

REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS: LEARNING FROM THE PAST, ACTING IN THE PRESENT: THE ROLE OF REFLECTION ON ACTION IN THE EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONS

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"In times of change it is the learners who will inherit the earth. While the learned will find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists."

-Anonymous

Reflection is the key to growth and learning, the means of reliving or recapturing experience in order to make sense of it, to learn from it, and to develop new understandings and appreciation. Reflection comes from the Latin word *reflettere*, which means to bend back. Imagine a mirror; "As a mirror reflects a physical image, so does the reflection as a thought process reveal to us aspects of our experience that might have remained hidden had we not taken the time to consider them," (Wade & Yarborough, 1966 p. 64). The Latin root of "educate" is *educare* - to draw out. Educators draw out students, such as John Dewey who has made much of the reflective process.

In *School and Society*, for example he explains "the statement so frequently made that education means 'drawing out' is excellent, if we mean simply to contrast it with the process of pouring in...The child is already intensely active, and the question of education is the question of taking hold of his activities, of giving them direction. Through direction, through organized use, they tend toward valuable results, instead of scattering or being left to merely impulsive expression" (Dewey, 1900, pp. 53-54).

However, these days, it seems, many standards are urging us to fill up our students and ourselves with information rather than to draw out or to evoke understandings. LaBoskey (1993) suggests that "individuals need to learn how to process their experiences; they need to bring other knowledge, theoretical principles, and alternative interpretations to bear in any analysis of that experience; in short, they need to be reflective (p. 10)."

TEACHER AS LEARNER

If professional learning and development are the goals for continuing to improve ourselves as teachers (and learners), then there is a need to explore and inquire into the experiences of, and/or the epistemology of, professional practice through the reflection process. How is professional knowing and practice of field-based academics like and unlike the kinds of knowledge presented in academic textbooks, or to be found in conference presentations, invited papers and scholarly journals? "In what sense, if any, is there intellectual rigor in professional practice?" (Schön, 1983, p. viii). This exploration of professional development through reflection relies heavily on Donald Schön's work on the epistemology of practice. How can we best describe models of reflection that assist one toward a better understanding of the practical uses (and potential limits) of research-based knowledge?

The dilemma of the education professional can be reduced to questions of rigor versus relevance (Schön, 1983). In fields such as human and community development and education we find that most problems of real-world practice do not come to us as well-formed structures amenable to application of theory and research-based technique. They often do not present themselves to us as "problems" but rather as "situations," "challenges" and "opportunities." Educators, Schön points out, "are increasingly aware of the zones of indeterminacy in practice that call for artistry but are bound by institutional commitments, to a normative pro-

fessional curriculum and a separation of research from practice that leaves no room for it" (pp. 42 - 46). The reflective process begins with an experienced dilemma (Ross, Bondy, & Kyle; 1993 p. 17).

An underlying assumption about the role of reflection as a means of improving professional practice (in its artistry, performance and design) is that it can be improved by collegial coaching. Collegialship (as pointed out by Senge) does not mean you share the same views. "On the contrary, the real power... comes into play when there are differences of view" (Senge, 1990 p.238). Collegial (or peer) coaching provides an opportunity for reciprocal reflection-in-action. Two studies investigating the benefits of reflective practice combined with action research centered on the development of professional knowledge by education professionals have been conducted by Featherstone, Munby, & Russell, 1997; and Korthagen & Wubbels, 1991.

Gross & Etzioni (1985) and Senge (1990) have developed models for viewing organizational models. Senge goes so far as to propose a strategy for organizational learning and development that may be of particular interest to education professionals. Educators in horizontal organizational structures, with participation by professionals from a variety of academic backgrounds and interests, can develop venues that promote ongoing collegial reflection. These diverse perspectives can foster the discussions that lead to the re-construction of educational goals and programs, and foster professional development -- Carpe Diem!

