Why a review of a child psychia-
trist’s book for Connections, a jour-
nal for educators?  Because the ten
case-studies, which Dr. Bruce Perry
has chosen to share—although dis-
turbing, some might even say, bizarre—just may be encountered in your
school. I suggest this 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 over-
worked 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 behav-
ioral sciences at the Feinberg School
of Medicine in Chicago. Previously
he was chief of psychiatry at Texas
Children’s Hospital, and vice-chair-
man for research in the department
of psychiatry at the Baylor College
of Medicine, in Houston, Texas. A
brief “Author’s Note” with which he
begins this book, Dr. Perry informs
readers:

“The sad reality is that these sto-
ries are but a tiny percentage of the
many we could have told. Over the
ten years our clinical group at the
ChildTrauma Academy has treated
more than a hundred children who
have witnessed the murder of a par-
tner. 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 psy-
chiatry in 1980. Today it is believed
to affect at least 7% of all Americans
with an impact that in infancy
children than in adults. While not
all children fortunately will ever experi-
ence any of these events, approxi-
mately 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 for us all.... In order to appreciate
how children heal we need to under-
stand 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 that
I found particularly useful are Dr. Per-
y’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 with ASPD (Antisocial Per-
donality Disorder), with Autism, and suffered from early childhood parental neglect.
Here Dr. Perry was called upon to
determine Leon’s mental capacity 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, Illi-
nois 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 “dis-
sociation.” (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. Read-
ers may recall this tragic situation in
February of 1993 involving the FBI and
the Branch Davidians (Bureau of Alco-
hol and Firearms) and firearms viola-
tions. This experience led Dr. Perry
to form one of his major conclusions
about healing traumatized children:

“Relationships matter: the cur-
critical system which fosters growth,
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 teach-
ers and/or administrators working in
schools, whether public or private,
ereducation, charter, STEM, or whatev-
er, 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
is about Jason, who is 7 yet socially
still a toddler. Dr. Perry presents this
case to illustrate the importance of
peer relationships. Jason, who was
living with Autism, and suffered from
repeatedly sexually abused, what
matters most is how those experi-
ences affect their relationships – to
their parents, to themselves, and to
the world. The most traumatic
aspects of all disasters involve the
shattering of human connections.
This is especially true for chil-
dren. 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
human – these are profoundly
destructive experiences. Because
humans are inescapably social beings,
the worst catastrophes that can befal
us inevitably involve relational loss.

“As a result, recovery from trau-
ma and neglect is also all about rela-
tionships – 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 ther-
apy in the world – with the common core, and the loss of time
connecting, caring connections to other.”

That’s a message which all educa-
tors 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!

Dr. Dave Lehman

Editor’s note: In this and future issues of Connections, links to Amazon are replaced with links to Smile.amazon.com,
which donates a portion of your purchases to a non-profit organization you select. If you have not already set up your
Amazon Smile account and would like to support the NSRF, please select Harmony School Corporation, the parent compa-
y of the NSRF. Purchases through Smile are not more expensive than other Amazon purchases, but the pennies donated
by Amazon to our organization for each of your purchases eventually add up! Every time you purchase through Smile
Amazon, no matter what you buy your beneficiary earns a few pennies. Thank you.

Purchase The Boy who was Raised as a Dog, available in hardcover, paperback, and audiobook and audiobook CD for-
mats: Via Amazon Smile

The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog and Other Stories from a Child Psy-
chiatrist’s Notebook: What Trauma-
ized Children Can Teach Us About
Loss, Love, and Healing by Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz, Basic Books, 2006

Book review by Dave Lehman

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog

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 named CIE coach and then an NSRF National Facilitator.
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LInKs
In the beginning of this book, various people were asked by the publisher to review this book and offered 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 a wide range of classes (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 student’s voices – he takes us on a journey, showing how he has combined mindfulness meditation creativity, empathy, and Socratic questioning to create a rich, collaborative learning process he calls Compassionate Critical Thinking.”

In the preface, Rabois offers the following summarizing description - “Compassionate critical thinking is a 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 fits 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 teacher in 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 nature of process of compassionate critical thinking - “building on the previous four chapters that illustrate the process 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 a truly “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 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 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 on something specific, 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. 10-12 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 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 rejections 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 bat; a child looking at his mother, or a person looking spaced out.’ ‘Listen for student responses. ‘Mindfulness is the education of attention. There are other three aspects of attention: What you attend to; How you attend, this is about the quality of attention; and The intensity of attention. High intensity with excitement and engage-ment 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 “propri-oceptive writing.” “Proprio means ‘your own,’ cep- tion is ‘sensing yourself in space and time.’ In this case, you use 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 habits and realize what is possible. Now that is a fulfilling life.”

Second book review by Dave Lehman

Compassionate Critical Thinking

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

Compassionate Critical Thinking: How Mindfulness, Creativity Empathy, and Socratic Questioning Can Transform Teaching by Ira Rabois (Rowan and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016)

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