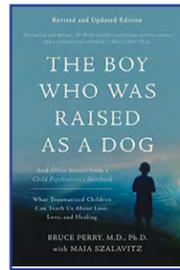
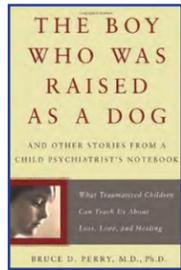


Book review by Dave Lehman

The Boy who was Raised as a Dog



The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog and Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook: What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love, and Healing by Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz, Basic Books, 2006

Why a review of a child psychiatrist's book for *Connections*, a journal for educators? Because the ten case studies which Dr. Bruce Perry has chosen to share--although disturbing, some might even say, bizarre--just may be encountered in your school. I suggest that his approach to healing these young people offers valuable insights for all of us to heed, particularly when, as he notes, our child welfare system, social workers, and foster parents are typically overworked and under-trained.

The lead author is an American psychiatrist, currently the Senior Fellow of the [ChildTrauma Academy](#) in Houston, Texas and an adjunct professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. Previously he was chief of psychiatry at Texas Children's Hospital, and vice-chairman for research in the department

of psychiatry at the Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston, Texas. In a brief "Author's Note" with which he begins this book, Dr. Perry informs readers:

"The sad reality is that these stories are but a tiny percentage of the many we could have told. Over the last ten years our clinical group at the ChildTrauma Academy has treated more than a hundred children who have witnessed the murder of a parent. We have worked with hundreds of children who endured severe early neglect in institutions or at the hands of their parents or guardians."

In the Introduction to *The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog*, Dr. Perry first notes the overall situation facing children and young people who have experienced horrendous abuse. For example, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) was diagnosed and introduced only recently into psychiatry in 1980. Today it is believed to affect at least 7% of all Americans with an impact that is far greater in children than in adults. While not all children fortunately will ever experience any of these events, approximately 40% of American children will experience at least one traumatizing event by the age of 18, including the death of a sibling or parent, ongoing physical abuse and/or neglect, sexual abuse, a serious accident, natural disaster, domestic violence, or other violent crime. Dr. Perry ends his Introduction noting -

"The core lessons these children have taught me are relevant

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Dave Lehman is the former founding principal/teacher of the Lehman Alternative Community School in Ithaca, NY. This public middle-high school was named for Dave and his wife Judy by the Ithaca, New York Board of Education upon their retirement after 30 years. Dave was a member of the very first "Principals Seminar" leadership group at the beginning of the NSRF, under the umbrella for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Soon thereafter he was trained as a CFG coach and then an NSRF National Facilitator. His email is davelehman@mac.com



for us all.... In order to appreciate how children heal we need to understand how they learn to love, how they cope with challenge, how stress affects them. And by recognizing the destructive impact that violence and threat can have on the capacity to love and work, we can come to better understand ourselves and to nurture the people in our lives, especially the children."

Here is a brief overview of a sample of 5 of the 10 case studies described in detail in this book. What I found particularly useful are Dr. Perry's discussions of his own thinking, his reasoning and unique approaches to healing these individual young people, beginning with deep listening, and often with the littlest children, simply getting down on the floor and quietly coloring. (1) Tina - Dr. Perry changes the names of each of these children - was sexually abused from the age of 4 to age 6 by the 16-year-old brother of her babysitter. (2) Leon, was 16 and in a maximum-

security prison for having sadistically murdered two teenage girls, and then raped their dead bodies. He was diagnosed a "classic sociopath" with ASPD (Antisocial Personality Disorder), with Autism, and suffered from early childhood parental neglect. Here Dr. Perry was called upon to determine Leon's mental capacity to know what he had done in order to determine an appropriate sentence. (3) Three-year-old Sandy was being called by an attorney from the Public Guardian's office in Cook County, Illinois to testify about the murder of her mother. This case led Dr. Perry into a deeper understanding of the effects of trauma on the brain, particularly "sensitization," "tolerance," and "dissociation." (4) A fourth case involved 21 children, specifically those who were released and survived the Waco, Texas Branch Davidian compound and their cult leader David Koresh. Readers may recall this tragic situation in February of 1993 involving the FBI and BATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) and firearms violations. This experience led Dr. Perry to form one of his major conclusions about healing traumatized children:

"Relationships matter: the currency for systemic change was trust, and trust comes through forming healthy working relationships.... The seeds of a new way of working with traumatized children were sown in the ashes of Waco."

