Three Kinds of Development in Higher Education


Reviewed by Richard A. Stowe

Jerry Gaff has produced a work of many uses.

It will serve well to define and differentiate three major activities of vital interest to practicing instructional developers—faculty development, instructional development, and organizational development.

It is an unusually handy book to pass on to your superior to illuminate what you are attempting to do.

It will have a place as a guide for faculty with whom you wish to work.

And it will be a bible beside your desk, an encyclopedia of fresh ideas for those uninspired days, a blueprint (if somewhat indistinct

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Parity for Instructional Development

in some particulars) of the kind of program you one day will implement in your institution.

One of the significant facts about this book is that it appears in the well respected Jossey-Bass series on higher education. It is reassuring to realize that deans, vice presidents, presidents, and board members will read about our field in a source that holds considerable validity for them. Moreover, it is gratifying to see instructional development given parity with such obvious comers as faculty development and organization development and to have the author acknowledge instructional development as “the most professionally advanced of the three.”

Jerry Gaff holds highly professional credentials of his own. He is director of the Project for Institutional Renewal Through Improvement of Teaching (based in Washington, D.C.). Formerly, he directed the Center for Professional Development in the California State University and College System, and he has participated in studies of such topics as faculty impact on students. He is co-author of The Cluster College, another in the Jossey-Bass series.

Gaff’s sanguine view of instructional-improvement programs hides few illusions about the difficulties in implementing the three Ds. He deftly points to scars and open wounds received by many practitioners, and his remedies are not always potent enough to salve them. The field of instructional improvement, the book seems to say, is not the place for the faint-hearted—only the incurably hopeful.

Faculty renewal, Gaff declares, is a veritable “movement.” He sees it as “an attempt to resolve a fundamental and enduring issue: how to develop the professional and personal talents of faculty members, particularly as they pertain to their most central professional activity, providing effective instruction to students.” Those of us who favor a systems view of matters will welcome Gaff’s insistence that the entire instructional climate be considered. The instructional climate includes the personal growth and characteristics of the faculty, the organization in which they work, and of course the methodologies by which they can be assisted in creating superior instruction. Gaff seems to say that overlooking one or another of these elements will result in a suboptimal design for faculty (and hence instructional) renewal. Together, these elements form “one of the most powerful—even revolutionary—concepts to emerge in higher education in recent years.”

But not all of the programs to which the author refers have achieved such holism. Admittedly, he is reporting early efforts, the first halting steps toward a distant ideal. But the ideal and the often painful actualities are both exciting, the ideal because of the impact it promises to make on the most critical function in higher education, the actualities because of their challenges.

Part 1 deals with programs for improving teaching and learning. Part 2 discusses implementation of the programs. Part 1 contains