical activities, reflection tasks and inspirational quotes aimed at motivating educators to align their teaching with compassion-driven goals. The ideas in the book are geared towards creating a classroom space where learners feel emotionally safe, empowered and engaged with real-world issues through language learning. The book equips teachers with the tools to create meaningful learning experiences that prepare learners to thrive as empathetic, critically engaged global citizens. For instance, one activity helps learners to critically reflect on what they can (and cannot) see in a set of images, thus enabling them to discuss their assumptions and the reasons for them.

The transformative nature of the book resides in how it challenges educators to rethink the purpose of language teaching. By integrating compassion into both the process and goals of education, the book offers a refreshing departure from transactional approaches. In its small way, it seeks to contribute to restructuring the educational edifice so that a more compassionate world is made possible.

## Reference

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. (2015, July 15). *MLK Beyond Vietnam – A time to break silence* [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJhgXKGldUk>

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