



Leadership for Change in Teacher Education: Voices of Canadian Deans of Education

Elliot-Johns, Susan E., ed.
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Book Review

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This book contains fourteen essays written by deans of teacher education programs in Canada who are leading change initiatives in the midst of turbulent times in North-American post-secondary education. The book examines reforms in programs designed to prepare effective teachers of the future and address the challenges that deans face in leading these initiatives.

A number of the essays emphasize the need for attention to diversity in teacher preparation programs. Although one essay describes diversity in language acquisition programs (25-30), more frequently authors emphasize the need to add Indigenous perspectives to curricula. One chapter examines a program designed to increase the numbers of Indigenous teachers and the awareness of Indigenous culture among non-Native students in teacher training programs, but also raises more fundamental questions about the ways that hegemonic discourses about ethnicity and gender are reproduced in education systems at large (7-12). Another chapter discusses the way that teacher education reforms need to come to grips with white privilege and racism: “Beyond ‘content’ we ask students to ask ‘what is knowledge, how is it privileged, and who does it benefit and why?’” (75). On a different front, one dean grapples with the need to add instructional technology amidst financial constraints (43-48), though another chapter promotes advances in technology use: “relational technology” for building effective bonds between teachers and learners; “cultural technology” which help students overcome the “ethnocentric monoculturalism” of education in the West; and “assessment technologies” that measure student engagement, learning attitudes, and learning strategies (55-60).

Other essays focus on the dean’s role in leading effective change. One chapter describes deans as middle managers who walk a tightrope between university executives on the one hand and faculty on the other, in a context where key external constituents doubt that faculty can be

trusted to change on their own initiative (61-66). Lack of good decanal leadership negatively affects faculty productivity and damages organization culture, while rapid turnover at this level is associated with increased faculty cynicism about change (31-32). Several authors note the importance of collaborative, democratic decision-making in building a common vision for reform.

Some of the strategies described include restructuring departments and committees to maximize faculty participation in decision-making; appointing a faculty steering committee in order to foster widespread engagement; and maximizing faculty choice and autonomy by choosing to change an area that faculty either identify as needing reform or is widely perceived as non-threatening. One author stresses the need to establish a good case for change and the timing of the change (88), while another emphasizes collaborative scanning of the environment (34), a practice identified elsewhere as a crucial factor in building an agile organizational culture. The dean of a faith-based teacher education program advises deans to nurture the quality of their inner life during seasons of change by practicing mindfulness, humility, stillness and attentiveness, and a reorienting gratitude that focuses on abundance versus scarcity (37-42).

According to these deans, greater attention to diversity in curricula, relationship-centered pedagogies, and participative, collaborative faculty-led decision-making are the mainstays of successful innovation in teacher education programs. My own experience in leading a large-scale change initiative in a seminary suggests that these same ingredients can be successfully applied in other educational contexts.

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