Pastoral Care in British Schools: Applications for Singapore

Vilma D’Rozario
Lawrence Chia

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how pastoral care is delivered in the United Kingdom. The paper proposes a framework for a three-fold approach to pastoral care in Singapore schools and outlines how one Singapore secondary school is incorporating pastoral care into its school system. In addition, this paper touches upon the possible effects this innovation has on teachers in terms of their roles, skills and training. Implications for research in the area of pastoral care are outlined.

Introduction

In late 1986, Singapore’s Minister for Education, Dr Tony Tan, and 12 school principals visited acknowledged good schools in the United Kingdom and United States and commended their efforts in ensuring not only their students’ academic development but a total development of the individual in the personal, social and vocational aspects of their maturation. In a report which followed, called Towards Excellence in Schools (1987), strong recommendations were made to introduce Pastoral Care into Singapore schools.

In response to the call for Pastoral Care in schools, the Ministry of Education invited 17 schools, three of which were independent, to take part in a pilot project to implement Pastoral Care beginning in 1988. The aim of the pilot phase was to encourage the evolution of individual pastoral programmes to meet the specific needs of each school. These systems would serve as models for more widescale implementation of Pastoral Care in the future.

To gain first-hand knowledge of the organisation and implementation of pastoral systems in British schools, a study team of 18 educationists from Singapore, comprising Ministry of Education officials, principals of secondary schools and pre-university centres, vice-principals and lecturers of the Institute of Education visited 16 British schools in June 1988.

The authors of this paper were amongst the educationists who visited the United Kingdom and will share some observations made and lessons learnt from their British experience.¹

Pastoral Care in British Schools: Some Lessons Learnt

Pastoral Care: What is it?

At its best, Pastoral Care may be regarded as an institutionalised system of personalised education acknowledging the pupils’ perspectives and their personal and social development.

In the first major work on pastoral care in 1974, Marland described Pastoral Care as

¹ The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of the other 16 study team members of the Ministry of Education Study Tour to 16 British schools in June 1988, especially to Mr William Thomas, Sr Anne Wong, Mrs Ng Gek Tiang, Mrs Pang-Cheng Li Yeng, Ms Ko Chai Peng, Ms Lily Thang and Dr Ong Teck Chin whose invaluable contribution to The Report on Pastoral Care and Career Guidance in Sixteen Schools (MOE Report, August 1988) has also been reflected in this paper by the authors.
covering "... all aspects of work with pupils in a school other than pure teaching ... looking after the total welfare of the pupil." Best, Jarvis and Ribbins (1980) agreed that Pastoral Care referred to the non-instructional aspects of the roles of teachers and others in schools, using it as an umbrella term to include guidance and counselling as specific aspects of Pastoral Care. They continue to present a model of Pastoral Care as

"... something which happens should happen between teacher and student, interacting in the context of an institution called a school or college which has four inter-related dimensions (disciplinary/order, welfare/pastoral, academic/curricular, and administrative/organizational) and which itself is located in a wider social, historical and cultural milieu."

It has been described by Hamblin (1978) as part of a teaching process which focusses not only on the intellectual, but social and emotional development of each child as well, and may involve altering the learning environment to suit the needs of each pupil so that he can develop to his maximum potential. Pastoral Care, from a wider perspective, is considered an attempt by schools to be involved in the total, continuous development of a child, especially one who is most in need of extra care and effort (David and Cowley, 1980). Reiterating the importance of a whole-school commitment to caring, Clemett and Pearce (1986) described Pastoral Care as being effective when "... everyone in the school community knows, and feels secure in the knowledge that as valued members of that community they can participate in giving and receiving encouragement, guidance and support. Such a climate will be created by the attitudes of staff and pupils and may be enhanced by a specifically designed pastoral care system. Each school would recognise its responsibility for extending care into all aspects of its work."

Pastoral Care: What are its aims?

Watkins (1985) states that Pastoral Care develops goals of:

- providing a point of personal continuing contact between a teacher and student;
- creating an overview of students' progress, achievement and responses;
- offering guidance on personal, educational and vocational issues;
- developing a management system to facilitate these goals; and
- communicating with all others involved in the enterprise, both those inside and outside the school.

Evidence from the 16 British schools visited showed that the aims of their pastoral systems placed emphasis on developing each pupil to his full potential. As such, tailoring the school's pastoral system towards the specific needs of its consumer, the pupil, was of prime importance. The aims focussed on encouraging a self-awareness of a pupil's present potential whilst relating these to their future contribution to the community.

