

Enacting a Relational Approach as a University Administrator: A Self-Study

Summary of article

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This paper explores one professor's response to the challenges of transitioning to leadership roles through an examination of his experiences as an administrator. He experienced the challenge of sense-making as the project lead for a major curriculum review and as the head of an academic unit in a faculty of education. He examines the ways in which he was able to live out his conception of teacher education as relational. More broadly, he identifies challenges and opportunities for extending the scholarship of teaching and learning, particularly the self-study of teaching and teacher education practices, to include practice-based research on leadership in higher education. The seven characteristics of relational teacher education (RTE) to the university leadership context are:

1. Understanding one's own personal practical knowledge;
2. Improving one's practice in teacher education;
3. Understanding the landscape of teacher education;
4. Respecting and empathizing with others in the organization
5. Conveying respect and empathy;
6. Helping others face problems;
7. Receptivity to growing in relationship.

In this self-study, the author employs RTE and how it has informed his professional identity and professional practice as an administrator of teacher education programs. He considers Volckmann's conceptions of *leadership* as "an inclusive concept involving the integration of (a) the *leader*, (b) *leading* in the role and (c) the context (culture, systems, processes, technologies) creating an integral perspective of leadership, including all *leadership development* . (p. 259). Also, he draws on the four topical threads in administrator self-studies identified by Manke: power; community; social justice; and reform.

This exploration of five years as a university administrator offers some insights into the lives of professors who assume such roles. First, the results of this self-study into my teacher education practice suggest that relational teacher development is robust enough to be applied in university administration, as it draws on the learning and teaching experiences of professors to help them make sense of their practice and build on their existing capacities. Second, the research suggests that professors can be more successful in administration if they draw on their prior experiences as educators. Third, the paper identifies a need for more first-hand accounts of academics serving in administrative roles.

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