This book is about professional change from the bottom up—that is, it is about professionals taking charge of their own knowledge creation in order to create lasting change in their practice. In a very real sense, this text provides an avenue for individuals to do what Whitehead (1989) described as engaging in “Action Reflection” in order to build a “living educational theory” for ourselves as professionals learning about our craft across the years of our careers. The action reflection cycle described by McNiff (2000) seems to me to be embedded in this text as a guide to furthering our own professional development and direction. She notes five points: I, the individual, am central to the process; I am learning first about myself in order to change a social situation; I am not aiming for closure but ongoing development; the process is participative; and, the process is educational (p. 203). Hannay, Wideman and Seller bring out these points by encouraging educators to engage in a process of constructing their own knowledge through collaboration with colleagues and through the use of inquiry, much as we advocate for this with students in our care at all levels of learning. In this model, leadership becomes a shared activity “with the goals of the process mutually determined by those involved and not externally mandated or imposed” (p. 2).

While the five chapters that comprise the book focus on different aspects of building a professional culture based on constructivist principles, they also flow seamlessly from past to present practice regarding educational change, and the shift from professional development to professional learning and how that might look in practice.

In Chapter 1, entitled “Taking Charge of Educational Change,” the authors describe reform practices that reference the past, discuss present practices, and posit the need to move forward in our knowledge economy structure (Hargreaves, 2003) where learning, and indeed knowing, is comprised of an ever-moving target that is increasing in size in our ever-advancing technological age. The three paradigms discussed are: (1) the shift from teaching to learning, (2) the shift from professional development to professional learning,
and, (3) the shift from isolation to community. All of these points move us in the direction of active engagement in learning with others in a collaborative framework, rather than passively partaking of professional development days or activities put on by others in which we have had little or no input.

The second chapter, “Professional Learning that Supports Knowledge Creation,” draws our attention to the insufficient nature of many of our professional development assumptions, which these authors note is often disconnected from teachers’ existing knowledge and so therefore results in few gains in practice. They discuss the untangling of our intentionality in professional development: the need to explore our own tacit knowledge, to examine our mental models, to be willing to reconstruct our knowledge based on new information, and to be active participants in our own learning. Reading this chapter, I am reminded of the importance of tools that support knowledge creation described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994). They advocate dialogue and interaction with others and also with oneself as a means of reinterpreting past experience in present terms. Activities such as engaging in conversations about experiences, collaborating with others, autobiographical writing where inquiring into events and situations can make learning visible, and keeping a journal or scrapbook to reflect on practice, can help us connect past and present experiences, thus opening a door to new learning and direction for action.

In chapter 3, “Building a Culture that Supports Knowledge Creation,” the authors take us into the larger social realm of organizations where, as Fullan (2005) notes, “each level above you helps or hinders [sustainability] (it is rarely neutral)” (p. 65). Key aspects critical to creating and sustaining a culture that supports knowledge creation are described as the four R’s: responsibilities, relationships, resources, and recognition. These attributes should be developed and encouraged as seminal because it is when individuals shift from the extrinsic to intrinsic in terms of learning that knowledge creation shifts from being imposed by others to being embraced and nurtured by the group itself, or by individuals intent on their own learning.

Chapter four, “Facilitating Knowledge Creation,” names and describes the process of knowledge creation and strategies that can be used to promote it. The process noted by the authors (including disturbance, authentic problem, action, reflection, and knowledge sharing) reminds me again of McNiff’s (2000) action research cycle where she notes five points: a critical point in practice is reached; there is a need to act; a direction for action is chosen; the direction is monitored and evaluated; and, change in action is taken in the light of evaluations (p. 202). Both are ongoing and dynamic processes and both rely on professional dialogue to open a door to reflective practice and change.

Other connections between the process of knowledge creation and action research are discussed in this chapter. As the authors note, knowledge creation can be greatly enhanced “through professional dialogue that is deliberate and collective . . . with individuals working together to improve student learning and sharing their emerging knowledge about teaching and learning” (p. 56). The same can be said for professionals engaging in action research, which is noted as one key aspect of professional learning in this chapter. Other
avenues described are peer coaching, mentoring, lesson study, collaborative study groups, and critical friend groups.

The final chapter concludes the book by reiterating the importance of changing professional development to match a constructivist era wherein the importance of taking responsibility for our own learning and thinking is essential if we are to move into a post-modern educational environment.

As a contribution to the literature, I believe that this book helps point us in the direction of inquiry, encouraging us to hone our interpersonal and intrapersonal skills so that self-understanding and professional collaboration can illuminate the way forward in teaching and learning in the 21st century.

REFERENCES


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