Article

The Journey to G.R.A.C.E: Creating an International Community of Practice

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Abstract: Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (G.R.A.C.E) is a unique Community of Practice (CoP). The CoP methodology was applied within G.R.A.C.E for its capacity to connect multidisciplinary and international academics and practitioners within Catholic Education. This paper presents key insights gathered from the G.R.A.C.E steering committee regarding their perspectives on the journey of initiating this unique CoP. A small qualitative research project framed within a phenomenological interpretivist theoretical perspective was employed to ascertain the participants' hopes, experiences, impact as well as challenges and opportunities. A Qualtrics questionnaire was the selected data collection method. Findings suggest that the experience of G.R.A.C.E has been a positive one, affirming the CoP methodology adopted was effective in ensuring the hopes that members held for the CoP were actualised. Challenges and opportunities identified in the findings provide insight into the future direction of this truly global initiative.

Keywords: Community of Practice; Virtual Community of Practice; Catholic education; Catholic research

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the impetus for, and journey toward, establishing Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (G.R.A.C.E). G.R.A.C.E is an emerging international and multidisciplinary Community of Practice (CoP). Initiated in 2017, G.R.A.C.E continues to bring together established and emerging researchers, academics and practitioners across Catholic education internationally. CoPs cultivate the sharing of knowledge, expertise, practice and advice to facilitate deeper thinking, meaning-making and the creation of new understandings (Wenger et al. 2002). CoPs are formed through a process of shared interest whereby members agree to support each other as a defined network that facilitates knowledge transfer and support (McLoughlin et al. 2018); G.R.A.C.E is such a network. The motivation for establishing G.R.A.C.E as an international CoP is described in this paper as situated within the context of Catholic education and the emergence of a pandemic. The global pandemic (COVID) forced G.R.A.C.E to transition to a more virtual application of the CoP than had been originally intended. The voices of the G.R.A.C.E steering committee are presented in this paper through a small qualitative investigation to illustrate the intentions, experiences and visions of the CoP as it transpired.

2. Background and Context

Current Situation

The founding members of G.R.A.C.E understood that secularisation, as a defining characteristic of modern society, has much to recommend it, however, they were keenly aware of the effects of secularism (as distinct from secularisation) which seeks the removal of religion from the public sphere and its confinement to the private, personal and recreational dimension of one's life (Casanova 1994; Habermas 2006). In their respective countries, they

experienced unbelief as the new norm for a growing number of people and the world was no longer an 'enchanted' place (Taylor 2007). The relevance of Catholic education to life, society, and the global community was now being readily questioned. For many, belief in God had little to say to a search for meaning, purpose and value, and such a belief did not seem to offer a credible vision for an authentic way of life in a globalised and pluralistic world. In this context, there was a growing sense that education was seen as simply a rational endeavour, a preparation for the 'market economy', providing individuals with the necessary skills and aptitudes to contribute meaningfully in it. This, however, as Pope Benedict XVI said, reflects not only a truncated and diminished understanding of education but also of humanity itself (Pope Benedict XVI 2010).

Such a context provided serious challenges to Catholic education. The taken for granted belief in the benefits of a faith-based approach to education was under fire from a number of sources. In some countries, the state sought to neutralise the religious identity of Catholic schools, Catholic education was often portrayed in public discourse as indoctrinatory and exclusive and under resourced from within the Catholic community itself, along with the state. There was also an ongoing need to work with school staff to deepen their understanding, appreciation and implementation of Catholic ethos on a day to day basis in this new reality.

The G.R.A.C.E project sought to respond to these trends. It stands with Pope Francis when he said, at the launch of the Global Compact on Education (October 2020), "Today we are called to have the necessary *parrhesía* [courage] to leave behind superficial approaches to education and the shortcuts associated with utility". It is only by so doing that Catholic education will be equal to the task of challenging so much that threatens our shared life: ecological disaster, a lack of global and local empathy, a growing coarseness in public discourse, a diminishment of responsibility and a shortage of imagination for an alternative future.

