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Editorial

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Editorial

Pastoral care in challenging times: embracing the opportunity of change

Welcome to this latest issue of *Pastoral Care in Education*. As an international community of educators and related professionals, we are committed to helping our children and young people to develop the life skills and aptitudes to enable them not just to *survive* but to *thrive* despite the challenges they might face. In normal times, this is demanding work; during a global pandemic, this takes on even greater urgency and significance, and we must ask ourselves what additional skills our children and young people will require to allow them to navigate safely through these choppy, uncharted waters.

A year ago, as news of the pandemic swept across the world, there was a tangible sense of fear as infection rates rose and as many countries entered a lengthy spell of lockdown which has exacerbated many of the existing educational inequalities in society and has highlighted the prevalence of digital poverty (e.g. IFS, 2020; Sutton Trust, 2020; Walsh et al., 2020). Almost a year later, many countries are experiencing new spikes of infection, repeated lockdowns, restrictions on social gatherings and school closures, but despite the gloom, there is now the promise of a new brighter future ahead, epitomised by the advent of mass public vaccination.

However, aside from the public health perspective, there are many further reasons to be optimistic, for as Disraeli once wrote ‘there is no education like adversity’, a maxim that seems just as relevant during the current pandemic as when it was first penned a century and a half ago. Without seeking to diminish the challenges of the past year, there have been many heartening examples of community spirit, generosity, resilience and courage (Stansfield et al., 2020). Education professionals have also displayed remarkable adaptability amid the rapid shift to blended and/or remote learning methodologies (Booth, 2020; König et al., 2020), and have sought to achieve a balance between educational continuity and effective pastoral support during and after the crisis (a theme to be explored further in our forthcoming Special Issue).

As an educational community we have been forced to re-examine and sometimes abandon completely some of our most deeply entrenched practices. Who would have imagined a year ago that we would have moved so quickly to provide online teaching? Who would have imagined that public high-stakes testing would have to be suspended? And yet, while the pace of change has

been unsettling for many, what it also shows is that there is nothing immutable in our education system, nothing which cannot be changed if absolutely necessary, nothing set in stone. I find that liberating and refreshing, and I believe that sense of potential should provide much encouragement as we look back over the past twelve months but also as we look forward more hopefully to the post-covid future.

In this current issue we see a wide range of contemporary pastoral themes explored through varied methodological approaches in research studies conducted on four continents (Africa, Australasia, Europe and Asia), making this one of the most international issues we have ever published. The global reach of this issue of *Pastoral Care in Education* is in itself something to celebrate, but so too is the relevance and quality of the collection of articles in this issue. At first glance, the articles are very different in terms of theme and approach: in the first article John McMullen and Patricia Eaton present a qualitative study of the impact of a Life-Skills intervention in secondary schools in Uganda, highlighting the importance of a participatory, student-centred approach which is culturally appropriate and which promotes indigenous capacity and genuine partnership. This is followed by an article by Maureen Mooney, Ruth Tarrant, Douglas Paton, David Johnston and Sarb Johal which examines the contribution of a school to supporting children after the earthquake disaster in Canterbury, New Zealand. The study demonstrates the positive role that schools can play as places of safety, security, friendship and connection where coping skills can be modelled and reinforced. In the third article, Amanda Bezzina and Stephen Camilleri examine the use of Friendship Cards, an educational tool developed in Malta for use by a range of professionals working in schools to develop pupils' social and emotional understanding. Using data from reflective journals, the study explores the potential of this resource to allow pupils to explore and develop their emotional competence. Finally, Mantak Yuen, Queenie Lee and Y.B. Chung consider teachers' perceptions of their pupils' concept of 'meaning of life', and how this is related to their life skills development and their connectedness to their peers, parents and school. The study is based on the experiences of 12 secondary school teachers in the highly competitive educational context of Hong Kong.

So, four contrasting international articles and yet, despite the many differences, there is undoubtedly a shared commitment to supporting children and young people to meet the challenges of life and a common sense of hopefulness and potential for the growth of age-appropriate and context-specific skills. Given the global challenges we continue to face, these skills seem more important today than ever before.

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