

Pastoral Care 11-16. A Critical Introduction

N. Purdy (Ed), 2013

London: Bloomsbury Academic

£22.99 (pbk), 216pp.

ISBN 978-1-4411-2748-8

2014 marks the fortieth anniversary of the publication of the late Michael Marland's seminal volume *Pastoral Care* (1974), so it was with some sense of history that I set out to read this book. How much common ground would I find between Marland and colleagues' thinking about pastoral care then and the content of this book? What has thinking about pastoral care in education come to mean forty years on?

Of course, there have been a considerable number of books and myriad articles (the majority published in the 31 volumes of this Journal) on aspects of pastoral care and personal-social education since 1974. Two series of books (one published by Blackwell, the other by Cassell/Continuum) appeared in the 'eighties and 'nineties and there have been at least three edited collections (Best et al, 1980; Ribbins, 1985; Best et al, 1995) which addressed a comprehensive range of issues and aspects of schooling considered to be 'pastoral' in the widest sense. A critical review of this entire literature would be a very interesting and worthwhile project for someone younger than me - a topic for a PhD, perhaps? Obviously, that is not my purpose here, but it is proper that Purdy's book be appraised within the context of the wider literature.

My first impression on opening the book was that, in contrast to the earlier collections, this was based on a rather narrow conception of pastoral care in education. Its apparent concern is with what has been called *pastoral casework*; i.e. how schools respond to a set of personal and emotional crises experienced by young people and which impede their learning and social engagement. The much broader concept of pastoral care as encompassing such things as careers and health education, guidance and counselling, the school in its community, developmental group work and so on, which featured in some of the earlier literature, was not easy to discern. Perhaps this was evidence of changes in the very concept itself? After all, it would be strange if this aspect of schooling had escaped the impact of forty years of changes including the advent and periodic reinventions of a National Curriculum, the imposition of an oppressive inspection regime, and the mentality of performativity and the 'audit culture' that are part and parcel of the neo-liberal agenda and the marketization of education. Certainly, some terms ('careers education', 'moral education' etc) have become anachronisms, replaced by acronyms like SEAL (the social and emotional aspects of learning), while personal and social education (PSE) became PSHE (with the inclusion of 'health') which in turn seems to have morphed into 'personal, social, health and *economic* education' (p.2).

My first impression turned out to be mistaken. This book is by no means a recipe for pastoral care as 'emotional first aid'; on the contrary, Noel Purdy has set his book firmly within the context of a broad conception of pastoral care as

..... much more than an emotional 'crutch' for troubled children to lean on in difficult times.... Fundamentally, it is about a whole-school atmosphere in which relationships are centrally important and are healthy and positive: between and among staff, pupils and the wider community. It is also about preparing children and young people through the curriculum for the realities of life today, and equipping them with the skills they will need to face challenging situations when (rather than if) they arise (p.2).

Purdy goes on to stress the importance of 'preventative and educational strategies' alongside reactive ones, and the potential for addressing these through the curriculum. All this is very much in the tradition of Marland's book (and of his later influential paper 'The Pastoral Curriculum', see Best et

al, 1980, chapter 11). It resonates with the late Douglas Hamblin's idea of planning for 'critical incidents' before they happen (Hamblin, 1978), and with the model of the 'five pastoral tasks' which, with others, I have developed over many years. This is not surprising, since Purdy and his colleagues make numerous references to the established literature, up to and including more recent frameworks such as Calvert's depiction of the evolution of pastoral care (Calvert, 2009).

In the first chapter, Purdy provides a succinct outline of the evolving concept of pastoral care, its manifestations in the pastoral structures of secondary schools and the key roles of form tutor and head of year, before noting the importance of support for those in pastoral roles. This provides a good context for the six chapters which follow, each of which addresses a specific issue or problematic experience for the pupil.

In Chapter 2, Bronagh McKee deals with child protection in schools, looking first at the legal and policy context across a number of countries including Australia, Ireland, Canada and the US. Under the umbrella concept of 'maltreatment', the definition and prevalence of various categories of abuse and neglect are considered before establishing that safeguarding and child protection are very much pastoral concerns. Interventions and strategies are discussed and the reader is alerted to the ethical dilemmas, particularly those concerning confidentiality and reporting. Excellent use is made of a case study, unfolding over several pages, to demonstrate the complexity of casework with an abused young person.

Bullying is the focus for Chapter 3. The authors (Fran Thompson and Peter Smith) assemble a remarkably comprehensive statement of the what is currently known about various kinds of bullying (including cyber-bullying) and the roles which children play in bullying contexts, before moving on to look at a range of proactive, preventative and reactive intervention strategies which have been adopted by schools. Given Peter Smith's eminence in the study of bullying, it is unsurprising that the strong and cutting-edge research base for this chapter is a particular feature.

