



MIND & LIFE INSTITUTE

Year in Review

2014



INITIATIVES

Call to Care

Call to Care was started in 2013 with a year-long planning project to explore how the Mind & Life Institute could promote new, interdisciplinary approaches for nurturing children's ethical and prosocial development. We soon recognized the extraordinary opportunity to both learn from and build upon the ongoing efforts of leaders and teachers in the fields of social and emotional learning (SEL), contemplative education, moral and developmental psychology, and neuroscience, and assembled an Advisory Group of over 40 experts to guide our first year of planning.

Brooke Dodson-Lavelle was hired to lead this effort, and a small core working group of educators, researchers, contemplatives, and developmental psychologists were recruited from the advisory group to collaboratively survey and assess the state of the field. The survey included SEL programs and contemplative-based education programs (e.g., programs with mindfulness- and compassion-based approaches). Educational movement leaders and strategists were consulted to gain insight into the existing best practices for fostering ethical development, and to consider ways in which Mind and Life could utilize its expertise and resources to advance the fields of SEL and contemplative education.

At the midpoint of the planning year, we recognized that the work of existing SEL and contemplative programs were proceeding largely independently, but that there was great potential for cross-fertilization. Missing was a conceptual framework that not only combined these approaches, but also integrated insights from developmental, clinical, and moral psychology. We developed such a framework centered on the concept of caring relationships, oriented towards the needs of PreK-12 students and teachers. Entitled *Call to Care*, the program integrates SEL with developmentally sensitive care- and compassion-based skills training and contemplative practices.



Call to Care 2014 in Review

The planning project ended in February 2014, with affirmations from the advisory group on many principles and elements of the *Call to Care* program, as well as suggestions for how best to move forward with developing, sharing, and testing teaching methods and materials based on the framework. The *Call to Care* framework, as developed to this point, was the subject of "The Care Proposition" article in the 2014 Spring issue of the MLI Magazine.

Since March, highlights of the year include:



Call to Care Professional Development Guide for Educators

The first version of the *Call to Care* Professional Development Guide for Educators was completed in June, and is comprised of 12 lessons, organized around the three modes of care (receiving care, self-care and extending care). The guide incorporates psycho-educational material, skills-training, and contemplative practice and was developed with partners at the Smith College Campus School, a K-6 independent elementary school in Northampton, MA, along with Rony Berger, John Makransky and Pamela Seigle. This guide represents our first attempt to translate the *Call to Care* framework into 12 modules for educators.



Call to Care Summer Workshops for Educators

In June, Kathryn Byrnes and Katie Gay were hired as the new Education Program Officer and Research Associate respectively. Then in July, nearly 80 educators from around the world gathered in Amherst, MA for intensive days of exchange, practice, and movement building. *Call to Care* faculty were: Rony Berger, Brooke Dodson-Lavelle, John Makransky, Pamela Seigle and Carol Worthman. The workshops included an introduction to the *Call to Care* framework for educators and immersion training in skills and practices designed to cultivate the three modes of care, as well as strategies for overcoming common obstacles to care.

The first 5-day workshop included 34 educators and research scientists from public and private institutions in the Northeastern and Midwestern United States. The second 5-day workshop included a global group of 40 educators including school principals and administrators, government officials, and scientists from 11 sites (Bhutan, Vietnam, Tibet, India, Israel, Mexico, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, South Carolina, and Seattle).

The intensives proved successful, and educators from the Northeastern United States were subsequently invited to partici-

pate in a 12-week distance-learning professional development course (see below), while global teams were invited to create culturally-appropriate adaptations within their own educational contexts. The eight global teams, many of which have been leading similar initiatives in their home countries, are actively exploring innovative ways of incorporating this new approach into their work. In some cases, this involves integrating overarching principles and ideas from the *Call to Care* framework into existing models, while other teams are more interested in directly translating it into their native cultures and languages.

The commitment of these international educational teams to creating more compassionate and caring school communities highlighted that care and ethics in education is needed around the world, and that there is a growing movement to respond to this deeply felt need. Although the teams recognized the value of promoting compassion and care in their communities, questions regarding the most effective methods of doing so were also raised. Specifically, in considering the lines some communities draw between “secular” and “religious,” we discussed if and how to best introduce contemplative practices in educational contexts, and asked what counts as “universal.” Continuing to investigate methods for cultivating our capacities for ethics, care, and compassion that cut across cultures is tremendously valuable. Our current work involves focusing on what is common to the human experience and the challenge of how to best adapt a broad, principle-driven approach, as well as finding ways of helping it take root in the hearts and minds of educators around the world.

12-Week Distance Learning Course for Educators

The US-based teams from the Summer Workshops were invited to participate in our first distance-based online course, which launched in September. The goal of this online course is threefold: 1) to help us continue to refine and develop *Call to Care* through an iterative process; 2) to support a



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network of teachers engaged in this work; and 3) to help foster community within school systems to support the sustainability of this work over time. The teams participate in weekly online training, meet at their school site weekly for group work and reflection, and are supported through monthly coaching sessions with faculty (Kathryn Byrnes, Brooke Dodson-Lavelle, John Makransky, and Pamela Seigle). Insights gained from this course will be woven in to our next version of *Call to Care* to improve its accessibility and applicability to diverse contexts.

Call to Care Classroom Guide for Educators

Together with educators from the Smith College Campus School, we developed a working draft of a developmentally appropriate classroom guide consisting of 12 weeks of lessons for grades 2-6. The Campus School educators met weekly during the spring to develop lessons and supportive materials, and participated in a three-day intensive curriculum workshop in June. These educators began experimenting with the program in their classrooms this fall, and we will continue to work with this team to refine and adapt the student guide.