An analysis of the aims and objectives of Pastoral Care (career guidance being an integral part of pastoral care) of the 16 British schools visited by a team of 18 educationists from Singapore shows that Pastoral Care sought to:

- instil in each pupil confidence, direction and self-discipline;
- encourage in each pupil self-awareness of present potential, in terms of interests, abilities, values, personal qualities, while relating these to future contributions to society;
- support the academic progress of each pupil through careful monitoring to ensure that each is able to take full advantage of the range of educational opportunities offered by the school;
- provide each pupil with practical life skills to deal more effectively with daily living;
- develop an awareness of the options available to each pupil on leaving school, to facilitate the transition from school to the world of work, by the provision of experience and necessary skills;
- engender in each pupil a sense of social responsibility, mutual respect and an awareness of the needs of others, whilst developing social skills to enable each to relate easily to the community and serve it well; and
- serve as a point of personal contact between
the school and the community, through parent-school activities.

Pastoral Care: How was it organised?

Each school's pastoral system was organised according to clearly defined structures representing the responsibilities and relationships of each person in the pastoral system (See Appendices I and II). Two structural systems were evident: the Vertical House system and the Horizontal Year system.

Under the Vertical House system, pupils were allocated to houses, each under the care of a Head of House, assisted sometimes by a Deputy Head of House, and always by a team of form tutors. Within each house, the pupils were allocated to a tutor on a year basis who took charge of about 30 pupils. There could be a total of 300 pupils in one house, depending on school enrolment.

The Horizontal Year System grouped pupils according to their years or levels. Each year was sub-divided into smaller groups of 25 to 30 pupils who would form a class under the care of a form tutor. The Head of Year had the responsibility of coordinating the pastoral programme, supporting and acting as consultant for the tutors.

In turn both Head of House and Head of Year came under the supervision of a Deputy Headteacher in charge of Pastoral Care or two Deputy Headteachers — one from the Lower and the other from the Upper School.

All schools recognised the important role played by the tutor, who served as the first point of contact of any sort for the pupil. Marland (1985) in North Westminster Community School's "Tutor's Guide to the Tutorial Programme" described the tutor as "the heart of the school" and "tutoring, the key role, in that the tutor's responsibility for personal, educational and vocational guidance and the associated family collaboration, welfare, support and discipline underpins everything else the school endeavours to do".

A tutor's responsibility was that of knowing each pupil well so as to facilitate close monitoring of pupil progress and a regular assessment of pupil needs. This in turn creates the opportunity for each pupil to identify well with at least one teacher, building a sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Form tutors in some schools took care of the same tutor group through the five years of their secondary education, thus making it possible to know their pupils well.

The Head of House or Year assumed overall responsibility for the welfare of the house or year pupils in their charge by overseeing the pastoral curriculum, monitoring the academic progress of each pupil through their tutors as well as through individual interviews, supervising a firm and fair system of reward and sanction and liaising with parents and the community including social services, if necessary.

Although the approach to Pastoral Care in most of the schools visited was top-down, there was a fair amount of consultation, involvement and autonomy in some schools, especially those which had well-planned and successful programmes.

Pastoral Care: How was it delivered?

Pastoral Care was delivered, among other modes, through:

- An effort on the part of tutors to establish personal contact with pupils during registration and tutorial time.
- A Pastoral Curriculum of planned tutorials, for example, Personal and Social Education or Personal Development courses. These courses were tailored to meet the specific needs of pupils and delivered through structured experiences like role play, discussion and values clarification exercises which usually followed a group format. Examples of themes forming Personal and Social Education courses were:
  - The pupil's place in the school.
  - The pastoral group as a small caring community.
  - Relationships, the self and social skills.
  - Communication skills.
  - Decision-making skills.
  - School work and study skills.
  - Academic guidance and careers.
education.
- Health and hygiene.
- Personal interests.
- The academic curriculum, for example, encouraging self-confidence and building problem solving skills during mathematics lessons.
- The hidden curriculum — teacher attitude was an essential factor in the success of pastoral systems, thus the hidden curriculum had a lot to do with whether or not pastoral care was experienced by pupils. For pastoral care to be successful, a whole-school approach needs to be taken.
- Special programmes like Induction programmes for pupils making the transition from primary to secondary schools and residential experiences to develop rapport between tutors and pupils and to teach social skills and engender camaraderie among peers.
- Special Needs programmes which catered to the needs of pupils requiring a special curriculum to maximise their potential. Alternative curricula may be developed and implemented for low achievers (eg. a modular approach, remedial lessons, etc), physically handicapped and gifted.
- “Special Interests” programmes where pupils were encouraged to take enrichment courses which interested them and sometimes led to life-long hobbies.
- A varied range of curricula, focusing on life-skills training and equality of educational opportunity.
- A comprehensive system of Careers Guidance, where it was mandatory in some schools for all pupils to take careers education courses, and participate in Work Shadowing, Work Experience and Industrial Tutor Schemes.
- A system of pupil profiling which provided a pupil with a personal record of his academic as well as non-academic abilities. A special feature of profiling was the fact that pupil profiles were drawn up through negotiations between the pupil and teacher. The pupil receives at the end of his education a Record of Achievement which would give prospective employers a detailed summary of his abilities and achievements.
- Continuing and warm relations with parents and the larger community.

