

1-2013

Review of Gratitude in Education: A Radical View

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Kerry Howells

Gratitude in Education: A Radical View

Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense, 2012 hb 173pp \$43.00

ISBN 978-94-6091-812-4

In her book *Gratitude in Education*, Kerry Howell makes a strong case for the incorporation of gratitude into educational settings. She contends that gratitude could be the key to offering hope to educators experiencing burnout and feelings of being devalued in today's educational climate. In addition, she offers the potential of a relationship between gratitude and student engagement, being careful to note that the practice of gratitude must start with school leaders and within educators' attitudes before it should be taught to students. The author goes as far as to claim that "when educators practice gratitude in the midst of time-poor and stressful conditions—where their self efficacy, collegiality and resilience are most under threat—gratitude takes on dimensions that are far deeper than those that come out of most other academic discussions and clinical research" (p. 4). There is a clear emphasis on the importance of expressing gratitude in a variety of instances, including adverse and challenging situations. It is important to note that Howells acknowledges that gratitude is at the cen-

ter of many religions, though she does not advocate for any one religion, therefore opening the book up to educators from a variety of religious foundations and backgrounds. She is careful to acknowledge that in order for gratitude to have an impact or to compel action, educators must regard it as gift giving and not as any type of exchange or something done with an expectation of reciprocity.

The author makes her case for including gratitude in education through a series of engaging stories related to her experiences in providing professional development to a variety of audiences in a range of school settings, while carrying out her own research on the impact of the expression of gratitude. The author herself grapples with the definition of gratitude throughout the text as she takes the reader through experiences in different schools and with different individuals within those schools. As she learns from the various audiences that she is attempting to influence, she molds and informs her own views of the term *gratitude* and its meaning. It is interesting to read her reports of her attempts to instill the importance of gratitude while meeting surprising skepticism from some participants. It appears that most of this skepticism revolves around the participants envisioning gratitude work as one more thing to do, rather than a gift that can provide a refreshing impact on the climate of a school, as well as on every individual within that structure. The author's stories suggest that it is sometimes difficult to see the value and impact that small acts may have on one's own attitude as well as the attitudes of others. Her ability to provide examples throughout the book of real educators employing gratitude practices in their daily lives makes *Gratitude in Education* an engaging book. Howells gives concrete support to instructors in their efforts, with an ultimate goal of giving students a purpose and responsibility for engagement in their learning.

I believe that the author succeeds in her effort to convince the reader of the important role that gratitude may play in education and in the many lives on which it can have an impact. Howells seems to combine the promise of hope for tired teachers and increased student engagement with increased creativity, enhanced relationships, and individual transformation, to make the effort to incorporate a lifestyle of gratitude worthwhile. Because some may perceive this as an overwhelming task, the author clearly demonstrates ways of making the expression of gratitude manageable. The potential to make changes to one's own perspective, to provide hope for

teachers who feel defeated and worthless, and to inspire engagement in learning is incentive enough for me to give this a try and to encourage others to do the same. This book is worthy of attention, as it is ultimately calling us to look for the good in others and to be thankful in that pursuit.

Kris Molitor