Extending our Translational Research Network

We have worked closely and collaboratively with a large group of experts and advisors from the start of the program, many of whom have become active partners and co-developers of the *Call to Care* framework. As the program has matured, it has become clear that Mind and Life can shift its role to be the convener and facilitator of a “translational research network” that would collectively focus on *evaluation* of the framework and practices, as opposed to implementation and dissemination of a particular curriculum. For example, the Guide for Educators described above is not intended to be developed into products by MLI; rather, it can serve to demonstrate the principles of the framework and as prototypes that can be adapted by educators for pilot testing. Likewise, the 12-week course and summer workshops are not trainings to prepare educators to teach



Call to Care; rather, they support the ongoing refinement of the program and lay the groundwork for pilot testing.

One major extension of the network being planned is to improve measures for pilot testing. The field of contemplative teaching and learning (CTL) suffers from a dearth of evidence-based measures that demonstrate validity (e.g., internal, external, discriminative, and face validity) as well as developmental and cultural sensitivity. Existing measures are largely self-report questionnaires, or methods that target distal outcomes as proxies for CTL-related effects. The successful evaluation of *Call to Care* and resulting curricula and programs is dependent on the ability to devise measures that rigorously and effectively assess multi-trait, multi-dimensional outcomes such as compassion, empathy, and altruism. These dimensions are inherently relational, and will require novel and sophisticated strategies to be measured effectively.

Looking Ahead to 2015

We look forward to refining the *Call to Care* framework through a translational research network by convening educators, contemplatives, clinicians, parents, and community leaders. *Call to Care* is one example of a program cultivating relational and ethical capacities, and we are excited to continue learning how to develop, research, and share the best ways of nurturing care in our modern world.



Reflections on *Call to Care*

AT THE VERY OPENING of the Platonic dialogue bearing his name, Meno asks Socrates whether virtue can be taught, or is given by nature, or attained in some other way? At nearly the same time in China, Laozi composed *The Classic of the Way and Virtue (Dao De Jing)*, which one can view as an extended meditation on the manner in which virtuous action arises in life. And, of course, contemporary with them both, the Buddha was teaching the four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path in Bodh Gaya, India. Since the “axial age” of Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, and Laozi, as Karl Jaspers termed it, humanity has inquired into the nature and cultivation of virtue, with mixed results.

Scientific and scholarly investigations have opened up amazing frontiers to human exploration, from cosmology to physics, and from neuroscience to consciousness. Already at an early age, we tell our children the stories of humanity’s scientific and technical accomplishments in schools, on TV, and in the popular press. From our cell phones to lunar landings, our technology underscores the power of these scientific successes. It seems that there is nothing we cannot do. Yet, alongside the development of science, a more critical analysis of its progress has occurred in philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and history, with the consequence that we have become increasingly discriminating about our scientific and technical achievements.

For all our success in these more cognitive domains, we seem not to have made comparable progress in the study and cultivation of our moral sensibilities. Meno’s question still hovers in the air. We possess almost unlimited technical power, but we are at a loss as to how to use it for the betterment of all. Humanity seems to carry within its core attributes of both the beast and the saint. The atrocities of war and drug lords flood our media, and yet we sense also the profound goodness in all those we know. Even our best intentions appear to cause harm in the long run: antibiotic-resistant diseases, economic expansion that reduces poverty but entails environmental degradation, and decoding the mysteries of the atom brings with it the prospect of global nuclear annihilation. Will we ultimately prove wise enough, soon enough, to find our way to the virtues that Socrates, Buddha and Laozi sought?

In recent dialogues with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, one of Mind and Life’s founders, we have circled the question of ethics and education. What evidence do we have from infant research studies concerning innate social and emotional capacities? Can we not only socialize children to cultural norms, but educate the root sources of kindness, care and compassion? Do we really have a sufficiently nuanced understanding of compassion in

particular? Neuroscientist Tania Singer’s major study of compassion at the Leipzig Max Planck Institute, and especially her seminal work with the contemplative Matthieu Ricard comes to mind, in which they distinguish between empathy and compassion on a physiological level.

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In my view, the question posed by Meno and contemplated by all of the philosophers of the axial age remains humanity’s most important challenge. Meeting it will, I feel, require that we bring our full interdisciplinary and cross-cultural competencies to bear on the question of ethics and education in a way that ultimately changes society for the better. Can we learn to care for others, care for ourselves, and be grateful for the care we have received? These three modes of care form the heart of Mind and Life’s *Call to Care* project. We at Mind and Life view this project as a form of translational research, as one way among many of responding to Meno’s question. We started with a year’s worth of conversation among over 40 scientists, scholars, and contemplatives. Subsequently, we worked closely with teachers to translate the insights of scholars, contemplatives, and scientists into a pedagogical framework, one that we can investigate with the help of many others around the world.

Such truly interdisciplinary and integrative research, which is being practiced now by many, is crucial to addressing the challenge we face, namely to close the gap between technical prowess and ethical insight. Our efforts at Mind and Life are modest, but they connect with similar efforts being made in countless labs, schools, and communities. Perhaps together we can accomplish what each of us alone would never be able to bring about. And in any event, as Laozi wrote, “To produce without possessing; to work without expecting; to enlarge without usurping; this is the absolute virtue!”

I remain hopeful we are on the verge of an ethical paradigm shift, but it will require us as researchers to live the ethic we are researching.

—Arthur Zajonc, President