



Towards Teaching in Public: Reshaping the Modern University

Neary, Mike; Bell, Les; and Stevenson, Howard
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Book Review

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The enterprise known as collegiate education is at a crossroads. This statement should not be a surprise to those involved in higher education. The playing field has changed drastically over the last decade since the advent of online learning. Debates continue to rage in the academic community regarding issues related to accreditation, how courses are delivered, faculty credentials, and the cost of a degree program. These questions confront present-day educators and administrators located in U.S. higher educational institutions.

These debates are keenly felt in the U.K. and in other global contexts, although each context will address them from different perspectives depending on teaching and learning needs. *Towards Teaching in Public* is primarily focused on addressing these questions head on. As the book details, there is a seismic shift occurring in the educational institutions of the U.K., and it is likely that these shifts will be felt here in the U.S. sometime in the not-too-distant future. That said, understanding how these shifts are impacting British schools before they impact American institutions could aid administrators and faculty in how to plan for the forthcoming changes.

The place to begin, then, is in understanding what is meant by “public.” In the U.K., “public” and “private” have less to do with religious affiliation and more to do with where tuition dollars come from in higher educational contexts. In the British system, education in “private” institutions is provided at the expense of the student. “Public” institutions, then, primarily receive money from the government to provide education to students. These students can be degree-seekers, lifelong learners, tradesmen who are looking to pick up some new information, or individuals interested in taking a class now and then. The question the book raises is whether this remains an effective endeavor in a perpetually struggling economy. A secondary

question concerns higher educational institutions as the loci of learning – teacher, student, and community. In answering these two fundamental questions, the contributors to this volume contend that the university could serve as the central hub of political, societal, and cultural reform.

The volume is divided into three major sections. The first section (chapters 1-3) focuses on education as “a public good.” The essays in this section recount the modern history of education in the U.K., noting how the public university was established to provide free education to all and how that morphed into the private universities that sought to offer degrees to paying students who would be held to more rigorous academic standards. The second section (chapters 4-6) focuses on the relationship between teacher and student. This section argues for a higher value to be placed on students. The chapter entitled “The Student as Scholar” was particularly insightful as it mapped out a program for developing undergraduate researchers who could benefit the university in a number of ways. The final section (chapters 7-10) seeks to answer the questions raised previously. First, the university should continue to offer free education to the general public through workshops, public lectures, and continuing education offerings. However, the book advocates for requiring stricter regulations for degree-seeking students. Second, the locus of learning has moved to the community, although the concept is more Marxist in nature. This would be my only critique of the material in the volume. In the end, the authors seem to say that the purpose of education is simply to share our collected knowledge. The modern university, then, will be a place where the discussion of ideas will occur but little else. Although this volume was an insightful read, it would most benefit those involved with administration or international policy discussions rather than faculty.

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