Pope Francis (2014) believes that Catholic education ought to 'foster three languages that a mature person should know how to express: the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands'. This is what G.R.A.C.E is designed to do. It seeks to influence these three domains in the field of Catholic education: (1) cognitive—the theoretical and conceptual base of Catholic education; (2) affective—the formative qualities and experiences that shape the Catholic educator and scholar; (3) behavioural—the adoption of new understandings which influence the practice of being a Catholic educator and scholar in promoting social justice, while enhancing one's capacity to foster a 'culture of dialogue' towards a global common good.

The cognitive domain is strengthened, in part, through the G.R.A.C.E community's persistent, critical and constructive engagement with points of tension in the provision of Catholic education, its commitment to ecumenical and interfaith collaboration, and its conviction for stronger, more persuasive arguments for the place of Catholic education in the public sphere. The product of these efforts will be shared in multiple ways, including peer reviewed journal articles, graduate coursework, teacher and head-teacher preparation and professional programs, and, in time, an international handbook on Catholic education.

G.R.A.C.E affects the formation of the educator and scholar, honouring the central role of Christian faith in their life and the contribution that Christian faith can make to the common good. Members will be encouraged to reflect on their spirituality and their work in integrated ways, to attune their abilities to notice and respond to the presence of grace in the world, and strengthen their ability to witness to the beauty, energy, and attractiveness of Christian faith, especially in educational settings. The members of G.R.A.C.E, formed in this way, will demonstrate a meaningful integration of scholarship and faith to the field of Catholic education.

G.R.A.C.E contributes to the behavioural domain of the field of Catholic education by introducing new theories and structures to influence practice. Collaborative research, joint production of articles, and building relationships across the community network will expand members' capacity for strategic action with the state and other agencies, foster the

promotion of social justice in the public arena, and prepare a pipeline of leaders, ready and responsible for Catholic education for the 21st century.

3. Framing Our Vision: The Emergence of G.R.A.C.E

At the time of this research, the G.R.A.C.E steering committee comprised two or three members across four tertiary institutions and one Catholic organisation, collectively spanning five countries. A key task identified by the group was to establish a terms of reference and vision statement that would define the purpose and aims of G.R.A.C.E for both the steering committee and future participants. In drawing on the words of Pope Francis (2014), it was clear that a focus on Catholic education through the development of the head (Catholicity, education, religious education, theology), heart (spirituality, formation, faith) and hands (service learning, social justice, engagement and outreach) would frame the purpose and aims of G.R.A.C.E. The following four aims were agreed to by the steering committee:

1. Seek a deeper study of ecclesiology and Christian anthropology and its significance for Catholic education
2. Pursue new theories of Catholic education based on empirical research
3. Strengthen a global argument for the importance of faith-based schools in a plural society
4. Attune educators' abilities to notice, engage, and celebrate the presence of God's grace in the world

The G.R.A.C.E partnership promotes research and learning to develop the head, heart, and hands of Catholic education.

A key consideration for the steering committee was that, unlike other Catholic networking groups that exist, G.R.A.C.E was to be a unique initiative that cultivated a multidisciplinary and truly global community that brought together emerging and established scholars and practitioners. This vision for G.R.A.C.E aligned with a Community of Practice methodology which has continued to guide the initiatives led by the G.R.A.C.E steering committee.

3.1. A Distinct Approach: Communities of Practice

A CoP methodology is well established and literature emphasises the success of this method in sharing expertise in a social context (Fung-Kee-Fung et al. 2014). Literature on CoPs and the various typologies that exist is diverse, resulting in some ambiguity in understanding the term (Cox 2005). This ambiguity stems from the multidisciplinary approach that a CoP seeks, thus research into how CoPs are structured and applied has also varied across disciplines (Cox 2005). Ryan (2015) suggests there to be four distinct and somewhat contradictory versions of CoPs in existing literature; CoPs to support collegiality; CoPs as a frame for reflection; CoPs as a means of formation in the higher education sector; and CoPs as a heuristic for understanding learning. Of these CoP versions, the latter is well regarded for its focus on knowledge transfer and as such, was adopted within G.R.A.C.E.

