BOOK REVIEW

Joy Jarvis and Karen Clark (2020), *Conversations to Change Teaching*
St. Albans: Critical Publishing, 96pp., ISBN: 9781913063771

Faculty roles are becoming increasingly complex as academic institutions navigate metrics often driven by economic, social and political pressures. As such, the role and impact of teaching on the student experience is often lost to other organisational priorities. *Conversations to Change Teaching* re-centres conversations about teaching as a way for faculty and students to develop innovative educational practices while also supporting the goals and mission of the institution. More specifically, Joy Jarvis and Karen Clark argue that conversations about teaching are ‘an essential activity for both individual and institutional well-being and effectiveness’ (1).

While the concept of having conversations about teaching seems straightforward, the authors acknowledge the vulnerability of faculty, potential power dynamics and the judgmental nature of peer teaching observations that may preclude any perceived benefit. Thus, the structure of this book not only assists faculty in how to prepare for and engage in critical conversations about teaching, it also includes practical activities, strategies and examples to facilitate change in teaching. Additionally, each chapter concludes with a brief bulleted summary of concepts, questions for critical practice and additional references with brief annotations.

In the first chapter, *Conversations to Change Teaching* seeks to transform the ‘ubiquity of talk’ to intentional conversations that evolve teaching practice, contribute to disciplinary teamwork and provoke critical reflection. Jarvis and Clark suggest that conversations should ‘disrupt’ how we think and act. In the context of teaching, such disruption is borne of conversations focused on purpose, values, pedagogical approaches or assumptions about students and their learning. It is through disruption that faculty can engage in more effective dialogue with colleagues and students about approaches to changing the teaching and learning environment.

Chapters 2 through 4 offer approaches for faculty to prepare for, engage in and sustain critical conversations about teaching with colleagues. Setting

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expectations for peer observations, understanding frames of reference, and gaining an awareness of assumptions are integral components to building a dialogue that will allow both parties to think differently about teaching as a practice. Furthermore, these components serve as a foundation for developing critical friendships. Critical friendships allow space for colleagues to challenge assumptions, take risks by trying new teaching techniques and facilitate pedagogical change. To sustain change, however, developing a collaborative space to engage more with more colleagues in a group is important. It is within these groups ‘conversational cultures’ emerge within the institution. Conversational cultures have the potential to provide sustainable support structures through shared resources and opportunities to learn from new perspectives. Students may also engage in these groups thereby providing important perspectives on effective teaching and learning environments.

Chapter 5 provides practical strategies to engage students in the conversation by collecting feedback about teaching strategies that promote learning. Jarvis and Clark focus on effective ways to build dialogue between faculty and students through group conversations that dismantle faculty-student power dynamics by focusing on building relationships, improving communication and demonstrating the value of the student voice. As faculty engage in conversations to change teaching, they must also practice those changes and seek continued feedback through observation and assessment. Chapter 6 explores the assessment of teaching. Jarvis and Clark provide useful questions for the assessor and the assessed to consider prior to the observation. These questions provide a framework for setting expectations for the observation and help develop a mutual understanding of how and why the assessment is occurring.

In the final chapter, Jarvis and Clark continue to centre conversation as a catalyst to change teaching. Faculty must engage in uncomfortable conversations that may challenge individual and institutional assumptions, beliefs and values. While one-on-one conversations and small group participation may serve to further ‘conversational cultures’, faculty must also be willing to lead conversations not only to change teaching but also to build learning organisations.

Conversations to Change Teaching is useful for faculty with any level of teaching experience. The material is accessible – it reminds us to engage in conversations as an intellectual exercise to fuel creativity and a renewed sense of excitement for the classroom. Perhaps the greatest value of this book is that it reminds us that conversations are critical to change teaching

and to developing relationships in which we can challenge assumptions, be vulnerable and grow as professionals and people. When we can continue to grow in this manner, our students will be better for it as will our institutions of higher education.

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