

University teachers' conceptions and articulation of pastoral care: Re-considering pastoral-caring pedagogy as a discourse of love, care and compassion

Anne L. L. Tang¹, Joshua Ka-ho Mok²

¹Lingnan University, Hong Kong, Hong Kong. ²The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Research Domains

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

Abstract

This working-in-progress paper seeks to explore the potential integration of pastoral care into a pedagogic approach to support students' studies, all-rounded development, and well-being. Utilising Patton's (1993) notion of "pastoral care as hearing and remembering", narrative analysis was applied to examine ten Hong Kong university teachers' notions and articulation of pastoral care. We have identified an overarching theme, "pastoral care was compelled by experiences of love and care and sought to express it to the others to foster a virtuous cycle of caring in a sustainable learning community". Participants underlined the centrality of facilitating students' holistic growth in personal, academic, and professional aspects while promoting their emotional and spiritual well-being. They emphasised guiding students' self-exploration of study and life journeys through a community of support. Overall, we argue that pastoral-caring pedagogy could present it as a discourse of love, care, and compassion to promote students' learning, whole-person development, and well-being.

Full paper

This study responds to the growing apprehension about students' academic progression and mental health. Scholars indicated the significance of the pastoral dimensions of the educative process and re-considering caring pedagogy underpinned by love, care, and compassion as guiding philosophies and practices in universities (Mutch et al., 2021). This has been germane to our research on exploring the integration of pastoral care into

a pedagogic approach to providing inclusive support for students' studies, all-rounded development, and well-being.

There is a trend towards a secular form of pastoral care in education, which takes an inclusive and whole-school approach (Schoeman, 2015). We admit that pastoral care is neither a panacea for every problem that students face nor the sole ingredient of good teaching. Nevertheless, recent studies conducted in various university contexts showed that teacher care has wide-ranging and transformative effects on students' academic learning and outcomes, holistic growth, and well-being (Anderson et al., 2020; Tang, 2017; Tett et al., 2017; Anderson et al., 2019). Pastoral care could foster thoughtful and reciprocal teacher-student relationships and transform students' learning experiences (Lu, 2022).

In the education context, pastoral care reflects a concern for students' welfare within a learning environment that supports their physical, personal, social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development (Seary & Willans, 2020; Lu, 2022). It can be referred to as teachers' non-instructional aspects (Best et al., 1977) and their deliberate efforts to offer wide-ranging student support (See, Baice et al., 2021; Hradsky et al., 2022; Lu, 2022). However, pastoral care is often associated with "counselling" in a university context (Lu, 2022). This may explain why the potential integration into pedagogic approach is arguably under-researched (Seary & Willans, 2020). It has unveiled a gap that we seek to fill.

We draw on Patton's (1993) notion of "pastoral care as hearing and remembering" as our conceptual lens. Central to pastoral care is its recognition that each person is unique while attending to both individual and communal needs and welfare (Patton, 1993; Carroll, 2010). The unity of persons in a community is one in which each remains a distinct individual and realises oneself in and through the others (Patton, 1993). Patton's (1993) discussions of individuality and relationality resonate with the discussions of teacher care in university contexts. For example, while considering individual students' characters and needs, caring university teachers also engaged them in fostering a community of learning in the classroom context by accounting for all their needs and capabilities as a whole (Tang & Walker-Gleaves, 2022). We argue that Patton's (1993) theme could present a way to attend to different students' needs in a class, first by hearing and remembering them as

individuals, and then by re-membering them into a community of learners centred on caring for one another.

Utilising a narrative research, we used purposive sampling to select ten teachers who self-identify as “caring” from five public and private higher education institutions in Hong Kong. Their fields ranged from religious studies to education and management (Table 1).

Empirical data were collected from their written narrations concerning: 1) how pastoral care is defined overall and distinguished in a university context; and 2) the essential qualities of pastoral care and the typical practices considered embodying pastoral care in universities. Narrative analysis was applied to examine participants’ views and draw pedagogic implications.

Based on the provisional findings, we have unveiled a distinct notion of pastoral care in higher education pedagogic context. We have identified an overarching theme, “pastoral care was compelled by experiences of love and care and sought to express it to the others to foster a virtuous cycle of caring in a sustainable learning community”. While supporting students’ study is a key “definer”, participants underlined the centrality of facilitating students’ holistic growth in personal and professional aspects while promoting their emotional and spiritual well-being. They emphasised guiding students on self-exploration of study and life journeys and coping strategies through a community of support. Pastoral care then could be characterised by a genuineness of care and compassion for students, and respecting students as individuals and recognising their voice, and fostering caring and trusting relationships. Hence, a pastoral-caring pedagogic approach could be embodied in creating opportunities to seek a deep understanding of students’ backgrounds and needs, build a mutuality of caring and trusting relationships, and engage them in dialectical learning facilitation in a classroom context and beyond. Overall, based on our preliminary analysis, we argue that pastoral-caring pedagogy could present it as a discourse of love, care, and compassion to promote students’ learning, whole-person development, and well-being.