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Higher Education Reconsidered: Executing Change to Drive Collective Impact

Lane, Jason E., ed.
SUNY Press, 2015

Book Review

Tags: changes in higher education | higher education | institutional change

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educatopm “[I]f we can shift our way of thinking from isolated interests to collaborative goals and ultimately to collective impact, we can change the world,” writes Jason E. Lane in his introduction to *Higher Education Reconsidered* (6). Changing the world is an ambitious goal for a book of essays, but the authors and editor are convinced that the systemic economic and social inequality in our society can be addressed through systemic fixes to higher education attainment with practical tools that address the pathway from cradle to career (107).

Read on their own, some of the essays seem to promote the idea that gathering and crunching data is a cornerstone of educational improvement. The book does not offer a direct critique of the present educational trend of data-driven assessment. However, the book may help teachers move beyond the rush to find quick fixes to education. The collective impact strategy it promotes is not easy or quick: bringing together a diverse group of leaders from various sectors to solve a common problem may be difficult and may involve finding unique strategies to address the problems at hand (12-13). The essay on change management by Scott Keller and Carolyn Aiken likewise moves beyond conventional wisdom and provides practical tips for successful organizational change (27-60).

This collection of essays emerged from a conference at the State University of New York. In many ways, it reflects the context of a large public university system. At first blush, this seems rather different from the typical smaller private institutions where many religious and theological studies programs are housed. However, educators and administrators in religious and theological studies face many of the same challenges outlined in the book. They may particularly resonate with the need for systemic change to resolve issues of inequality.

Religious and theological studies programs are often plagued by a lack of diversity among those who attain degrees, despite institutional goals that point in more inclusive directions.

Adapting the insights of collective impact may be a helpful strategy for religious and theological education programs as they work toward identifying and promoting effective solutions to thorny educational problems in religious and theological studies. Undergraduate and graduate programs in religion and theology might work together across institutional boundaries to identify common educational strategies that contribute to student success. Faculty from various sub-disciplines of religion and theology might work together to identify ways to build students' core knowledge.

The book suffers slightly from the uneven quality and topical range of its essays, but that is nothing new for books that are the products of conferences. Readers may need to exercise some patience with examples and parlance drawn from business, healthcare, and large higher education systems. Altogether, it is a helpful book. I recommend it to educators and administrators looking for tools to lead change in religious and theological higher education.

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