

Review Essay
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***Transforming teacher education: lessons in professional development.* Edited by Hugh T. Sockett, Elizabeth K DeMulder, Pamela C. LePage & Diane R. Wood. Published by Bergin & Garvey, Westport, Connecticut, USA (2001).**

From Eagles in Flight to Academic Road Kill
Michael Kompf

The Context

I met Hugh Sockett in 1993. He chaired a session I presented with two colleagues at the second International Conference on Teacher Research hosted at the University of Georgia, USA. I had the pleasure of attending several conversations where his early work was presented describing the principles and programs of the groundwork for the information presented in this book. These matters were illustrated and discussed in tentative and hopeful terms that focused on student-centred learning ensured through a collaborative consultative approach designed to meet individual needs and the associated educational needs of each's community. On a few occasions since that meeting in 1993, I have encountered Hugh at conferences and exchanged hurried greetings about largely inconsequential matters. His program and ideas remained in the back of my mind as dusty curiosities usually recalled a day or two later meritling only a fleeting mental question: "whatever happened to that interesting program"?

My early impression of Hugh Sockett and the students with whom he felt privileged to work remains. He is a thoughtful, patient and incisive thinker as well as a gracious and polite individual. His writing and conviction shows that he is also a passionate advocate of the higher road and unafraid of the minions and structures of power. He treated his students as colleagues and sought goodness in their ideas, building the confidence that allowed them to find an authentic voice and extract from higher education those learnings of greatest personal and professional value. While it might seem odd to start a review essay with personal and professional information about the lead editor, this volume is as much about Hugh Sockett's championship and vision as it is the discussion of an innovative program of learning and teaching. While it might also seem odd in an academic book, the final chapter has a Hitchcock-like twist that causes at least two reads and a scurrying return to reread the entire volume.

This book details a remarkable series of innovations in gifted but ill-fated program development that teaches and reaches out through a Master of Education program rooted in moral professionalism delivered through the Institute for Educational Transformation (IET) at George Mason University's (GMU). That the program did work well is evidenced by the articulate and compelling accounts by participants included in this book. Their ideas and style reflect studies and growth though learning in an environment of scholarship and forward thinking. The idea of community-based learning permeates the philosophy and delivery of this innovative Master of Education program

and its relevance is demonstrated by the 166 locations offered as of December 2001 and the 175 references on GMU's website (as of August 2002). The program description offered on the site consists of the following:

IET's Mission

Located within George Mason University's Graduate School of Education Initiatives in Educational Transformation (IET) strives to integrate teaching, scholarship, and civic service through the formation of learning communities. We intend to bring together citizens, scholars, teachers, business and other professionals to examine and to effect the transformation and systemic reorganization of educational institutions and practices. Grounded in teamwork, we seek to foster continuous improvement and critical reflection about the moral, civic, professional and technological bases of teaching and learning.

The Distinctiveness

The distinctiveness implied in the mission can be expressed under four main headings: Transformation and Reform; Partnership and Governance; Interdisciplinarity; and Moral and Technical Purposes

The Priorities

The mission we have articulated and the four distinctive characteristics of our work provide a basis for grouping our work into three sectors: Teachers, Children and Schools; Families and Communities, and University Transformation

The Text

This book consists of fourteen chapters presented in four parts each consisting of three chapters. Following a succinct foreword by David Hansen, the Preface holds two introductory chapters: "Transforming teacher education" (Hugh Sockett) and "From educational rhetoric to program reality" (Hugh Sockett and Pamela LePage).

Part I - Curriculum and Pedagogy consists of Chapter Three "Teacher as citizen: professional development and democratic responsibility" contributed by Diane R. Wood; Chapter Four "Talking to learn: a pedagogy both obvious and obscure", by Ann Sevcik and Chapter Five "Teachers in school-based teams: contesting isolation in schools" by Sharon J. Gerow.

Part II – Improving Children's Learning includes Chapter Six "Complexity in morally grounded practice" by Elizabeth K. DeMulder, Ann Cricchi and Hugh Sockett; Chapter Seven "Through the eyes of the child" by Rita E. Goss and Kristin S. Stapor and Chapter Eight "Illuminating knowledge: three modes of inquiry: by Deborah Barnard and Deborah Courter-Folly.

Part III – Diversity and Dialogue has Chapter Nine "Culture clash: teacher and student identities and the procession towards freedom" by Mark Hicks, Chapter Ten "No more 'making nice'" by Donna V. Schmidt, Renee Sharp and Tracey Stephens and Chapter Eleven "Towards a common goal: teachers and immigrant families in dialogue" by Elizabeth K. DeMulder and Leo Rigsby.