PROFESSIONAL STEPS

"I have had my solutions for a long time. But I do not yet know how I am to arrive at them."

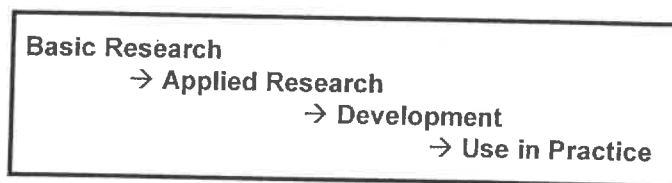
- Karl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855)

The opportunities for us as educators and human development professionals to make a difference, in areas we think differences are most needed, begin to unfold as we assess possibilities, plan the strategies for achieving the potential of our collegial "community" team, and take action. Change – a key ingredient of all innovation – is in

the educational wind. What differences are we committed to, and what changes are we willing to make? What changes are we *committed* to make? How will we bring and express our individual craft-skill and artistry as professionals to the overall goals of *education*? What unanswered questions and as yet uninvestigated inquiries would lead to breakthroughs in our field? In our professional practice?

As human development professionals, we are charged with bringing together basic research and its use in practice. While these are often seen as opposing demands, Schoenfeld (1999) provides us with a model that brings synergy to the dilemma.

FIGURE 1



Schoenfeld's Progression from Research to Use

Some of us focus on innovation within the existing parameters of our professional work (refining, fine tuning, making needed adjustments, improving...) while others invent – perhaps inventing entirely new ways – to reach new human development goals. Simply put, is our professional work to be a remodel job, or a new adventure? Both? Neither?

TEACHER AND STUDENT AS LEARNER (CO-INQUIRERS)

The early work of Dewey cited earlier, and the more recent work of Schön and Russell, lead one to connect the teacher and learner as co-inquirers into the learning process. Although arguably the "teacher" usually has more knowledge about the topic under investigation, constructivist learning theory leads us to believe that the learner is, by definition doing the learning. Schön and Russell argue that the teacher is learning, too. There are several "moments" in the dynamic process of reflection-in-action as described by Schön

tial weighting are often unreliable and restrictive (Buchmann and Schweille; 1983). One can go so far as to say that experience without reflection is generally neither useful or helpful. LaBoskey (1993) suggests that "individuals need to learn how to process their experiences; they need to bring other knowledge, theoretical principles, and alternative interpretations to bear in any analysis of that experience; in short, they need to be reflective."

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ENCOURAGING REFLECTION

There are several opportunities and strategies for developing reflective skill that fit well with after-school, community-based educational programs, and can be modified as needed to fit the classroom. These range from the "One-Minute Reflection Periods," which emphasize cooperative learning as suggested by Armstrong (1994), to the inclusion of individual and group reflection times (Gardner; 1991). Some researchers have suggested the allocation of specific instructional time devoted to learners focusing on concept development vis-à-vis the "learning cycle" model of instruction (Karplus et al, 1977; Lawson, Abraham, & Renner, 1989; Marek & Cavallo; 1997). Reflection on experience, either as an individual or as part of a group, is particularly effective for concept development and cognitive consolidation (Guzzetti, Snyder, Glass, & Gamas, 1993). Johnson & Johnson (1975) describe the power of learners reflecting together and sharing insights with each other. Educators can and have developed many opportunities for cooperative work and reflection. Opportunities for cooperation and reflection can be found at gatherings such as after school club meetings, or classrooms when students are planning a community-based service learning projects. Each of these provides opportunities to reflect and learn from one's own experiences and/or the experiences of others. Individual or group portfolios and reports to community groups provide opportunity to reflect on lessons learned through experience. John Dewey emphasized the value of reflective thought, saying "it enables us to know what we are about

when we act. It converts action that is merely appetite, blind and impulsive into intelligent action." The goals of reflection are to learn the lessons our experiences provide us, to continue to grow, and contribute to our communities.

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