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Committed to Learning: A History of Education at The University of Melbourne

By Juliet Flesch

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Committed to Learning: A History of Education at The University of Melbourne is beautifully and expertly written, revealing the history of education at The University of Melbourne culminating in the world-renowned Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE). Renowned historian and academic Juliet Flesch seamlessly moves through the pages of history, from John Smyth (1864–1927) as the first Professor of Education to ‘the first revolution’ in the 1960s–1970s with Barbara Falk and Professor Richard Selleck, and culminating with ‘the second revolution’ under the visionary leadership of Field Winston Rickards, Dean of Education from 2004–2017.

Rickards expertly transformed the Faculty of Education into a Graduate School and the teacher training course into the Master of Teaching program, which essentially encourages its graduates to take a clinical approach as well as differentiation combined with practical placements. The high status the MGSE has achieved as one of the top five educational faculties in the world is phenomenal, and one that few would have believed was possible.

Flesch’s book demonstrates the visionary and progressive leadership of teachers, educators and academics who believed in the power of education and saw it as a profession that should be highly regarded and valued equally to Medicine or Law. It

is this belief that pervades every page of the book, and indeed the Faculty of Education’s 110-year history. Moreover, all of the leaders in the Faculty of Education have had wide and diverse personal backgrounds, with most of them being school teachers. The photos interwoven throughout this tomb gives it a human context that personalises an educational organisation much like how teaching itself is about humanity.

As a current English Literature and History secondary teacher and MGSE graduate, this book has made me proud to be part of the legacy of education at The University of Melbourne. However, this is also where my reservations lie in the relevance of this book to the curriculum and classroom. I believe the readership of this book may be exclusively limited to Master of Teaching graduates or Diploma of Education graduates from the MGSE. I do not know how teachers from other universities would feel reading this book or what value they would extract. While I am a proud alumnus of The University of Melbourne, others who are not could see it as egotistical.

I still think it is a very worthwhile text for teachers’ own professional development because it is a remarkable history of education led by dedicated, passionate and committed educators spanning more than 110 years.