Pastoral Care: What systems supported it?
To support the pastoral duties of tutors, most schools employed support teachers where these were needed, especially for Special Needs programmes. Two schools found the services of school counsellors helpful and employed them to care for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems.

An educational support team comprising an Educational Welfare Officer who checked the attendance of pupils and made home visits, if necessary; an Educational Psychologist, to whom pupils with emotional and psychological problems were referred; and a Careers Officer, employed by the Local Education Authority, serviced all schools.

Support of school programmes and activities by parents and the larger community, for example, employers, was high.

Applications for Singapore
Where Pastoral Care was seen to be effective in the 16 British schools visited, it was evident that emphasis was placed on a whole-school approach to Pastoral Care. Staff members were consulted on the planning and practice of Pastoral Care, and where this was more evident, there was a sense of ownership and thus dedication to and confidence in, the pastoral programme. In all schools, Pastoral Care was planned for, either in terms of a pastoral curriculum, being integrated within the academic curriculum or being consciously recognised within non-academic programmes, like "Special Interests". It has been recognised and emphasised in the Ministry of Education Report on Pastoral Care and Career Guidance that teacher attitude was a crucial factor influencing the success of a pastoral system.

Bearing all this in mind, it is thus proposed that Pastoral Care in Singapore be delivered...
via a whole-school approach, involving all staff with pastoral responsibilities.

This approach to Pastoral Care would necessarily involve its delivery via:

1. A Pastoral Curriculum

This would consist of a planned curriculum of activities aimed at developing and enriching a pupil in lifeskills — personal, social, educational and vocational. In introducing a pastoral curriculum, schools may want to consider the following:

- Developing a programme of structured tutorial sessions, either daily or weekly, specifically focusing on pupil needs in the personal, social and vocational realms.
- Recognising and highlighting the pastoral elements in non-academic programmes which have great potential for providing Pastoral Care, for example, Moral Education, Religious Knowledge, Physical Education, Health Education and Extra-Curricular Activities. These programmes can serve to promote Pastoral Care for pupils, for example, opportunities for personal growth abound through extra-curricular activities which can be used to build self-esteem and self-acceptance, to utilise pupil talent and interests in meaningful ways, and to involve students in service towards the school and the larger community.

2. The Academic Curriculum

It must be emphasised that there is an urgent need to consciously be aware of and recognise the pastoral potential of each academic subject area. It is imperative that attempts be made to integrate pastoral care programmes with the academic curriculum. To do this, the primary pastoral needs of our pupils have to be ascertained and ways of integration into daily lessons identified and put into practice.

3. Individual or Pastoral Casework
   (Student Counselling)

Individual casework/pastoral casework refers to the one-to-one contact with pupils with the aim of getting to know and understand them better and consequently helping them to maximise their potential. These encounters may be developmental, where tutor and pupil may be engaged in negotiation of the pupil's progress, present potential and aspirations. One-to-one encounters may also serve a remedial function, in remedial work in an academic area, or in counselling a pupil with a personal problem.

The Anglo-Chinese School Experience: One School’s Experience in Implementing Pastoral Care

In Anglo-Chinese School (ACS), Pastoral Care includes career guidance. The aims and objectives of the ACS Pastoral Care system were formulated by the school staff during the school’s Pastoral Care seminar and workshop in January 1988, and upon consultation with the Heads of Levels (Heads of Year), and Sports Secretary. The pastoral structure is a horizontal one as seen in Appendix III.

The school views the tripartite relationship amongst the academic, disciplinary and pastoral care systems as inseparable. The degree of mutual support, complementary relationship and harmony of these systems are of paramount importance to ensuring success in achieving their aims and objectives. Being a Christian school, the foundation upon which each of these systems rests, must be the principles and values as taught in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible.