CoPs are premised on promoting collaboration and sharing knowledge across a variety of fields, professions or interests (Yarris et al. 2019). CoPs seek to attract groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion for a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in an area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al. 2002). Through this regular interaction within a CoP "participation is supported by other members of the community of practice and previous knowledge and experience is passed between 'old timers' and 'newcomers'" (Montgomery and McDowell 2009, p. 463). Participation in a CoP recognises that knowledge and knowledge sharing are social processes, reliant on the discourse that occurs between members (Ryan 2015). Individuals engage in discourse to share knowledge, reflect on learnings and to make meaning that translates across various fields or disciplines (Wenger 1999).

Existing research warns the CoP construct is not to be confused with other pedagogical approaches for learning or knowledge sharing. Wenger (1999) suggests that the way in

which discourse is applied within CoPs is distinct from other collaborative approaches in that its focus is on meaning making for practice; "practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do what they do" (p. 73). Of significance, Wenger (1999) outlines the key characteristics of a CoP as collective negotiation, accountability and mutual engagement which result in participatory value (Ryan 2015).

The use of virtual CoPs is an emerging area of research (Yarris et al. 2019). The global pandemic in 2019 (COVID) had largely been the impetus for the transition to virtual, rather than in-person CoPs and this also necessitated the need for G.R.A.C.E to adapt to CoPs online. Virtual CoPs utilise technology as the platform for engagement and participation (Yarris et al. 2019). Virtual CoPs are described as being full of tensions and challenges (García-Monge et al. 2018). In particular, the virtual platform facilitates periphery participants, that is, members who observe others participating rather than actively engaging in the community for themselves. García-Monge et al. (2018) suggest that periphery participants may not feel that they belong or may be challenged to engage actively due to feelings of insecurities. Considerations and attempts to overcome these tensions and challenges can be achieved by promoting the benefits of participation, such as greater esteem, increased recognition or satisfaction (Orhun and Hopple 2010) to cultivate a community of contributors. Benefits of virtual CoPs have also emerged. Thoma et al. (2018) propose the move toward technology-based platforms for CoPs has led to broader, more diverse CoPs where innovation is fostered, more robust scholarship is entered into and the sharing of knowledge is increased.

3.2. Enacting Our Vision

In utilising a CoP methodology, the G.R.A.C.E steering committee intended to host gatherings biannually on a rotational basis at each of the institutions represented in the committee. In addition, the G.R.A.C.E vision was to be enacted through reaching out to the global south and other nations yet to be represented as participants of G.R.A.C.E; to create opportunities for collaboration, discussion and the transfer of knowledge; and to facilitate sharing particularly between emerging and established scholars and practitioners. As consultation and planning commenced for the first of the intended gatherings, the global pandemic (COVID) took hold and this required flexibility and adaptability by the steering committee. Virtual CoPs was the approach taken by the steering committee from the outset, as was necessitated by the international membership. However, this was now also the approach taken for the various activities and opportunities provided by each of the institutions/organisations. Subsequently the following opportunities, as examples, were developed in place of physical gatherings; an international monthly lecture series, an outreach to Africa for a specific lecture series, localised CoPs based on various topics within Catholic education and where possible, smaller physical gatherings.

During this period of adapting to a changing world, the G.R.A.C.E steering committee continued to meet as a CoP and were steadfast in ensuring the vision and aims of G.R.A.C.E remained at the forefront of all initiatives. The desire to meet for a physical international gathering when feasible remained the goal.

