An evidence-based approach to educating heart and mind

The Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics supports an evidence-based approach to educating both heart and mind. With programs grounded in a theoretical framework for the cultivation of competencies that lead to the pro-social behaviors and outcomes that support flourishing and wellbeing for individuals and societies, the center also actively works to demonstrate the efficacy of these programs through cutting-edge research. The center is inclusive in its outlook and does not seek to advance any kind of sectarian moral agenda. Neither does the implementation of compassion-based ethics preclude or supersede the role of family, culture, or faith tradition in helping children constructively engage the challenges of life.

Contemplative science is an interdisciplinary field that investigates the phenomenological experiences of contemplative practices and their physiological, mental, and behavioral effects. Using methods from neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and medicine, contemplative science seeks to understand the range of factors that contribute to well-being—personally, socially, and globally—and how to cultivate them.

Compassion-based ethics, a framework proposed by the Dalai Lama and advanced by many experts in social, emotional, and ethical development, seeks to describe an ethical mindset, whereby ethical decisions originate internally, effortlessly, and spontaneously. Also known as 'secular ethics,' this approach is grounded in scientific research, shared human experience, and common sense. Compassion, for example, is a capacity central to secular ethics because: a) scientific studies of compassion training interventions have found positive physiological and psychological outcomes; b) it is central to shared human experience (it is considered a positive capacity by all of humanity’s major religions and the nonreligious alike); and c) it is grounded in common sense (it is such a primary phenomenon that infants naturally show preference toward compassionate agents).

Unifying Suppositions

- Contemplative practices can be decontextualized from cultural/religious origins
- Pro-social skills (compassion, self-regulation, etc.) are trainable and beneficial
- Both material phenomena and subjective experiences are valued sources of empirical evidence
- It is possible to scientifically measure the benefits of engaging in contemplative practices
- Essential aspects and outcomes are accessible by anyone