The Pastoral Care system is seen to help pupils attain excellence in education and develop a truly wholesome life. The overall school philosophy fosters a caring, sharing, educated, united and God-fearing community.

---

The authors wish to acknowledge the contribution of Sr Elizabeth Than in the conceptualisation of this framework, which has been adapted from a joint paper by Sr Elizabeth Than and Ms Vitalia D'Rosario entitled, "Pastoral Care: Its Concept and Practice", presented at the Seventh Biennial Conference-Workshop of the Association of Psychological and Educational Counsellors in Asia, July 1988, in Bangkok.
Teachers are at the frontline of pastoral care in both showing care and concern as well as teaching a syllabus of personal and social education to meet the needs of the school’s stated objectives. Thus, the teacher is meant to be something of a mentor, moral educator, disciplinarian, parent figure, guardian, motivator, counselor and friend. Although a new programme, teachers have been helped through several in-house seminars and workshops. These have also been reinforced through staff meetings, inputs from Heads of Levels, circulars and informal dialogue. The pastoral objectives and programmes would be constantly reviewed in order to better match the needs of the pupils. The principal and staff are resolved that pupils should be, to the best of their conscience and knowledge, imbued with an undying passion, motivation and belief that “THE BEST IS YET TO BE”, which is the ACS school motto.

Implications for Research

Until the 1980s, little research had been carried out on Pastoral Care in the United Kingdom. Lang and Marland (1985) have commented that as a consequence to the lack of research into the thinking and practice of Pastoral Care, “it suffers from a lack of knowledge about itself and its role in the educational process; about its relationship to other caring agencies; and about the connections that could exist between schools and these agencies”.

Research into Pastoral Care in Singapore has started with the pilot schools which have just completed a review of pastoral systems set up in their schools. The review focused on each school’s pastoral aims and objectives, how the pastoral system was organised and the approach taken to plan the pastoral structure, the pastoral programmes developed and run — their strengths as well as the difficulties encountered. This review would be taken one step further when Singapore’s consultant on Pastoral Care, Peter Lang, does his own review of Pastoral Care in these schools in September, 1988. Other schools contemplating the introduction of Pastoral Care may then draw upon the experiences of each pilot school model of Pastoral Care which caters specifically to the needs of its own unique school population.

In terms of research into pupil perception of Pastoral Care and whether they perceive their needs being met, Lang and Marland (1985) stress that “The pastoral dimension of learning requires research into how personal and social development can be promoted throughout pupils’ school and classroom experience, particularly through the curriculum and through aspects of introduction to the classroom and the school.”

For Singapore, too, research into Pastoral Care must not forget the pupil — the consumer of Pastoral Care. Schools should be helped to analyse their pupils’ needs through systematic needs assessments.

Another area where research could pave the way for more effective programme development in Pastoral Care is in the area of encouraging and maintaining more effective home-school links. Lang and Marland (1985) suggest that research in this area could investigate what parents see as the responsibilities, obligations, capacities, caring styles and wishes of teachers and what teachers see as those of parents; the tensions arising from differing perceptions of responsibility and the circumstances in which families have to cope with the deficiencies of the school, and vice versa.

An analysis of a survey of pilot school teachers’ perception of their needs in terms of training to assume the pastoral aspect of their role revealed that they hoped to acquire skills in group work approaches, student-centred teaching methods, basic counselling skills, team leadership skills, needs assessment skills and individual student profiling skills. Further research into the training needs of teachers who are to exercise pastoral responsibilities could be systematically undertaken and consequently lead to better provision of training for them.

Conclusion

It is our belief that a whole-school approach to Pastoral Care is the answer to assisting learn-
ing, thus serving the goal of achieving excellence of an all-rounded kind and respect for the development of young people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX I

VERTICAL HOUSE SYSTEM

Headteacher

Deputy Headteacher

Head of House

Head of House

Head of House

Head of House

Tutors

Tutors

Tutors

Tutors

Pupils

Pupils

Pupils

Pupils

House

House

House

House

1989 SPECIAL ISSUE • 113
STAFF STRENGTH & CLASS SIZE

Total number of teaching staff . . . 99
Total number of students . . . 2,033
Average class size in Secondary One . . . 30
Average class size in Secondary Two . . . 37
Average class size in Secondary Three . . . 40
Average class size in Secondary Four . . . 40