4. Research Design

This paper presents research undertaken with the G.R.A.C.E steering committee as a unique CoP. A qualitative approach was an appropriate fit for this research given the discursive nature of a CoP. Qualitative research is based on gathering narrative accounts, or perspectives, thus providing an opportunity for the voice and experiences of participants to emerge (Stringer 2008). A qualitative approach seeks to identify and understand data which can produce new knowledge (Braun and Clarke 2013). The new knowledge this research sought to uncover was the perspectives of the G.R.A.C.E steering committee members on their journey in establishing G.R.A.C.E. As such, the research also sought the steering committee members' perspectives of participating in an international CoP.

Within the qualitative approach, a phenomenological theoretical framework with an interpretivist paradigm guided the research. The interpretivist paradigm is a method of positioning the researcher to provide a framework that will guide the research (Neuman 2009). Within this paradigm the intent of the researcher is to gain a deep insight by pursuing the participants' views of the social phenomena by applying simple data collection methods such as surveys (Creswell 2018). This approach placed significance on interpreting and understanding meaningful social interactions and the understanding of everyday lived experiences from the perspective of the steering committee. Phenomenology was the applied theoretical framework. Phenomenology is a perspective that investigates the individual aspects of human experiences, furthermore it is a method of understanding how individuals perceive meaning through their life experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Stringer 2008). This theoretical perspective was applicable to this research as the steering committee members responded to the questionnaire based on how they derived meaning from their participation in G.R.A.C.E. This is particularly significant as the participants represented numerous international institutions.

4.1. Participants

Purposive sampling was applied to select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling is selecting participants on the basis of which will be most appropriate to the study (Babbie 2016). In this research, as there were a limited number of members of the G.R.A.C.E steering committee, all members were invited to participate. At the time of the research, the committee consisted of twelve members that represented four tertiary institutions and one Catholic organisation across five countries. Two of the researchers who were also members of the steering committee did not participate in the survey to limit bias. There were nine members of the steering committee that completed the survey. The participants who provided consent and participated in the research were a mix of male and female academics ranging in age from 40–65 years.

4.2. Methods of Data Collection

A qualitative Qualtrics questionnaire was the tool for data collection. Online questionnaire is an established qualitative tool and is effective in gathering responses from individuals (Babbie 2016). Questionnaires are explicitly designed to extract information that will be useful for analysis and they can be administered in a number of ways (Babbie 2016). The questionnaire employed in this research asked participants ten open-ended questions. The participants were provided with an opportunity to write extended answers to facilitate a deep understanding of their experiences as members of the steering committee (Creswell 2018). As an example, the following questions were asked to elicit detailed and extended responses and encourage participants to provide their perspectives on their journeys within G.R.A.C.E:

- When you joined the G.R.A.C.E steering committee, what did you anticipate G.R.A.C.E would be?
- What do you consider to have been the benefits of G.R.A.C.E both to the Steering Committee and to the participants within G.R.A.C.E?
- What do you consider the greatest challenge is for G.R.A.C.E moving forward?

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval to undertake this research was obtained through the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia (Number: 2022-103F). Participant consent was obtained in the first questionnaire question. If participants consented, they were taken into question two of the Qualtrics, and, if not, they were exited from the questionnaire. All ethical standards were upheld in conducting this research. The researchers who also resided as members of the steering committee did not partake in the questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality of participants, questionnaire responses

were returned anonymously and any identifying information was removed during the analysis process.

4.4. Limitations

This research is limited by investigating only the voices of the steering committee participants of G.R.A.C.E. As such, it presents one perspective of the CoP methodology as applied to this international network. Further research will address this limitation by seeking the perspectives and experiences of the members within the various CoPs that have emerged within G.R.A.C.E as the network continues to grow.

