



Becoming an Authentic Teacher in Higher Education

Patricia Cranton; Krieger Publishing: Malabar, FL (2001)

Reviewed by Denise C. Camin, Associate Professor, DeVry University, Tinley Park Campus

To better understand our teaching, we must first understand ourselves. What we find significant in our lives and the values we hold shape us and our teaching. This is the crux of Patricia Cranton's *Becoming an Authentic Teacher in Higher Education*, the focus on exploring "self" as essential for improving practice.

Much of the professional development literature points to self-reflection and critical examination as effective methods for improving teaching. Teacher ownership and involvement have been shown as key for successful faculty professional development programs, especially those in higher education. Cranton offers educators and professional development practitioners a practical guide for using self-reflection to examine and improve teaching, becoming a good teacher by "building a personal ideal of practice" (p. viii).

Why authentic teacher? As she notes in her Preface, Cranton believes that knowing one's self, one's values, is essential for good communication and the cornerstone of authenticity, which leads to good teaching. Only by becoming authentic teachers can we truly become who we are meant to be. The "authentic teacher" remains true to his or her values, maintains a separate identity from the community, and is empowered by individuation.

A mere 123 pages, including references and index, this concise text could easily be read in a single sitting; however, most readers (like me) will find themselves taking much more time to explore the exercises included in each chapter. Organized as an eight chapter exploration and critical reflection, the text begins with "Understanding Your Self" [divided in the book] in the first chapter and culminates with the "Transformative Teacher" in the final chapter. Chapter one also establishes the "lens" for the book – we bring to our teaching different attitudes and different expectations. Having completed the early steps towards a greater understanding of who we are and why we teach, as "transformative teachers" we can now embrace the discomfort that comes with change as an inevitable part of the process.

I particularly enjoyed the concrete examples and inventory found in "The Good Teacher" (Chapter 3). Cranton's four categories – supported with theoretical foundations – are broad enough to encompass all forms of teaching and yet establish distinctive divisions. Her practical example of how to use the inventory's results demonstrated critical self-reflection of teaching practice isn't about changing who we are but rather recognizing and using our strengths to improve, as in her example of how one "organized teacher" used these strengths to plan for spontaneity in the classroom. In my mind, the true value of this chapter was its foundation – there is no "one size fits all" plan for the perfect teacher, something that is reiterated throughout her book.

The value of this book lies in Cranton's twenty years of experience in professional development coupled with its combination of research and practical application via exercises to begin (and promote) educators' self-reflection. The many personal experience examples offered in each of the eight chap-

ters show the diverse nature of “authentic teacher in higher education.” She does not describe what a good teacher should do; rather, she clarifies that there is no such formula. Additionally, she establishes in her Preface that she is one of the educators: “The purpose of this book is to illustrate in a practical, clear, and concrete fashion how we can work toward becoming more authentic in our teaching” (p. viii). She continues this connection to her readers throughout the text with a personalized writing style.

She recognizes that even good teachers may question themselves or feel like “imposters sitting at the teacher’s desk” (p. 2). Her book gives educators permission to sit back and reflect. This is especially important as most of the professional development literature shows resistance to change as pivotal: we must be willing to question why we teach as we do, understand how our values and beliefs affect our teaching, and then determine the best approach for improving our practice.

I really enjoyed Cranton’s book and feel it is ideal for new faculty and those looking for a tool to aid them in their professional development efforts. While written for educators, I see it as a guide for supporting faculty, especially relevant for deans and those involved in faculty professional development. Though the book could be an individual journey, incorporating this as part of a professional development program on campus would garner support for those re-evaluating their teaching and create a greater feeling of community. For those educators seeking verification that they are on the right path, or for those desiring to make changes, Cranton’s book offers a refreshing change simply because it offers no one best approach.



[Table of Contents](#) | [Issues](#) | [Credits](#) |
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