

# **Resilience and responsiveness in challenging times**

## **Editorial**

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# Resilience and responsiveness in challenging times

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*'In war, truth is the first casualty'*  
*Aeschylus -Greek tragic dramatist (525 BC - 456 BC)*

In the last editorial (November 2021), writing in the context of the challenges of our times and COVID-19, I wrote, *'Our task is to continue the legacy of discovery; to strive for the (re)gaining of freedoms and to engage -when appropriate- in ideological battles'*. Viewed from May 2022, how ironic, sad, and prophetic were these words, when, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, barely three months later, the Ukraine was invaded by Russia and a bloody war on the continent of Europe still rages. In this catastrophe, the invaders seem to have abandoned international charters and the expected mores of behaviour towards civilians and combatants. We await verification of violations that may be considered war crimes. On the other hand, we witness extraordinary resilience and responsiveness by the Ukrainian people and leaders, and their neighbours who have welcomed refugees. Hence, this edition is dedicated to the casualties of war, displaced peoples, traumatised persons in mind, body, and spirit, and to all those individuals and organisations who are trying to provide support, humanitarian aid and to be peace makers. Let us also not forget those in other theatres of conflict be it civil war, terrorism, invasion, or drug wars (for example, Afghanistan, Colombia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Myanmar, Yemen).

The qualities of resilience and responsiveness, no matter which comes first, are evident in the articles in this edition. They are discussed in the section introductions and weave their way through the articles in different guises. As educators, our challenge is to help nurture and define these qualities. As academics, we investigate their nature, enabling and inhibiting

factors and propose strategies to mitigate the circumstances that require such resilience and responsiveness. For those in the medical and human sciences, whether as researchers or practitioners, the ability to develop strategies to deal with the legacy of conflicts becomes more pressing. Indeed, we ask ourselves whether ‘resilience and responsiveness’ are qualities or competences. Analysing the Tuning generic competences,<sup>1</sup> we find these traits, albeit articulated in a different way and perhaps with a degree of complexity rather than simplicity, for example:

- The ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness
- Determination and perseverance in the tasks given and responsibilities taken
- Ability to act based on ethical reasoning
- Ability to communicate with non- experts of one’s field
- Ability to adapt to and act in new situations

Simply put, when enacted, these competences are exhibited by people who are active participants in society and are ethical, responsive, socially aware, effective communicators with experts and non- experts alike. Perhaps it is a timely moment to analyse our curricula and consider the extent to which these competences/ qualities are promoted, measured, and evaluated. Within, and between, subject areas, we require an evidence base to support pedagogical strategies that can successfully enable students to develop and demonstrate these competences and qualities from the undergraduate student to the post-doctoral graduate.

In addition, skills of advocacy blended with subject knowledge are required to raise awareness of the issues underpinning any conflict, likely future actions, and consequences. Here we draw on the expertise of those in international relations, politics, history, and other social scientists who can draw attention to the discourses and rhetoric of the conflict. As Aeschylus stated. ‘In war, truth is the first casualty’, and we see this exemplified in the Putin discourses where ‘invasion’ is ‘a special operation’ to protect people from ‘Nazi genocide’ and in some reporting of casualty figures by both sides. Academics are, and should be, in the forefront of analysing political rhetoric and data from all stakeholders and pointing out historical connections, inaccuracies, propaganda, uncertainty, ambiguities and drawing attention to powerful networks, influencers and hidden stakeholders (e.g. drug barons, arms dealers). The responsibility of the

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<sup>1</sup> “Generic Competences,” Tuning, accessed May 12, 2022, <https://unideusto.org/tuningeu/competences/generic.html>.

informed academic to be responsive and disseminate the outcomes of such analyses in a fair, balanced, timely manner is crucially important given the speed of communications and the use of various forms of social media. Similarly, persistence and resilience may be necessary when the external climate inhibits the academic discourse.

Higher Education Institutions themselves can facilitate or hinder access to education for displaced people with absent, or inadequate, documentation. Within the context of one subject area (nursing), Cassar<sup>2</sup> identified different ways through which refugees without verifiable documentation may access education and employment, these included aptitude tests, competence assessment, legislative frameworks, supervised and assessed practice, and the use of subject area benchmarks like Tuning competences that, she argued, can provide reference points from which individual assessments can be made. The evidence base in this domain is weak, and many subject areas at local, national, or international level have not developed robust and rigorous strategies to implement practises like accreditation of prior learning, aptitude tests, simulations, supervised academic practice and portfolio evaluation. Hence, the ability of the HEI to be responsive to the needs of displaced students and staff is to some extent dependent upon their existing policies and expertise in these forms of assessment and evaluation. In addition, resources and expertise are needed to provide the socio-emotional and economic support required by students newly arrived from conflict zones.

In the face of adversity or challenge, irrespective of cause, resilience and responsiveness are key qualities and competences required by individual students, staff, departments, institutions, and nation states. The Journal welcomes evidence-based articles from a policy and pedagogic perspective on mechanisms that (1) help students and staff develop resilience and responsiveness; (2) enable the receiving HEI and/or subject area to be responsive in these crisis situations; and (3) international strategies to support HEIs who are continuing to operate within, or adjacent to, conflict zones.

Finally, we extend our deep appreciation and respect to our academic colleagues in areas of conflict for *their* perseverance and responsiveness as they endeavour to support their students, colleagues, and communities. We hope that by the next edition of the Journal, there may be a more positive

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Cassar, "Using the Internationally Recognized Frameworks of Nursing Competences to Address the Challenges of Nurse Refugees without Documentation," *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (November 2020): 53-73, [https://doi.org/10.18543/tjhe-8\(1\)-2020pp53-73](https://doi.org/10.18543/tjhe-8(1)-2020pp53-73).

situation in the Ukraine. Similar to the aftermath of the acute phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, our thoughts would then lead inevitably to the next 'Rs' - the themes of 'Recovery, Rehabilitation and Renaissance'.

Meanwhile, please stay well.

*Editorial Team*  
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