5. Analysis

Qualitative data from the questionnaires were analysed and explored for common themes which are presented as findings within this paper. When analysing these data, this project adhered to the framework and guidelines offered by Miles et al. (2019). This framework assisted the researchers in identifying connections among social phenomena, based on the similarities and differences that connected these phenomena. In this research, the phenomena refer to the steering committee members' journey in G.R.A.C.E. The analysis approach comprised four main components: data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. This process allowed the researchers to reduce the data into themes by applying codes, and subsequently to determine conclusions (Creswell 2018) as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The application of the analysis framework to the research.

Data Collection	Data Reduction	Data Display	Drawing Conclusions
Data were collected via a Qualtrics questionnaire. Responses were returned anonymously.	The data were analysed by assigning codes to common topics across questionnaires.	The data were displayed through 'extended text' and organised to provide analysis of common themes in connection to the literature.	The researchers identified patterns and final conclusions emerged, presented as the findings.

The data reduction phase of analysis occurred for each of the four types of questions included in the questionnaire. The ten questions were grouped into four categories, namely; aspirations, experiences, impact and hopes and challenges. Table 2 presents an example of the raw data and the initial codes that emerged for question three in the questionnaire.

Table 2. Example of coding undertaken in the analysis.

Question Category	Question	Participant Response	Codes Applied
Experiences	Describe your experience of the G.R.A.C.E Initiative, from the perspective of your role on the Steering Committee	energising, creative, mutually enriching, aware of the challenge of holding it all together pilgrimage . . . affirmation, concrete programme, webinar outcomes, credibility of Cath Ed	Complex Positive Positive Multi-dimensional

6. Findings: Participant Perspectives

Participant responses are presented in this section in relation to the four types of questions that comprised the ten items in the questionnaire. Examples of the types of responses provided by the participants are presented (as opposed to all of the raw data). As aforementioned, the four types of questions that comprised the questionnaire were; aspirations, experiences, impact, hopes and challenges.

6.1. Aspiration of the Participants

In response to questions about their original hopes and intentions for G.R.A.C.E when it was initiated, participants responded with the following statements:

a network for mutual support and collaboration balancing and uniting head, heart and hands.

I envisaged knowing more about best practices in Catholic education around the world.

I thought GRACE would be a community of researchers who would find ways to disseminate their research ideas and convene panels/conversations about future research directions.

Overall, the voice of the participants is articulated in the following response;

An opportunity to exchange and collaborate on research and practice with a global community committed to sustaining and strengthening Catholic schools . . . including with an emphasis on the global south

6.2. Experience of G.R.A.C.E

The following responses were gathered when participants were asked about their experience of being a part of the G.R.A.C.E CoP:

energising, creative, mutually enriching, aware of the challenge of holding it all together

. . . has allowed me insight into the way the key partners in the GRACE community think through events, planning, and logistics. The group is very collaborative and friendly. We have made progress on activities we have implemented in our countries and/or as a collective.

Pilgrimage . . . affirmation, concrete programme, webinar outcomes, credibility of Cath Ed

My journey of GRACE has been defined by learning about the work of senior colleagues who share my research interests and learning about what it is that can be done when developing a research agenda in Catholic education/Catholic schooling.

To have the opportunity to connect w/other Catholic researchers at institutions across the globe has been simply this- a grace!

From small beginnings to the inspiring meeting with Pope Francis and the adoption of a strategic plan, I hope that G.R.A.C.E. will fulfill its potential to contribute to research and capacity building on Catholic education within the framework of the Global Compact on Education

6.3. Impact of G.R.A.C.E in Their Lives

The way in which G.R.A.C.E had impacted the participants' personal or professional life was gathered through the following responses:

Working with the steering committee has been terrific in developing my research . . .

It's been reaffirmed to me how doing work in Catholic education research need not be just a within-nation conversation.

Expanding my professional network and understanding of Catholic schools in other countries, specifically Australia, Ireland, and England.

Energising, creative, mutually enriching, aware of the challenge of holding it all together

I firmly believe G.R.A.C.E. offers a wealth of resources for practicing true Catholic education.

