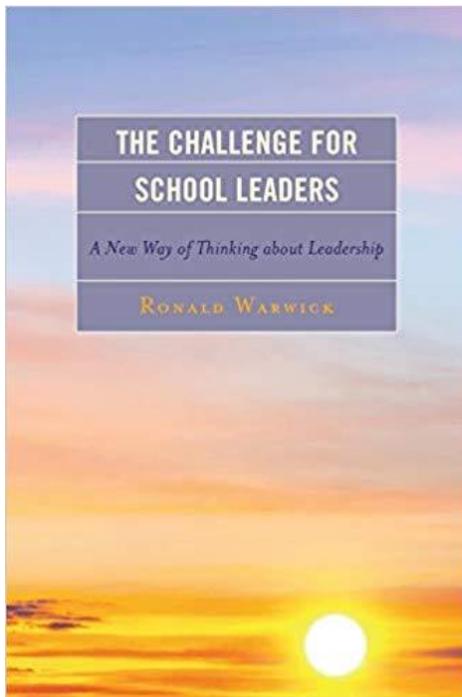


Book Review

A New Way of Thinking about Leadership

“The Challenge for School Leaders” by Ronald Warwick

By Kathleen A. Tobin



In *The Challenge for School Leaders: A New Way of Thinking about Leadership*, Ronald Warwick examines the enduring tests of continual-improvement expectations placed on teachers, educational institutions, and school corporations. However, rather than decry the value of continual-improvement intentions, he provides strategies for leaders for inspiring and measuring improvement in their schools.

Continual-improvement is not a new concept, but it is one that has demanded revised approaches resulting in new models over the years. Building on past practice and new research, Warwick brings experience as a public

school math teacher, middle school principal, and professor of education in addressing these approaches with complexity and insight. Warwick’s focus on challenges for school leaders is not superficial; rather, it delves into pedagogical analyses using innovative tools created to help keep schools on target when collecting data. Knowledge is advancing rapidly in this field, so leaders should find his research and synthesis valuable.

Warwick reminds administrators that teachers themselves are the experts here, and that innovation in developing effective continual-improvement strategies can only come by fostering creativity and individual thinking. This takes time and investment on the part of institutions, but the results can be worthwhile. In order for this to happen, good leadership within teaching and administration is necessary.

Early on, *The Challenge for School Leaders* offers numerous recommendations for administrators in affecting positive changes in learning, such as:

- respecting teachers’ competence, abilities, and professional status,
- including professional staff in identifying areas in need of improvement,
- giving teachers adequate time to design curriculum and develop strategies,
- acting as a role model by demonstrating a sincere love for learning and commitment to continual-improvement, and
- facilitating the gathering and analysis of

action-driven qualitative and quantitative data.

Warwick advocates for the use of technology for more mature upper-level students requiring less face-to-face interaction, as well as for the professional development of teachers as they gain knowledge and meet certification requirements. He predicts even greater electronic delivery of instruction in the future, resulting in less emphasis on what has been traditional student time spent in classroom seats and more on the measurement of learned competencies. In this case, leaders must become more aware of their responsibilities toward the encouragement of innovation and alternative instructional design. From his perspective, continual-improvement may lead to more creativity in delivery, just as creative delivery may lead to continual-improvement. While he calls for support of teachers in the decision-making process, he clearly envisions a transition in teacher-student relationships. He sees students increasingly acquiring knowledge through digital means, with problem and project-based learning shifting teacher roles to those of mentors and small group advisors.

In chapter 2, Warwick provides an overview of systems essential to effective learning common to wide variations in schooling in the United States (home, hybrid, charter, private, public, etc.) and then elaborates on those systems. Chapter 3 is devoted to the importance of a strong communication system, for example. This in itself is complex, as he includes communication from instructional teams to school administrators to district leaders to school boards, and vice versa. He also stresses the importance of good communication between teachers and teaching leadership teams, and advises on effective meeting agenda-building and the taking of minutes, adding a survey to gauge success.

Chapter 4 examines the curriculum system designed with critical thinking in mind, as well as state-mandated core competencies. That system may include traditional, content-integrated, thematic integrated-unit, project based-learning, problem based-learning, or independent curriculum designs. In each instance, Warwick provides detailed processes for faculty discussion, consensus building, learning objectives, timetables, lesson plan development, and assessment. The same is true in chapter 5, which is devoted to the instruction system. Here, he outlines step-by-step processes for clarifying student expectations, considering variations in learning styles, determining instructional methods, and collecting data on student performance. Chapter 6 brings added dimension to the assessment system. Beyond assessing student learning in individual units, teachers must engage in action-based assessment to determine effectiveness and ultimately improve curriculum and strategies. At the end of each chapter, as well as in his appendices, Warwick provides sample survey questions to help school leaders estimate progress.

Some aspects of the material presented in *The Challenge for School Leaders* can be intimidating, but so, too, can real life assessment in which authentic goals toward improvement are embedded. The primary benefit for readers is the effort Warwick has made in detailing processes for getting this kind of work completed in a timely manner. There is opportunity for pioneering leaders to adapt recommendations to suit the needs of their own schools, and the guidelines can help all those engaged in these endeavors.

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About the Author

Ronald Warwick is professor of educational leadership at Concordia University, Chicago. He has been a high school math teacher, public school administrator, university professor and administrator. He has presented and consulted throughout the U.S., Europe, and Korea over the past 50 years.

About the Reviewer

Kathleen A. Tobin earned her Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago and teaches United States and Latin American history at Purdue University Northwest. She has served on the Indiana Commission of Higher Education and subsequently Indiana's Statewide Transfer and Articulation committee, and is currently heading her campus Department of History and Philosophy. She served as President of the Indiana Association of Historians from 2019-2019. She loves all things related to teaching and learning.