For those of us who are teachers and/or administrators working in schools, whether public or private, alternative, charter, STEM, or whatever, relationships are indeed key, and creating the conditions in which every child, every student, has at least one meaningful relationship with a caring adult is absolutely essential. As Dr. Perry puts it - "People, not programs, change people." (5) The fifth case

"People, not programs, change people."

is about Jason, who is 7 yet socially still a toddler. Dr. Perry presents this case to illustrate the importance of peers in the healing process, stating, *"while we realized that ongoing relationships are critical to healing, we hadn't yet fully understood how important peer relationships, are, especially as children get older."*

In his closing chapter, "Healing Communities," Dr. Perry notes the dramatic changes that have occurred in the caring for our children, particularly in this country. For example, countless generations of humans initially lived in small groups of 40 to 150 people, most of whom were closely related to each other and lived in community. As late as the 1500s the average European family consisted of about 20 people whose lives were intimately connected on a daily basis. By the mid-18th century this number was 10 living in close proximity, and by 1960 the number in this country was 5! By 2000, the average size of a household was less than 4, and 26% of Americans live alone. Other changes he notes include - in 1905 only 1% suffered depression, by 1955 it increased to 6%, and in 1955 teen depressions have increased by a factor of 10! Dr. Perry states, "The disconnect between what we need in order to be mentally healthy and what the modern world offers can also be seen in the constant unease felt by parents - about the internet, the media, drugs, violent predators, pedophiles, economic inequality, and above all, the values of our culture that shape our responses to these issues."

I'll close this brief review, by first urging all of you readers who work in schools to read this book, and secondly, quoting this summary from Dr. Perry in the closing chapter -

".... my experience as well as the research suggests that the most important healing experiences in the lives of traumatized children do not occur in therapy itself. Trauma

and our responses to it cannot be understood outside the context of human relationships. Whether people survived an earthquake or have been repeatedly sexually abused, what matters most is how those experiences affect their relationships - to their loved ones, to themselves, and to the world. The most traumatic aspects of all disasters involve the shattering of human connections. This is especially true for children. Being harmed by the people who are supposed to love you, being abandoned by them, being robbed of the one-to-one relationships that allow you to feel safe and valued to become humane - these are profoundly destructive experiences. Because humans are inescapably social beings, the worst catastrophes that can befall us inevitably involve relational loss.

"As a result, recovery from trauma and neglect is also all about relationships - rebuilding trust, regaining confidence, returning to a sense of security and reconnecting to love. Of course, medications can help relieve symptoms and talking to a therapist can be incredibly useful. But healing and recovery are impossible - even with the best medications and therapy in the world - without lasting, caring connections to other."

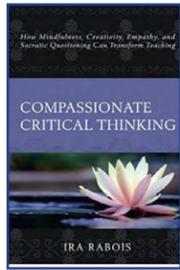
That's a message which all educators and all parent/caregivers I think need to hear in this day and age of an over emphasis on academic learning, the common core, and the loss of time for our children and youth to play, to be creative, to simply sit quietly, to turn off the TV, put away the "smart" phones, and to even dare to touch each other, to give hugs, and simply listen!

