

Lessons Learned

By Jan Kettlewell

Each of the five cases previously described represents the highlights of restructuring a single college of education. As the reader will note, each site has a different context; each represents different visions; each has employed somewhat different strategies. Through mutual sharing and critique, the deans and faculty from the five sites have learned from one another. The accomplishments at each site are greater because each has benefited from the successes of other members of the Network for Innovative Colleges of Education (NICE).

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Given the differences in approach to restructuring among the sites represented in this Network, are there any principles about restructuring colleges of education that cut across the five institutions? Are any of these principles applicable to other institutions?

We answer affirmatively to both questions. In this concluding article, we attempt to share common themes that have cut across our work at the five sites. We share these themes in the form of “lessons learned,” in the hope that others may benefit and

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improve upon them when engaged in similar efforts to restructure colleges of education or policy formation that encourages restructuring within universities. The lessons we have learned to date are presented in six categories: Why Engage in Restructuring; Process of Change; Restructuring Strategies; Role of the Dean in Restructuring; and Benchmarks and Next Steps.

Why Engage in Restructuring

For years each of us has been engaged in reform projects of one kind or another in either K-12 schools or universities. While each of these projects may have had some value, in their entirety they did not contribute significantly to fundamental change either in K-12 schools or in colleges of education. As a result of our independent experiences, we each had concluded that the fundamental culture of the college of education must change in order for it to function effectively as a professional school that has primary responsibility for coordinating teacher education among faculty in education, arts and science, and K-12 schools.

We each had reached a stage in our careers where “being dean” was not really very important. Rather, the moral agenda of fundamentally rethinking colleges of education and the education of educators in ways that directly improve outcomes for children and youth was extremely important. One member of this Network summed it up this way:

Twenty-nine years ago, having just graduated from an accredited university program, I began my career as an English teacher in the midwest. I was well grounded in my discipline, with a B.A. degree, as well as in the methods of teaching, knowledge about learning, human growth and development, and so forth. As I reflect back upon my entry into the teaching profession, it is extremely clear to me, now, that I viewed myself as a teacher, and assumed no responsibility for whether or not the students learned.

Several years later, after completing graduate school, I became a faculty member in higher education, with responsibilities in teacher education and educational leadership. Again, I was well equipped with the appropriate knowledge base, and like my earlier years in high schools, I was a teacher, and assumed no responsibility for whether or not the students learned.

When *A Nation at Risk* was published I was serving as dean of a large school of education. I recall moments of inner turmoil around the question—what are the responsibilities of schools/colleges of education for the quality of the American school systems? On some occasions, as I wrestled with this inner turmoil, I came down on the side that said we, in schools/colleges of education, did own part of the responsibility for the quality of education in our nation’s schools. On other occasions, particularly when I examined the lack of responsibility for professional practice that my colleague deans assumed for the quality of practice in their fields of business, architecture, and so forth, I came down on the opposite side of the argument; that is, schools/college of education had enough to do to worry about

the quality of our preparation programs for future teachers; we could not, and should not, try to do anything comprehensive about the quality of professional practice.

In 1990, after reflecting on John Goodlad's publication of *Teachers for our Nation's Schools*, which focuses on the "simultaneous renewal of K-12 schools and teacher education," my agenda became painfully obvious. Throughout my entire career (of now 26 years) I had been letting myself "off-the hook." As a classroom teacher, university professor, and dean of a school of education—I had yet to grasp what my real responsibilities were. Goodlad's premise of the need for "simultaneous renewal of K-12 schools and teacher education" makes clear that schools of education cannot divorce themselves from the fate of our schools; in fact, I have come to accept that schools of education fail if our K-12 schools fail to educate all children in their charge.

Why restructure? We believe that colleges of education must have a collective agenda—one that is grounded in principles that govern the work that we do and reflect why we, as faculty, do our work. Further, we believe the agenda must move away from issues of faculty welfare and the sole preoccupation of faculty with their own courses and research. Our experience has taught us that the agenda adds to the work of faculty a collective sense of responsibility for the stewardship of the college of education and its fundamental role in improving outcomes for children and youth in schools.

