PASTORAL CARE

in Education

Special Issue –

Changing Structures for Care and Learning

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EDITORIAL

Changing Structures for Caring and Learning

The practice of pastoral care must always develop and change, as context and needs change, and as we learn more about the effects of our practices and our systems. This special issue focuses on aspects of innovation which may be crucial to schools in the 21st century.

What has the 20th century shown us in this area of interest? Certainly more than one thing, since there is no one history of pastoral care: explanations of how practice has developed will always remain contested. Nevertheless, the issue of school structure has figured significantly. Decades of talk about pastoral 'versus' academic, the pastoral 'side' and so on, have (if they reflect anything more than an unfortunately lazy way of talking) shown us that such separations can have adverse effects. Writing over a decade ago about the failure of pastoral care, D. Hamblin, one of its most energetic proponents, could say, 'Failure stems from separation of the pastoral and the curricular' ('The Failure of Pastoral Care?', *School Organisation* 6(1), pp. 141–8). Yet a few years earlier, in the inaugural issue of this journal, R. Best and R. Ribbins, two founders of the association, had sounded a cautionary note in planning any radical reorganisation of systems, concluding that 'separate structures manned [*sic*] by those with particular interest, the necessary experience and special abilities in pastoral work may be required if care is to be maximised' ('Rethinking the Pastoral–Academic Split', *Pastoral Care in Education* 1(1), pp. 11–18). That article was tilting against calls for 'rationalisation' which were associated with cuts in educational expenditure. But even in that continuing scenario, others, such as S. Wilkinson, argued that rationalisation would be positive if it enhanced the role of the tutor ('Rationalization: the Reconciler of the Academic–Pastoral Divide?', *School Organisation* 8(3), pp. 271–6).

Two things are needed if these differences are to be overcome: a more holistic vision of the school's impact and a more explicit focus on pupils' learning – by which term we should not limit ourselves to any of the old separations such as 'academic learning' or the like. Learning engages the whole person and effective learning has to engage the personal–social aspects of life. (See C. Watkins, E. Carnell, C. Lodge, and C. Whalley (1996), *Effective Learning*, London:

Institute of Education School Improvement Network (Research Matters series) [download free on http://www.ioe.ac.uk/iseic/research.pdf].)

Never more has this been needed than in the current context of UK schools, and the current approach adopted by government. The point was made well a number of years ago, by Fred Newmann:

> Unfortunately, the dominant discourse of educational reform is technical, functional, and individualistic. The task is to deliver many diverse services to students so that each will eventually contribute to national productivity, exercise full choice on personal consumption, and make prudent, socially responsible decisions in personal and civic affairs. This orientation … has led to designing schools as corporate, rational bureaucracies and conceiving their mission as analogous to shopping malls, restaurants, clinics, or private clubs where the main purpose of the organisation is to serve individual, private needs and wants. In spite of well-intentioned goals of human betterment, individualistic bureaucracies tend to breed alienation that suppresses learning and creative spirit. … The overall effect of these typical tendencies in schools is to weaken both teachers' and students' investment in the constructive use of mind. ('Beyond Common Sense in Educational Re-structuring: the Issues of Content and Linkage', *Educational Researcher*, 22(2), 4–13)

The collection of articles in this issue addresses ideas and examples of secondary schools experimenting with changes in the traditional structures and roles. Structure is not everything. But structure does impact on the daily lives of teachers and pupils, and it does influence their perspectives. The 'egg-crate curriculum' still separates pupils' experiences of learning into outdated and insulated categories called school subjects. The organisational structure of subject teams and tutor teams has a splitting effect on teachers' views of their work.

The secondary school needs a structure which better weaves the elements and which brings into focus the important matters of pupils' learning and development. The examples in this issue are a contribution to that theme. I start off with the research case for restructuring the secondary school, and Caroline Lodge gives an account of some very popular courses which addressed these ideas (see *From Head of Year to Year Curriculum Coordinator? A Collection of Resources for INSET*, Coventry: National Association for Pastoral Care in Education, 1992). Charles Harper and Yvonne Barry then describe the development of year curriculum at Burntwood School, and Mike Reading looks at new management at George Spicer School. The last article, by Mike Evans, brings evidence to remind us that pastoral systems have to avoid distortion into discipline systems which become dominated by some teachers with particular attitudes. By lucky coincidence, this issue also carries an announcement of work which NAPCE has been doing on standards for pastoral leaders: this, too, emphasizes the need for better connectedness.

The state of our schools at the end of the century is such that not all of them will involve themselves in experimenting with their internal structures. The weight of history is strong, and the last decade has seen a peculiar resurrection of treating the organization as though it were a machine. They are weighed down by too many expectations, and the hostile rhetoric of 'raising standards'. The result is a climate more characterized by fear than a decade ago. This is not a productive context for experiment! Yet, as articles here show, some schools do take charge of change and make significant strides to a more learning organisation. And, paradoxically perhaps, supportive evidence comes from the increasing amount of data which circulates in and around our schools. National performance tables in their raw form are serving to increase inequalities between schools. But in their various adjusted forms, they bring evidence which supports the pastoral cause in its widest and best sense. For example, those schools which show up as making most improvement in performance tables are often schools which have given extra focus to learning through pupil reviews and action planning with the tutor. And the tables produced by the *Observer* (6 December 1998), in which school performance was adjusted for social deprivation, showed that schools which work as well-connected communities get the best results. Both the schools featured in this issue topped their LEAs in this data.

So as the millennium changes, we do, too – not because of the hype but because there is real change in our lives and in our society. Will our schools change to become more modern and future-oriented places? The changing millennium influences our thinking and invites us to think more about the future than we otherwise might. In that sense, it can be an occasion to boost our hopes and take new steps towards a goal which unites more than it divides – communities for learning.

Chris Watkins