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Editorial: Transitioning into calm after the COVID-19 storm: promoting holistic support to achieve positive developmental outcomes for learners in schools

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Research shows that natural disasters impact holistic development in young people, with at times, poor developmental outcomes (Masten & Osofsky, 2010). Therefore, until recently, there has been much research interest in how young people cope and develop in the context of natural disasters (Masten, 2014). The most recent coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the hard lockdown it necessitated brought about uncertainty, fear, and anxiety in communities worldwide. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on development in young people on biophysiological, academic, social, psychological, and religious levels. Learners with diverse needs were even more at risk since they typically require heightened levels of support. With this special issue we invited articles in which developmental risks and challenges experienced by education stakeholders, as well as interventions that eased transition and enhanced development in vulnerable learners/students were documented.

Several articles were received and much can be learned from each one of those that were accepted for publication. For instance, in one of the articles the inclusion of learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in early childhood care and education during the COVID-19 pandemic was explored (Mzimela, 2023). The findings of this study show that early childhood care and education teachers did not know how to teach and accommodate children with ASD during the hard lockdown. This served to further imperil their development and learning since they typically require high levels of support as learners with special educational needs. The author recommends that teachers be trained to acquire more knowledge and understanding of children with ASD during and after natural disasters. In another article the nature and quality of psychosocial support offered to orphans in rural primary schools in Lesotho during the COVID-19 pandemic was examined (Konyana & Matheolane, 2023). The findings show that the schools met the physiological needs of learners by providing them with food. Furthermore, schools made counselling accessible to learners to enable resilient coping in the context of adversity. The authors recommend that policy change be implemented in Lesotho to meet the psychosocial needs of orphans as they also have special needs.

The hard lockdown prevented access to educational support services within full-service schools (Makhalemele & Jama, 2023). These services are rendered by school-based support teams. The findings of a study in which the views of teachers serving in school-based support teams were investigated show that it was difficult for full-service schools to render adequate support to learners at risk of poor developmental outcomes. The referral procedures were disrupted and teachers did not have ways of rendering support to learners when learners were away from school. The authors make a call that interventions be crafted to help learners overcome learning and developmental backlogs.

In another study the researchers looked at how the technology, pedagogy, content, and spaces (TPeCS) knowledge framework could be used in rural secondary schools to enhance and maximise the teaching of mathematics after normal school hours (Mthethwa, 2023). The main benefit of this study is the demonstrated effectiveness of the TPeCS knowledge framework in enabling the learning of mathematics in rural secondary schools. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academics in higher education institutions in South Africa and how they coped resiliently in the context of the pandemic were explored in another study (Mestry, 2023). The findings show that academics experienced psychological distress (PD); however, they coped resiliently in the context of risk and adversity through complex combinations of personal and socioecological resilience resources. The author calls for the capacitation of academics to enable them to adapt and cope resiliently in the context of future crises.

In another study the literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on holistic development in learners worldwide was systematically reviewed (Malindi & Hay, 2023). The findings show that the lockdown restrictions had a negative impact on learners' biophysiological, psychological, social, educational and religious development. The authors call for multisystemic interventions to enhance development and resilient coping in learners. In a study in which the cognitive coping strategies that anchored teacher resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic were explored, it was found that there was a significant, positive correlation between problem-focused coping and adaptive coping or resilience (Williams, Ferreira & Botha, 2023). Coping strategies that include active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, the search for instrumental social support and developing a growth mindset were documented in this study. The study shows how personal and socioecological (social capital) resilience resources can combine in complex ways and enable adaptive coping. The results of this study inform practice and training initiatives.

In a study in which the focus was on teacher well-being, specifically, the psychosocial experiences of foundation phase teachers in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that foundation phase

teachers had acquired basic knowledge and understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic (Thilakdhari & Jairam, 2023). They were battling challenges and therefore, they needed to benefit from targeted interventions to enable them to resile in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The significance of the articles in this special issue is that they call upon policymakers and mental health practitioners to intervene meaningfully to enable learners to resile and overcome developmental backlogs, and teachers to also cope resiliently.

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