We have also come to accept that there are multiple ways to develop a sense of collective responsibility within a college of education. Two of the sites in this Network started through organizational restructuring; two started with building a shared sense of mission; the fifth attempted both simultaneously. Context was the governing variable in institutional approach. Regardless of institutional approach, a commitment to principles reflective of a collective agenda that relates fundamentally to the role and purpose of a college of education has been consistent across all five sites.

The Six "Givens" to Managing the Process of Change

Based upon our experiences in five institutions, we have concluded that there are certain "givens" to the process of institutional change that can be articulated and anticipated in other settings. These are:

1. Any serious restructuring effort changes the power relationships within the college. There will be shifts in perception as to the amount of influence faculty have. Those whose influence either diminishes or remains constant will become "nay-sayers," because both will see restructuring as the loss of an opportunity to gain influence. An operational definition of nay-sayers is—those who wish to remake the system in their own individual image.
2. The presence of nay-sayers is constant throughout the restructuring process, although the membership will vary from issue to issue. Nay-sayers typically seek

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to build coalitions from among those who, for very different reasons, are opposed to restructuring. The presence of nay-sayers needs to be planned for throughout restructuring; the energies of those who are leading restructuring efforts should focus on “managing” the presence of nay-sayers rather than wasting energy trying to convert them.

3. Faculty are not afraid of change. What they are afraid of is loss—loss of turf, loss of their courses, loss of confidence in their capacity to make a shift to a new collective agenda for the college.

4. During restructuring, the faculty reward system becomes a “whipping block”—some nay-sayers will argue that IT must be changed before they involve themselves in restructuring because of the expressed fear that their efforts will go unrewarded. Concurrently, others will argue that the reward system should not change within the college of education without first changing throughout the institution—they espouse a fear for loss of prestige within their institution and a return to a “normal school.” Those who are leading the restructuring effort must recognize that the reward system is but one of many strands of the agenda—each of which must change throughout the process. The local context and opportunity should govern which variables to focus on first.

5. Faculty have difficulty with lack of closure. Failure to attend to what we have come to call the “dailies” will derail the whole restructuring effort.

6. It is inevitable that restructuring a college of education will be misunderstood within other parts of the university. It is not a matter of trying to educate those who misunderstand. Our experience suggests that the more some understand, the more they will be against restructuring because it challenges their traditional beliefs about universities.

Restructuring Strategies

Despite the presence of what we have come to refer to as the six “givens” to managing the process of change, we have learned specific restructuring strategies that have been consistently helpful throughout the five institutions in the Network. The first of these has to do with vision.

We have come to accept that there are two equally important aspects of vision—the first relates to what it is you want to achieve—the agenda, if you will. The second is a vision of how you’re going to work your way through the “givens” in managing the process of change; that is—how you’re going to get from point A to point B while simultaneously managing the “givens.” Without clarity in both aspects of visioning, we believe you will fall far short of your aspirations. A simultaneous focus on the over-all agenda and the “dailies” that are of constant

concern to faculty is a useful strategy.

One key indicator of progress in restructuring is changing the nature of the dialogue. Bringing K-12 teachers to the table helps here. It tends to keep all participants on their best behavior and helps maintain focus on the agenda. A second strategy for changing the nature of the dialogue is to physically reassign faculty office space. This latter strategy will alter the informal conversation patterns of faculty and facilitate change in the membership of coalitions.

It is easy for faculty and administrators to become complacent within our individual and disciplinary role—like “fox-holes.” Again, there is a need to alter the nature of the dialogue. Providing support for faculty and administrators to attend meetings in which they become part of the national dialogue is extremely helpful. It is equally helpful for faculty and administrators to hear the same message from others—perhaps bringing in someone from another campus to voice the same message or taking a team of faculty and administrators to another campus that is engaged in restructuring and facilitate cross-site discussions on pre-selected issues.

Another key indicator of progress in restructuring a college is evidence of a change in the work that faculty do. The dean has some leverage here. For example, the dean can influence faculty commitment to the restructuring agenda through allocation of positions; decisions as to who gets approved for sabbaticals, travel funds, etc.; and reframing all vacant positions in ways that are consistent with the restructuring agenda. While the dean cannot change the research prerogative of faculty (nor would it be desirable to do so), the dean can choose to only support research that is consistent with the restructuring agenda. Finally, the dean has a responsibility to model the principles that undergird the restructuring agenda; that is, if a goal is to prepare teachers to be part of learning communities, then the dean must model a learning community with the faculty.