To the steering committee, it provided an organisational space to allow the partner universities to work together with regular communication. To participants in the broader GRACE community, the work the steering committee did allowed there to be events/sessions.

Opportunities to learn from colleagues across the globe, broadening our network and potential to collaborate on research and practice.

The webinars are of immense benefit to the learning experience

6.4. Hopes and Challenges for the Future of G.R.A.C.E

Participants were asked about their perceived challenges as well as their future hopes for G.R.A.C.E. The following responses illustrate the participants' perspectives:

I think our institutions are at different places when it comes to engaging and interacting with Catholic educators in our countries. We also have had to

shift the overarching goal from meeting in person to virtually, and the funds that are necessary for us to be able to engage in person may limit in person engagement.

It seems to me that the steering committee needs a more concrete/actionable purpose than just planning the convenings. Articulating the long term vision and granular details of operation appeared as the big challenge.

The Steering committee is working well—the question given the limited resources of the partners is to try to find the best ways to make a difference.

Do small but important things well

I look forward to seeing G.R.A.C.E. become the succor for Catholic teacher and leadership training, especially in developing countries where the cost of formal education is a setback for Catholic educator development.

The key for the next few years will be to assess what niche G.R.A.C.E could find so that its contribution to the international Catholic education community is optimized. I hope that it becomes one of the key collaboratives for research and capacity building on Catholic education globally.

I would love to continue being a part of Catholic Ed research conversations across nations. GRACE does this really well!

I hope we will be able to conduct more collaborative research, and we will have a clear collaborative system for how we conduct virtual lectures or inperson opportunities should that surface.

I hope that it becomes one of the key collaboratives for research and capacity building on Catholic education globally, and if we open membership to additional universities, my impression is that the priority should be to have universities in the Global South join the current group

7. Discussion

The G.R.A.C.E steering committee articulated in their responses a positive and collaborative experience of the journey so far, as well as an optimism and continued enthusiasm for the journey ahead. The CoP methodology was applied in a nuanced way, employing key features that emanated with the requirements and the vision held by the steering committee. The findings from this investigation contribute key insights into G.R.A.C.E as a unique CoP. and these are discussed within three emergent themes in connection with existing literature.

7.1. The Realisation of Our Aspirations

In the findings, participants contributed their vision for G.R.A.C.E and their desires to develop a truly global network within Catholic Education. The initial vision held by participants transpired, despite the challenges of time, location and a pandemic. It was evident from the participants' responses that progress had been made toward our shared goals (Wenger et al. 2002). Participants also articulated benefits they themselves had experienced or they perceived members within G.R.A.C.E had experienced. A focus on

the collaborative nature of the steering committee members and sustained enthusiasm to continue with the original vision for G.R.A.C.E was noted specifically. Key features of the G.R.A.C.E steering committee CoP that align with those in existing literature are its focus on supporting collegiality, reflection and knowledge transfer (Ryan 2015). To realise the aspirations of G.R.A.C.E, the CoP relied on commitment from its members and a focus on learning from each other across a range of contexts (Yarris et al. 2019). Wenger et al. (2002) suggest that for a CoP to be effective it must first seek to attract a group of members that share a concern or a passion. The G.R.A.C.E steering committee employed key features of what is described as an effective CoP, evidenced by its ability to bring together a multidisciplinary and international group successful in transforming hopes into action.

