

FOREWORD II

More than two years after the first waves of the COVID-19 tsunami washed ashore around the world, humanity is still grappling with the longer-term impact of the pandemic while more immediate and tragic consequences also continue to leave their mark. Although it has paradoxically brought prosperity to some, for the majority, the pandemic has left people of all walks of life struggling, if not with the disease itself then with the fallout, the lockdowns and other measures taken to respond to this tiny virus. Particularly hard-hit—as almost always is the case—have been those in lower socio-economic strata with fewer healthcare, technological and financial resources and facilities.

As some societies begin to return to normality (or a new normal) and strive for social and economic recovery, it's apparent that overall human development has been set back many years, notably with regard to education, including moral education. But if, as is said, there is an opportunity within every crisis—and the pandemic has surely created many a crisis—then it is well worth reflecting on what has happened during the past couple of years, not only to look at underlying fault lines that have been exposed but also to see how we may correct course and co-create stronger and better societies. This book is a contribution to just that exercise as the distinguished authors of each of its chapters share their experiences, consider some of the moral issues that educators, and each of us, have been called upon to contend with and report on their analysis, research and observations of moral education and related issues in the context of the unparalleled challenges of the past two years. The book also represents an important milestone for The Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education as an embodiment of its purpose of bringing moral educators together and fostering collaborative relationships among them for the advancement of moral education and research in the region.

Unsurprisingly, the effect of isolation, lockdowns and worries on students' mental, emotional and social health and well-being loom large on the following pages. Academics, teachers and the broader adult population have experienced significantly more symptoms of anxiety and depression than previously, as typical day-to-day activities including family, social, work and academic life have all been impacted and all at the same time. Young adults have been amongst those most affected in this regard with some school and university populations reporting depression amongst well over

the majority of their students. The aftermath of this will be with us for years to come and is a pressing issue that must be given the attention that the overall well-being of our youth, and society as a whole, deserve.

And yet it is not all bad news. Moral education (whether called as such or by other names) has deep, strong and diverse roots in our region and, connected as it so surely is with the best of the human spirit and life, this book shows how resilient educators have risen to the challenge in many ways, both helping us to understand and make better sense of what has happened and pointing to some initial implications for the way ahead for moral education. In that regard, going beyond the disruptions to routines that most of us experienced in one way or another, a common theme for many during the past two years has been a reassessment of the priorities and what's most important in our lives. Health and well-being, good relationships with others and a sense of meaning or fulfilment in life are only likely to attract greater focus in the years to come and feature more prominently within moral educators' remit.

In a similar vein, it was often during the darkest days of the pandemic that we saw some of the best of the human spirit in uplifting and heart-warming outpourings of care, commitment, responsibility, love and selflessness. Carrying some of those images in our mind's eye is both reassuring and an important reminder of how essential the work of moral educators is in helping keep the light of such values shining bright and strong to the best of our ability, no matter the circumstances. Huge thanks are therefore due to all those who have contributed to this publication and the many others who continue to work in this field. Moral education could not be more important in today's world.

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