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The politics of care, compassion and concern in the contemporary academy

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Pastoral Care in Education

Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

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Editorial

Welcome to this Special Edition of Pastoral Care in Education, 2017. Writing as academics in the contemporary university in the world of Higher Education (HE), we are familiar with the profound and incessant change driven by neo-liberal values and an endemic culture of improving performativity, individual success and feminine marginalisation. This edition addresses a complex, political and, in current times, much debated field within the HE sector: the subject of 'care'. The work draws attention to matters of 'care', 'compassion' and questions of place, roles and responsibilities in relation to the affective domain of students and faculty learning and working, which seems to have less consideration in this increasingly impersonal academic world. This is linked to a wider concern being debated across Education regarding what the Academy's response should be? Questions are being asked regarding where 'care' and 'compassion' lie in terms of student and faculty experience. These are, arguably, core elements to consider for successful progression in education, i.e. learner and faculty health when working towards individual and community transformation. Common threads in these articles suggest that this is due to the personal becoming de-politicised, or silenced, in reaction to a progressively technicist managerial HE world. We acknowledge the impact of such a phenomenon evident in higher numbers of students and academics seeking support for their 'emotional self'.

The papers included highlight the need for cultural engagement and philosophical reflection as to the purpose and impact of the academy on all stakeholders – learner, academic community and society. They evaluate and critically engage with questions and models of 'pastoral care' for higher education in a 'changing era'. The material presented - both empirical and theoretical- engage with how the Academy can best respond to and plan for an ever-evolving campus and linked to this, issues regarding student drop out, academic progression and the matter of ethics.

Six papers contribute to this exploration and critique.

Supporting Professional Doctorate women students through identity change and turbulent times: Who cares?

The first (?) paper by ??? addresses the question- where do Doctoral students find support and direction in times of uncertainty and crisis.? Crisis is positioned not solely in terms of study direction, but also in terms of other life related concerns, eg family and work. Writing as a recent EdD student, a full time academic and a mother, the author draws on these experiences alongside her empirical study with six female doctoral students.

The paper highlights the matter of gender identity and role and how, for those who embrace both motherhood, family, career and postgrad studies, the journey can be a challenging and at times traumatic one. The key question asked- where does one turn to in turbulent times, who is there to pick up the role of guidance or counsellor?

Louise's study used qualitative methods to explore turbulence in the students' lives, which included - *relationship breakdown, ill health and conflict at work because of their changing identity*. She drew on Mezirow's theory of transformation when considering the narratives shared and considered what the role of 'supervisor' was or could be in such situations. Whilst noting the importance of resilience, an increasingly flouted buzz word in contemporary education contexts, Louise finishes by arguing for a more *supportive, non-hierarchical relationship* between student and supervisor alongside more ,meaningful empathy for the pressures these students' face.

Narratives of care amongst undergraduate students

This paper engages with a very contemporary issue- the matter of care and support for undergraduate students when they face high levels of stress and/or experience mental health needs. A clear and critical argument is developed and weaved throughout regarding the existence of a paradox in the Academy: *Just as universities have increasingly adopted the language and behaviours of neo-liberal managerialism and 'student satisfaction' has become the by-word for good practice, so their capacity to respond to students' needs and circumstances in a caring way may be diminished*. The authors explore the changing academy providing a rich critical account of neo-liberalism's growth and impact on the HE landscape. They consider the audit culture

that exists and drawing on an empirical research study, use findings to highlight how this culture has impacted upon matters of 'care' across the sector. Key insights from this work are on the value of meaningful relationships between tutors and students, and some rich insight into how students explore and make sense of the levels and type of support that is available to them.

Stepping through the Daylight Gate: compassionate spaces for learning in higher education: The X [number] article from XX [authors] offers a revealing insight into emergent processes of a multi-disciplinary research group. Using psychodynamic perspectives on emotions and "knowing otherwise" epistemology, researchers explored dangers within liminal spaces and closely examined their felt disturbances. In the conceptualisation of this article, two of the researchers propose a trinity of inter-related liminal landscapes that encompass the nature of the research. It is clear from this research that the authors advance our understanding of experienced troubling emotions and the importance of compassion in HE.

"Becoming Others" Valuing our relationship and communication with students

In the X [number] paper, the authors [names] treat us to an emancipatory process that students and researchers in an Early Childhood Course collaboratively designed and developed. Sharing ideas, examining their different childhood experiences, and engaging with the epistemology in their university, provides participants with opportunities to understand self-affirming identity formation and belonging to their university. What we believe is of particular interest is that the authors privilege student voice and provide greater understanding of how students and academics might potentially exchange roles and responsibilities to address equity and inclusion concerns, and develop deeper intellectual and emotional affinity.

How we should we 'care' for LGBT students with higher education?

X – [author name) – presents in the X [number paper] a strong argument, designed to challenge perceptions of “pastoral care” of LGBT and students in Higher Education (HE), indicates that institutional “care” requires reframing. Three consultation groups of young people with a range of gender and sexual identities drew on their own perspectives and experiences to review, test and expand five dominant themes identified in an international literature review. The author offers revealing insight into the complexity of HE experiences they face. This article is particularly important as these real life accounts provide an opportunity to carefully consider informed institutional responses.

From collusion to collective compassion: Putting heart back into the neoliberal university

Mutch and Tatebe present the X paper, an important international contribution to this edition. Using extracts from field notes the authors focus on their lived experiences in order to consider challenges and aspects of student disengagement. They identify their resistance to imposed constraints by creating a culture of collegial care and academic collaboration. This paper provides the reader with an honest, insightful reflexive account of current challenges in the neo-liberal politics in HE and extends our understanding of academics’ perspective in this culture of performativity thus challenging the ethics of university care.