In Chapter 4, Christine Harrison and Rava Thiara address a topic not much in evidence in the pastoral care literature known to me, but which is a serious concern for what seems to be a growing number of children: the experience of domestic violence. The overlap with child protection is obvious, for to be exposed to violence amongst family members is damaging for the child, even if they, themselves, are not physically abused (although very often they are). I found this chapter particularly disturbing, not least when I read the statistics for domestic violence (18% of violent crime in England and Wales, with one in four women experiencing domestic violence at some point in their lives (pp.100-101)). Teenage relationship violence gets its own section, before the potential for pastoral care to promote children's safety and well-being in the face of domestic violence is thoughtfully discussed.

Young people's capacity to learn (not to mention their social and emotional development) is also affected when they experience the divorce or separation of their parents. This is the focus for Paula Hall and Noel Purdy in the fifth chapter. As in other chapters, there is solid statistical information to ground the discussion. Trends in marriage and divorce rates and the numbers of children affected are reported and there are again some interesting international comparisons. The different ways children react - children who are 'silent', 'angry', 'clingy', 'fragile' or attempt to be 'perfect' - will be useful to teachers of children going through this experience, and there is plenty here to think about for those involved in establishing a whole-school approach.

In chapter 6, Mary Lappin sees bereavement as providing both challenges and opportunities for schools and their pastoral systems. Models and theories of grief (including Kubler-Ross's classic five-stage model) are presented, as are the common reactions to loss amongst children, but we are rightly warned about accepting stages of grief (age-related or not) too rigidly. According to Lappin,

"[t]raining in Grief and Loss Education programmes is becoming increasingly sought after in UK schools" (p.160), and this is an excellent example of how children's individual traumas can be eased not only through individual casework but also through the pastoral curriculum. An important addition to my (admittedly limited) knowledge of this issue was the section on 'ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief', where children are unable to complete the grieving process because it is unclear that the other has died, or there is no closure for other reasons, and/or the child is not permitted to grieve on cultural or other grounds. It made me think (not for the first time) of the way our best intentions in 'protecting' children from unpleasant realities may actually do more harm than good.

The final chapter, by Jo Bell, deals with suicide and self-harm. As self-harm has been a research interest of mine in recent years, I was less surprised by the statistics regarding prevalence than with comparable statistics in earlier chapters, but they still make disturbing reading. Although Bell's working definition of self-harm is broader than some (p.181), the chapter does not consider some of the more bizarre, indirect and peripheral forms of self-harm teachers and lecturers have to contend with (Best, 2006; 2009). The potential to educate and raise awareness of self-harm, and models for preventive and responsive strategies to suicide and its impact on individuals and whole schools are well discussed, and there can be no doubt that these are big issues for every school's pastoral care policies and procedures.

All chapters include research examples, case-studies, further reading and useful web-sites, all of which will be of use to both students and teachers pursuing continuing professional development, whether through courses or in-house projects. The standard of writing, the quality of theory and the research base is consistently high throughout all the chapters, and this is a testimony to both the expertise and skills of the chapter authors and the coordinating and editing skills of Noel Purdy. I was surprised that there was no concluding chapter drawing together the key themes common to all the chapters. Had Purdy provided a conclusion of the quality of his Introduction, this would have rounded things off nicely, but it may be that limitations on book length did not allow this.

One final point: the subtitle of the book is 'A critical introduction', and in one sense this is apt; for each contributing author has adopted a properly critical perspective on their topic, interrogating data and critiquing theories and models in a scholarly way. But there was a different kind of critical edge (not in evidence here) to some of the earlier work on pastoral care in education - born of the radical sociology of the 'sixties and 'seventies - which proposed a latent function of 'pastoralizing' challenging or deviant students in order to achieve conformity and protect the academic status quo (e.g. Williamson in Best et al, 1980, chapter 12). Whether the inclusion of such a perspective would have made this a better book is a moot point, since the stated purpose of the book (pp. 3-4) is to contribute to the training of teachers, and to assist qualified teachers to better meet the needs of their pupils within the system as it is rather than to challenge the system itself. And within the limits of this purpose, it seems to me to be a very good book indeed.

References

Best, R. (2006): Deliberate self-harm in adolescence: A challenge for schools. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 34(2), 161-175.

Best, R [2009]: 'Students who self-harm: A case-study of prevalence, awareness and response in an English university'. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 27(3), 165-203.

Best, R., Jarvis, C. and Ribbins, P. (eds) (1980) *Perspectives on Pastoral Care*. London: Heinemann.

Best, R., Lang, P., Lodge, C. and Watkins, C. (eds) (1995): *Pastoral Care and Personal-Social Education: Entitlement and Provision*. London: Cassell.

Calvert, M. (2009) From pastoral care to care: Meanings and practices. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 27(4), 267-277.

Hamblin, D. H. (1978) *The Teacher and Pastoral Care*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Marland, M. (1974) *Pastoral Care*. London: Heinemann.

Ribbins, P. M. (ed) (1985). *Schooling and Welfare*. Lewes: Falmer