LINKS

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Second book review by Dave Lehman

Compassionate Critical Thinking



Compassionate Critical Thinking: How Mindfulness, Creativity, Empathy, and Socratic Questioning Can Transform Teaching
by Ira Rabois

Rowan and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016

In the beginning of this book, various people were asked by the publisher to review this book and offered their comments. I'll share mine here as Rabois was a fellow teacher at the [Lehman Alternative Community School](#) in Ithaca, New York –

*“Ira Rabois – a 21st century renaissance man – has taught karate, philosophy, psychology, English, Social Studies, and drama to secondary school students for over three decades. Drawing on this wealth of experience – and using illustrative vignettes of his students’ voices – he takes us on a journey, showing how he has combined mindfulness meditation creativity, empathy, and Socratic questioning to engage young people in a rich, collaborative learning process he calls **Compassionate Critical Thinking.**”*

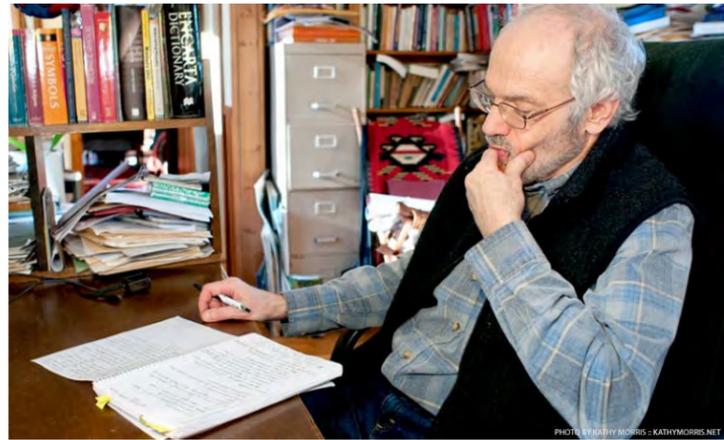
In the preface, Rabois offers the following summarizing description – “Compassionate critical thinking is reason deepened by empathy and by valuing the welfare of the countless others who inhabit the world with us.” He then describes in greater detail the purpose of the book:

“The purpose of this book is to show you how to run your intentions and goals into a classroom culture of compassionate critical thinking. It is intended for anyone who seeks ways

to become more compassionate on a personal level and on a professional level to integrate mindfulness into your classroom regardless of subject area. It demonstrates how a teacher who uses compassionate critical thinking can transform student learning. Mindfulness can help students feel at home in your course, feel more comfortable with you as a teacher and with other students. It can help you motivate students and engage the critical thinking process.

Over the years, this instructional method was applied across a variety of subject areas – English, philosophy, history, drama, karate, and psychology classes. It was developed in a school where teachers were given space to create a curriculum that fit the specific educational needs and interests of students.”

The book includes 24 sample “lessons” and is divided into five chapters, each ending with footnotes to the references used: chapter 1) guides the practice – teaching, benefits, and application of mindfulness; 2) is about knowing yourself and how your brain and emotions structure experience; 3) the emotions of anger, suffering, fear, joy, anxiety, worry, and greed, and how they are constructed; 4) compassion, empathy, and love, and how they are constructed; and 5) spells out the natural process of compassionate critical thinking – “building on the previous four chapters that illustrate the pro-



Ira Rabois in his home office. Photo courtesy Kathy Norris, from the author’s website.

cess in classroom vignettes, it includes discussions on dialectical questioning, the nature of truth, as well as how mindfulness develops a quiet, self-aware mind that makes effective self-reflection possible.” Thus, it is really a “how-to” book full of tips directed to the teacher with sample discussions from students throughout.

In the opening chapter, “Begin with Mindfulness,” Rabois notes the importance of how the classroom is physically set-up with artwork, quotes written on the chalkboard, tables and chairs arranged in a hollow square, rectangle, or circle so students can see each other, with calming music playing in the background [he suggests flute music and lists several artists in his footnotes]. He then provides journals for students to write their own personal reflections throughout the upcoming classes, and asks students to answer the following questions – “What do you want to learn from this class? What are your questions? List things you want me to know about you so I can better help you learn.” Rabois follows this beginning to the initial class meeting. (Following a simplified method of the NSRF [Setting Agreements Activity](#)) Rabois discusses with the

class these key questions about how the class will be run: “Can you agree to not tell anyone outside this class that x said y? You can share the material, but no naming; everyone agree? Secondly, you must do the work. I will always show up ready to learn and teach. You need to do whatever you can.”