7.2. A Complex Journey

The complexities of gathering an international group of Catholic educators and researchers were made evident in the findings. Catholic education globally strives to draw people together despite their differences, seeking to realise a familiar humanism (Pope Francis 2014) and as such, the tensions experienced by the G.R.A.C.E CoP are not unique. A key insight gained from the findings pertained to the participants' expression of challenges "of holding it all together" and in "articulating the long-term vision and granular details of operation". These types of challenges are not unexpected given the diversity of the CoP and that is why collective negotiation, accountability and mutual engagement are central features of the CoP (Wenger 1999). Furthermore, participants articulated the move from planning in-person CoPs to virtual CoPs as a significant challenge faced by G.R.A.C.E. Virtual CoPs are an established method, acknowledged as being difficult in existing literature (García-Monge et al. 2018). However, for the steering committee CoP, many of the tensions suggested in the literature, such as participants taking a passive presence or feeling insecure about contributing, were not noted in the findings. Rather, the complexities experienced by the participants were framed in terms of maintaining a virtual CoP in the midst of the pandemic and with the challenge of re-orientating the G.R.A.C.E gatherings to virtual opportunities.

7.3. From Small Things, Big Things Can Grow!

The findings from this research are clear in illustrating the journey of G.R.A.C.E from an 'idea' to an established international network, hence the emergent theme that from small things, big things can grow. Despite the complexities articulated by the participants, great things have been achieved. Of significance for the participants were the lecture series, webinars and localised events which were sustained through the regular interaction between the CoP, which is key to this social process (Ryan 2015). Participants also contributed their continued passion to G.R.A.C.E becoming a forum to share knowledge through professional learning, and with a particular focus on countries where Catholic education is costly or difficult to access. Consequently, the original vision to reach out to the global south continues to be incorporated within the G.R.A.C.E mission. One participant stated their "hope that it becomes one of the key collaboratives for research and capacity building on Catholic education globally". Collaborative research across the members of the CoP integrates with the focus on bringing together the 'old timers' with the 'newcomers' (Montgomery and McDowell 2009) and therefore this paper contributes valuable insight into the way in which features of a CoP methodology can achieve this.

8. Conclusions

The findings and discussion presented in this paper build on existing research that supports the benefits of applying a CoP methodology, whether in person or virtually (Mavri et al. 2019; McLoughlin et al. 2018). The adaptability of the G.R.A.C.E steering committee, their innovation in times of the pandemic and their strong drive to develop and share knowledge and practice align with the key features of an effective CoP approach. These

strengths of G.R.A.C.E have led to a truly global network of academics, researchers and practitioners within Catholic education. G.R.A.C.E has achieved much amidst the pandemic and placed itself at the forefront of Catholic education internationally. The findings from steering committee data not only contribute the aforementioned opportunities, but they also suggest challenges that will require addressing.

Challenges Ahead

The perceived challenges of the steering committee are twofold, developing a strategic direction and establishing a global presence. Firstly, during the pandemic the steering committee were faced with the challenge of redefining their strategic direction to ensure that G.R.A.C.E would not only survive but thrive. The original aim of G.R.A.C.E was to provide a platform for established and emerging researchers, academics and practitioners in Catholic education internationally to come together at a G.R.A.C.E gathering. As this was no longer a viable option for the duration of the pandemic, the steering committee altered their direction by continuing the work of G.R.A.C.E through the virtual international lecture series. The steering committee have faced this challenge and are now able to return to the original aim of G.R.A.C.E which is an in person gathering with the international community of researchers and practitioners. The strategic direction of G.R.A.C.E is assured as it focuses on expanding its network and drawing together the emerging with the established scholars within Catholic education. Secondly, establishing a global presence continues to be a focus of the committee. Global relationships have been developed between the steering committee members and their institutions. Furthermore, global relationships have been initiated with nations in the global south, addressing one of the strategic aims of the steering committee from its inception.

To conclude with the words of Pope Francis (2022), G.R.A.C.E seeks to address the "tension between risk and security . . . in harmony to the point of thinking what I feel and do; feeling what I think and do; of doing what I feel and think. It's a balance". The research presented in this paper suggests the CoP methodology to be appropriate for the G.R.A.C.E steering committee and has contributed to existing research by explicating the journey of G.R.A.C.E. The G.R.A.C.E steering committee continues to work toward its strategic aims of addressing the challenges and the trends of our time within a uniquely global network of Catholic scholars and practitioners.

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