Of all the restructuring strategies used by the deans in the five sites in this Network, the most powerful was the use of cross-institutional networking. The NICE has no single platform. Yet it serves as a learning community for the deans and faculty from the five participating sites. Through Network meetings, we each have been forced to stand back a bit from the challenges and frustrations of our own setting and reflect and analyze the issues in a focused way. Participation in Network meetings has been a regular reminder that our job is about improving outcomes for children and youth; and that is the *raison d'être* for restructuring.

Role of Deans in Restructuring

To some extent all that has been said thus far characterizes the role of the dean in restructuring a college of education. Based upon our experience at five sites, there are some additional dimensions of restructuring that are unique to the role of dean. These dimensions are enumerated here.

First, the dean must serve an important symbolic leadership role. He or she

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must be the consistent spokesperson and conscience for the long-term vision. An important dimension of this vision is a change in the work of the dean and the faculty. The dean must lead by example—keeping his or her own behavior and decisions consistent with the long-term vision.

Deans also have to recognize that while they serve as consistent spokespersons for the restructuring agenda, and that change can be initiated from the top-down, the agenda cannot be sustained without building faculty support. Here we recommend the use of formal faculty votes on key decisions.

Deans must recognize that all that they do is not public to faculty. Great pains must be taken to help faculty understand the work of the dean in supporting the restructuring agenda behind the scenes. When allocating budgets, approving sabbaticals, etc., it is not only important to make decisions that advance the restructuring agenda, but to make public the basis for such decisions. Revealing what you do promotes understanding; it also is a form of sharing power, which, too, advances the restructuring agenda.

In a very real sense, providing leadership in restructuring a college is analogous to managing conflicting tensions—How hard do you push? When do you wait? When do you take an issue before the faculty for a vote? How much consensus is needed to move ahead? We have found no cookbook to follow here. Rather, we repeat a message voiced earlier—context, context, context. An important variable in interpreting local context is your own aspirations as dean—Can you stand up to it? Are you driven by wanting to remain as dean? Or is there a larger sense of purpose that motivates you to restructure? Your answers to these and related questions are important to be faced at the front end before deciding whether or not to initiate a restructuring agenda.

It is also important to recognize that while obtaining support of central administration for restructuring is important, it falls to the dean of education to articulate for the institution the broader platform for K-16 collaboration. Equally important is the working relationship between the deans of education and arts and sciences. Colleges of arts and sciences are as important to this agenda as are K-12 schools. Yet, unlike other agendas within the university, when the chief academic office provides leadership in situations that involve two or more colleges, with this restructuring agenda leadership must come from the dean of the college of education. Thus, in addition to providing leadership for the internal restructuring of the college of education, the education dean must also articulate the broader institutional platform for K-16 collaboration and provide leadership for teacher education program reform that cannot be accomplished without the full partnership of the college of arts and sciences and K-12 teachers in partner schools.

Benchmarks and Next Steps

We entered the Network because of our individual commitments to restructur-

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ing our college of education in ways that are consistent with the greater purpose of improving outcomes for children and youth. Thus our focus has been “principle-based.” We recognized at the outset that restructuring is a journey, and not an outcome. The outcome we aspire for is when graduates of our institutions are successful in promoting the learning and well being of all children in their charge, and serve, collectively, as stewards of the school—in the same sense that college of education faculty serve as stewards of the college, who collectively share responsibility for the learning of all students who aspire to become professional educators.

To date, we can articulate the following benchmarks or footprints on our journey:

1. The nature of the dialogue has changed on all five of our campuses—a sense of a “faculty collective” is emerging—what might be called a forerunner to stewardship. The level of discourse has been raised within and across departmental or unit lines.
2. Curriculum development is now approached from a position of principles that faculty have agreed to in advance, as opposed to a disparate set of courses that fit the individual interests of faculty members.
3. There is evidence of new faculty leadership, which is not only invigorating for the people involved but it is serving to build new alliances that support the restructuring agenda.
4. There is a much closer link between the college of education and the needs of K-12 schools and there is a reduced status differential between K-12 and university faculties.
5. There is recognition throughout the university campus that something important is going on in the college of education.

Immediate next steps along our journey are to more formally study the process of restructuring on the five campuses, add a few additional sites to the Network, and extend the agenda to embrace the education of future teacher educators.