For each class session there are selected readings – photocopied sections from a variety of books from leading authors dealing with compassion, critical thinking, and mindfulness – and each class includes six basic types of practice:

“1) **Mindfulness as open, receptive awareness:** settling and noticing breath (e.g. deep or shallow, long or short) and sensation (e.g. hot, cold, tense, relaxed), feeling (e.g. like, dislike, no preference), thoughts and images, and what you establish and discern is true.

2) **Concentration:** focusing exclusively and pointedly on one object, for example, on the point where air enters the nose, or on an image, or counting breaths.

3) **Visualization:** progressive relaxation and imaginative journeying (e.g. to a time in history or a place where you feel safe).

4) **Inquiry:** after settling the body and mind, introduce a word or topic for the students to explore (e.g. courage, freedom, love, or power).

5) **Compassion and empathy;** for example, visualizing caring for and understanding the emotions of another person. This allows you to view others and the world more clearly and from different perspectives.

6) **Group dialogue and questioning:** use conversation as an opportunity to practice mindfulness with others as well as to increase attention and develop insight.”

The classes begin with a mindfulness meditation practice to use with students, including sample prompts,

questions, suggestions for teachers, and “text boxes” with samples of the actual discussion and comments of students in dialogue with the teacher. They all begin with an invitation to students to sit comfortably, to close their eyes fully or partially, and tune into their breathing. For the sixth part of the class session – group dialogue and questioning – there are suggested directions to teachers with sample questions to ask students. For example, for “Lesson Nine: The Emotion Areas of the Brain and How to Pay Attention,” Part of the directions to the teacher that Rabois offers include these –

“The topics for today are the emotional areas of the brain, attention, and mindfulness. Ask students: ‘Does emotion influence how you look at something: And if so, how?’ That is the central question.

“Name different ways you can be attentive or look at someone or something?” “Think of the difference between a pitcher looking at a batter, a child looking at his mother, or a person looking spaced out.’

“Listen for student responses.

“Mindfulness is the education of attention. There are actually three aspects of attention:

What you attend to.

How you attend. This is about the quality of attention.

The intensity of attention. High intensity with excitement and engagement or low intensity with disinterest and boredom.”

The last classroom session is Lesson Twenty-Four: The Role of Self-Reflection in Compassionate Critical Thinking, and includes a writing meditation using the technique of “proprioceptive writing.”

“Proprio means ‘your own,’ cep- tion is ‘sensing yourself in space and time.’ In this case, you use writing to sense your inner orientation. Play music in the background to set off this moment ‘as a time and place in which

to establish intimacy with yourself.’ The teachers of this technique recommend Bach and other Baroque music [and a lighted candle], as research indicates it assists thinking.... The object of the exercise is write what you hear and listen to your mind speak. Don’t force anything. If you think there is something you ‘should’ be writing – put the “should” on the page. Treat anything said or felt as material to record.”

Rabois ends this amazing little book with a two-page conclusion from which I offer the following summarizing quotes [bold are my own for emphasis] –

*“**One gift** that a teacher brings to students (and vice versa) is the mere fact of companionship; you live the school year together.... You become **family** for a time. What kind of family will you be? What kind of person will you be as a teacher?.... The more you use mindfulness, the better you hear what students have to say, the better they hear you. **Feeling** is not secondary to academics but **at the heart** of it.... The class is a **refuge** for students and an example of what is possible in life.... The process of compassionate critical thinking is critical thinking, questioning, and solving problems with added benefits. It is a process that integrates how to live and accept yourself and all aspects of your life.... You teach students not only what the world is but how to break out of conditioned limits and realize what is possible. **Now that is a fulfilling life.**”*

LINKS

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