

Journeys through the self: pathways to leadership in third space

Book review: Hosein, A., Rao, N. and Kinchin, I. M. (eds.) (2023) *Narratives of becoming leaders in disciplinary and institutional contexts*. London: Bloomsbury Academic

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Good leadership is like oxygen: essential but invisible; we're most aware of it when we don't have it. There is a growing body of literature tracking its presence in higher education, through which we can better recognise the qualities and behaviours involved in educational leadership. For example, a leader can be identified as someone who is generous with their knowledge, who joins and builds networks and who through these activities is able to bring about change (Fields, Kenny and Mueller, 2019). Other researchers focus on the challenges of claiming leadership as a part of one's identity, such as Harvey and Jones's (2022) study of the six tenets of distributed leadership in support of women leaders. These explorations tend to be role-based, investigating leadership as a position; while this is useful, particularly in those studies which locate it in relation to teaching and scholarship (e.g., Taylor et al., 2021), it does little to illuminate the process of becoming a leader, or of claiming that position or identity. It is easy to assume that confident and decisive actions are the outcomes of confident and decisive people, and that the participants in these studies must be people who sought leadership and knew how to achieve it.

How refreshing it is, then, to encounter in this new volume an emphasis on narrative, through which we become privy to the inner lives of these collected authors, who lay bare the turmoil, hesitations and guesswork we all must negotiate. Contextualising these ideas in the introduction, Anesa Hosein and Namrata Rao champion the value of the journey, and the diverse pathways that these contributors have taken through their institutions or

within their disciplines. Most importantly, they wish to show that the journey to leadership in learning and teaching is as valuable as that in research, and deliberately encouraged a personal, narrative style for each chapter to better express not only the bumps in the road but also the scenery of their sociocultural landscapes and how it has shaped the road.

The first and most fascinating point to notice is that the leadership journey for these authors began long before they became leaders; perhaps before they had even conceived of its possibility. Leadership emerged out of circumstance, in tandem with a characteristic such as curiosity or determination, or a persistent idea that drove them on. Each chapter is therefore an attempt by each author to interpret, track and contain their careers, to find meaning in their choices and understand the boundaries within which they have operated. The book is divided into two sections: the first presents the stories of those who became institutional leaders; in the second, we hear from disciplinary leaders. While neither of these might feel immediately accessible or relevant to Learning Developers, firmly situated within third space, each chapter carries not only the wisdom of lived experience but ways of understanding transitions into, through and around third space via the application of theoretical lenses, metaphors and frameworks. Part of the value of the book lies in the resultant diversity of stories; there are as many ways of thinking about leadership as there are people – in this case, chapters – because each is about how the author views the world and relates to others.

For example, in Chapter 3, Celia Popovic uses the Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development to understand her progress as a leader. However, it is her metaphor of a map – not a surprising choice for someone who physically relocated to a new country – that perhaps has the most impact, particularly in how she committed to sharing that map with others. The idea of journey and travel arises elsewhere, too; in Chapter 7, Susan Rowland chooses the road less travelled, trusting herself in the process of earning the trust of others. Similarly, Patrick O’Sullivan in Chapter 2 has travelled a ‘distinct but not unique . . . path’ across a ‘broad landscape of professional fulfilment’ (p.31). Both authors see themselves as a ‘stranger in a strange land’ (p.33), and ‘an outsider looking in’ (p.62) but harness the strength of curiosity and the underpinning values that inform their identity to embrace transformation. This is not to say this journey need take place in isolation. Constructing ‘a bridge to cross the dark valley that separates’ the discipline from learning and teaching (p.139) was only possible for Paulo Rogério Miranda Correia with the support of a mentor, a point that crops up repeatedly throughout the book.

And this is where the book comes into its own. The decision to have each author tell their own story, personally, almost informally in tone, is repaid in the insights it provides to how vital others are. Courtney DeMayo Pugno in Chapter 1 speaks of social capital and social networks, drawing on Bourdieu, but essentially she advises recognising who you know, how you know them and what that might open up for you. Amalia Hosein explores the interplay of structure and agency in Chapter 5 in an autoethnographic account founded on the importance of conversation, a finding reached via a different route by Louise Jackson in the following chapter, albeit more imbued with regret from not having had more conversations with more people. For her, 'collaborative professionalism' is the key to success, those high-trust, non-hierarchical, cross-group relationships built on shared goals, and in a chapter full of honesty and challenge, she ends with the hope that she will continue learning how to implement these strategies.

Despite not mentioning third space at all – it doesn't appear in the index, nor in passing – this volume is about living with liminality and creating something tangible from it within a defined space. There are lessons here in unlikely and surprising journeys; we start from where we are but should assume nothing about that and instead pay attention to blossoming opportunities that appeal. Every Learning Developer has the potential to become a leader in learning and teaching; Ian Kinchin's reflective conclusion draws on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming as a way of embracing change and development within 'leadership literacy' (p.176). This volume provides an array of tools and inspiration to anyone wishing to take the next step. For those who still need some convincing, the last word goes to Paulo Coelho whose ideas open the book: '[e]verybody has a creative potential and from the moment you can express this creative potential, you can start changing the world' (p.10).

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