Foreword

The focus of the Handbook of Research on Learner-Centered Pedagogy in Teacher Education and Professional Development is on how digital technologies and educational strategies can be used to create learning centered environments that are empowering for both students and teachers. The Māori of New Zealand use the term ako to describe a learning centered approach (Alton-Lee, 2003). Ako means both to teach and to learn. It recognizes the knowledge that both teachers and students bring to learning interactions, and it acknowledges the way that new knowledge and understandings can grow out of shared learning experiences. Embracing the principle of ako enables teachers to build learning communities where each person feels that their contribution is valued and that they can participate to their full potential. This is not about people simply getting along socially; it is about building productive relationships, between teacher and students and among students, where everyone is empowered to learn with and from each other.

Hattie (2009) describes this as a visible teaching and learning framework where “teachers SEE learning through the eyes of their students and students SEE themselves as their own teachers” (p. 238). The educational research studies in this book demonstrate that when teachers facilitate reciprocal teaching and learning roles in their classrooms, students’ achievement improves.

Traditionally, teacher education and professional development programs have concentrated primarily on the role of teachers (teacher presence) but increasingly the focus is on teaching presence, similar to the concept of ako. This involves the teacher sharing the tasks for the design, facilitation, and direction of a learning experience with the students (Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2013). Teaching presence is enhanced when participants become more meta-cognitively aware and are encouraged to assume increasing responsibility and control of their learning. Much attention needs to be focused on teaching presence if we are to create and sustain the conditions for higher order learning. All participants in a collaborative learning environment must assume various degrees of teaching responsibilities depending on the specific content, developmental level, and ability. Teachers and students must be prepared to clarify expectations, negotiate requirements, engage in critical discourse, diagnose misconceptions, and assess understanding. Continuing advances in digital technologies requires both teacher and student to engage, interact, and contribute to learning in new ways. The challenge is that simply providing opportunities for interaction and collaboration does not provide assurance that students will approach their learning in deep and meaningful ways. The role of learner in these digital environments constitutes multiple roles and responsibilities. This creates role complexity, as participants must assume varying degrees of responsibility to monitor and regulate the dynamics of the learning community. As a course progresses, students take on increasing responsibilities, which in turn helps them become self-directed learners.
Foreword

Public calls around the world for educational reform are getting louder and the chapters in the Handbook of Research on Learner-Centered Pedagogy in Teacher Education and Professional Development provide a series of blue-prints for creating learning centered environments that will reinvigorate and engage students, teachers, and parents. The key is to design, facilitate, and direct learning experiences where all voices are heard and empowered.

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REFERENCES