Part IV – Framing Professional Critique concludes the book with Chapter Twelve “Sustaining the moral framework: tensions and opportunities for faculty” by Pamela C. LePage, Chapter Thirteen “The standards of learning: one teacher’s journey through state-mandated curriculum” by Margaret Kaminsky and Chapter Fourteen “Leading a transformative innovation: the acceptance of despair” by Hugh Sockett

Successful innovative program development and delivery are rare facets of academic life accompanied by risk-taking, adventure and accomplishment for the developers and participants. The process of learning has a profound effect on the content, output and future of all engaged in the learning exchange. The ideals conveyed through the guiding philosophy and vision of this program express insights and perspectives capable of not only prompting learners to re-view and re-search the essence of teaching and learning, but provides them a view that can penetrate the culture of teacher learning in a university context. Otto Von Bismarck’s declaration of politics and sausages (that he enjoyed both but did not like to see either made) readily applies to higher education institutions. Most often pretty sights are not beheld especially when the machine behind the mask of propriety and public relations reveals university administration to be rife with moral flaccidity and functioning under a decaying, whimsical, and idiosyncratic grasp of principle, purpose, ethics and fair play. Harsh words these may be, but they are warranted and well illustrated by Sockett’s experiences and echoed by a growing body of princely academic programs turned into frogs.

The text and chapters this book contains confirmation of success through the contributions of scholars produced by the program. Details from blueprint to finished evidence of successful program construction, delivery and product are presented. Sockett, the attentive, dutiful architect and one-man construction crew, did all the right things in all the right ways. He and his students met the best expectations the profession and learning community could have anticipated. Yet the “Acceptance of despair” rendered in the final chapter, contains a litany of lament enumerating each step on the death march of the IET and the principles it exemplified. The deep fear touched for any professor who takes the principles of academic freedom seriously seems “the better you do what you do, the easier it becomes for those of more base values to fix you in the cross-hairs of administrative folly”. Sockett comes to grips with the personal aspects of the program’s demise and acknowledges that he was “the consistent, if not the fully acknowledged target” (p. 220).

More than a few reasons for bureaucratic butchery are cited in the final chapter, leading to speculation of readers who can draw a larger international perspective from which these events might be considered. Sockett’s program, while earning grassroots respect from where it originated and from those who it was intended to serve, represented more than a program of study and the rich opportunity of establishing an institute within an academic organization. The program stood for a departure from the norm and standing alone as an institute evoked the separation anxiety of part from whole that emerges in Canada each time the Province of Quebec debates independence. Sovereignty association as is discussed politely and openly in political circles deals with procedures and whether-or-nots, and the eventual negotiations of what-if outcomes. Publicly protracted debates usually lead to long deaths characterized by starvation of interest and intellectual dehydration.

Academic debates consist more of Machiavellian manoeuvres that make decisions and policy causing death that is not announced or felt until long after life supports have been unplugged. There is an ugly, resentful, change and criticism-sensitive vortex of reactions behind the facade of institutions of higher education especially when power and authority are exercised to display displeasure with those perceived to have broken ranks or represent a threat to the stability, predictability and security of the academy and the collegium. To such perceived perfidy, add the notion conveyed by the story of the Emperor's New Clothes and the treatment of the lad whose declaration elevated understandings of the relationships between perception and reality. Sockett violated both of the foregoing domains.

The dark side of his efforts largely from an administrative perspective include aspects of suspicion (and perhaps envy), perception of threat against organizational hierarchies and the need for control and compliance. Administrative and policy change, such as Sockett experienced during the build-up to actualizing the IET as a full fledged institute within GMU, led all to the ignominious outcome of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory and doing the wrong thing for the wrong reason. Universities of these postmodern times, according to Sockett's account seem hell-bent on mediocrity by using the safeguarding of traditional roles and expectations as a mask for control and domination.

Hugh Sockett is tragically not alone. Others share his defeat and despair including students now unable to study in his program and the growing legion of thoughtful colleagues who will think of walking his path. The faint glow on the horizon of teacher's further education is not a dawning light of hope but rather reflections of Pyrrhic victories in today's academy. Would the institutional politics of yesteryear allowed this program to survive and thrive? Did the personal, professional and institutional commitments that characterized former eras of study and learning actually place the needs of students and communities ahead of struggles for power and control? Alternatively, have we simply been sharing the mass delusion of professorial idealism and naiveté now becoming more transparent as corporatization and preoccupation with micro-management increasingly reveal administrative hucksterism and the lack of ethical and moral accountability? Christopher Hodgkinson claimed that educational organizations are structured to be resistant to change. T. B. Greenfield added to the weight of his statement by maintaining that the first goal of educational managers is to ensure that the organization continues to exist: all means are thus fair play and justified by the ends they serve.

Few others know of what Hugh Sockett writes as he accepts the despair of his program's fate. After reading his triumph and tragedy, I found similar experiences in other universities. Like Sockett, others have assisted in the birth of programs designed to meet learner needs. Attempts to do right things in right ways often leads to a bittersweet meeting of success and failure and unwanted meta-learnings about self and the university. Championship and the fight for fair circumstances of delivery can conveniently be misinterpreted as self-aggrandizement, justifying the administrative wrath of can and cannot.

As Sockett's students demonstrate their voice in this volume, other learners should be encouraged to seek out such experiences and demand deep quality of educational experience. In the increasingly consumer driven edu-business, the students voice is often heard more clearly and listened to more attentively than that of those who

profess and protest. Learners in higher education will no doubt continue to learn and produce in spite of organizational antics. What will they learn? What will program designers like Hugh Sockett learn?