

Reflections from the Guest Editorial Team: The Impact of COVID-19 on Preparing Future Helping Professionals and on Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, and Communities

Katherine Selber and Lynn Levy

Abstract: In this guest editorial, we introduce the first of two Special Issues on the impact of COVID-19. Our goal for this issue is to tell the stories of lived experiences, interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and the complexities educators encountered by the logistics of either reopening campuses or learning online while keeping students and faculty safe. Authors featured in this issue reveal the challenges of changing teaching modalities, focus on the realities of moving to online platforms, and offer strategies for self-care and connection in the face of isolation.

Keywords: pandemic, online teaching, isolation, connection, education

Welcome to the first of two Special Issues of *Reflections* focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on professional education and practice. Over the past two years we have experienced an unprecedented amount of turmoil, chaos, and challenges due to the effects of a world-wide pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply changed our lives and those of our families, our communities, students, clients, and our institutions. As we all experienced personal and professional challenges, we began to reflect on how these might also be affecting our educational institutions, practice agencies, and professional education in particular. Educators and practitioners have struggled to continue to support social work and other helping profession students through these times of financial hardships, loss, grief, and demands for learning how to navigate isolation, new and changing health care protocols, and public health disruptions without a map of how to do so. As we acknowledge the ever-present parallel process, this Special Issue was conceived during this maelstrom in an effort to contextualize our new reality and adapt to a new normal.

Our goal for this Special Issue was to tell the stories of lived experiences, interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and the complexities we encountered by the logistics of either reopening campuses or learning online while keeping students and faculty safe. Many of us found ourselves embracing new teaching technologies and methodologies for online education and interacting via media platforms while assisting students with virtual practice protocols. The impact of the pandemic on educators, practitioners and their clients, and the institutional cultures in which they work was felt by everyone as we navigated this new and challenging landscape. Along the way we all were required to change—in some positive ways and in some ways unexpected and perhaps unwelcomed. We remained committed to the Special Issue as our colleagues responded with manuscripts that both inspired and instructed us—all helpful in illuminating our way forward. Each of the articles in this issue is deeply personal and self-reflective and each sheds light on a time in our lives that demands chronicling and a shared commitment to try to articulate what may have left us speechless at times.

Some day we may look back on this and determine that in the process of losing our old communities and ways of teaching we actually found better, richer, and more connected ways of doing our work and leading our lives. This is the first of two Special Issues that we believe captures much of our fears, challenges, and losses as well as the camaraderie we found along the way.

This issue focuses on the challenges encountered by educators as they pushed forward on multiple platforms and, in many cases, with little to go on except the overwhelming mission of being there for students and guiding them through this new world. The landscape was changing as quickly as the weather, and we groped to hang on and find meaning and purpose in our work. Many of these articles provide valuable insight and discovery and offer us a pathway to new landscapes.

Three articles by Grape, Lane and Walters; Ames and Hall; and Leisey explore the challenges of shifting teaching modalities mid-semester and moving students and faculty to online platforms. The struggles of students and educators are notable as everyone searched for stability and some indication that life could be normal again. Livingston, Bost, Kerr, and Wilson tell the story of how an assistant professor and three MSW students adapted to online instruction amid the emotional experiences of balancing personal and professional lives. Clary and Hernandez explore the importance of self-care and strategies to promote this in the classroom for educators as well as our students while Shah's poem draws attention to the human as well as professional challenges. Radis and Deedat discuss not only the trauma imposed on us by the pandemic, but the very real trauma of racial injustices that were interwoven into the experiences of the pandemic by BIPOC populations, impacting us in the classroom and in all fields of social work practice. Authors Thurber, Suiter, and Halverson also examine theoretical lenses used to guide reflections through the pandemic and that acted as beacons along the path. Hastings and Hawkins reveal the challenges in making our way back to community as faculty members and colleagues confronted the isolation imposed by the pandemic and the sense of community that they missed.

We would like to thank all of our authors for their openness and willingness to tell their stories and reflect on their fears and feelings in real time. We also thank our guide Dr. F. Ellen Netting for demonstrating care and support to us as we pushed forward learning and experiencing much of what our authors in their manuscripts wrote about. In addition, we would be remiss if we did not mention the many reviewers who gave their time unstintingly to our special issue of manuscripts. We are deeply grateful to the following reviewers for all you have done to ensure this first of two special issues is representative of the fine work of our authors and the journal: David Conley, Jeffrey Scott Yarvis, Jill Becker, Joan Beder, Jordan Wilfong, Kelly Clary, Lara Vanderhoof, Laurie Blackman, Matt Price, Monit Cheung, and Nanette Fleischer.

Finally, we are grateful for the friendship and camaraderie that has grown between us as we collaborated on this special issue. We would never have been brought together otherwise and it has enriched both our lives.

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With Gratitude...

Again, we would like to recognize and thank the reviewers who contributed their time and invaluable assistance to *Reflections* V27(3):

Jill Becker, Joan Beder, Laurie Blackman, Monit Cheung, Kelly Clary, David Conley, Nanette Fleischer, Matt Price, Lara Vanderhoof, Jordan Wilfong, and Jeffrey Scott Yarvis.

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