REFLECTIVE PRACTICE
A New Agenda for Education

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Chris Argyris and Donald Schön began, in 1971, what was to become a continuing inquiry into the dynamics of effective leadership. Asked to consider how to assist educational administrators to become more effective in initiating school reform, they observed that people's ideas about how things work, their "theories of action," were central to their effectiveness as leaders: to become more effective in school reform, administrators needed to learn not simply new skills, but new "theories of action" (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

This assumption prompted another important question: How do professionals become skilled, how do they learn new theories of action? After nearly a decade of inquiry, Schön (1983) concluded that skilled practitioners are reflective practitioners; they utilize their experience as a basis for assessing and revising existing theories of action to develop more effective action strategies.

Emphasizing the importance of reflection as a key element in professional growth, Schön also addressed the necessity for examining these theories of action within the context of professional practice. He maintained that there is a core of artistry, an exercise of intelligence, and a kind of knowing inherent in professional practice, which we can only learn about by carefully studying the performance of extremely competent professionals. Posing a challenge to educators, Schön (1987) and Argyris & Schön (1974) called for a reexamination of professional education to develop more effective means of educating professionals to this "artistry" of knowing.

This challenge has been met. During the last few years, there has been a growing interest in reflective practice as a means of professional development. In the field of education, teachers and administrators have seen rapid growth in the number of pre-service and in-service programs that incorporate the concepts of reflective practice — programs which use experience and

reflection to develop professional skills. This emphasis on reflective practice represents an important change in approach to professional education; but, more importantly, the interest in reflective practice signifies some important and dramatic changes in our ideas about school leadership and school reform.

This article reviews the concept of reflective practice within the framework of experiential learning theory, discusses ways in which reflective practice advances professional practice, and explores the implications of these ideas for professional education and for school reform.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: AN OVERVIEW

Reflection is concentration and careful consideration, and reflective practice is the mindful consideration of one's actions, specifically, one's professional actions. This reflective practice, however, is far more than leisurely speculation on one's own successes and failures, and far more than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Rather, reflective practice is a challenging, focused, and critical assessment of one's own behavior as a means towards developing one's own craftsmanship. While reflection is certainly essential to the process, reflective practice is a dialectic process in which thought is integrally linked with action. It is, as Schön describes, a "dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful" (1987, p. 31).

Prompted by a problem, a discrepancy between the real and the ideal, or between what occurred and what was expected, the practitioners step back and examine their actions and the reasons for their actions. They reflect on the effectiveness or legitimacy of these action choices, and they use this new perception as a means of developing alternate strategies. Through this dialectic process of thought and action, the practitioner takes an active role in shaping his or her own professional growth.

Reflective practice is a professional development method which enables individual practitioners to become more skillful and more effective. It is also a process that has a potentially positive impact on organizational effectiveness. As the following discussion explains, reflective practice enhances professional practice in several ways. It leads to greater self-awareness, to the development of new knowledge about professional practice, and to a broader understanding of the problems which confront practitioners. Because it enhances professional growth, and thereby responds to the needs of individual practitioners, it also influences the environment of the workplace in ways that support organizational change and effectiveness.

SELF-AWARENESS

While the term "reflective practice" was coined and popularized by Donald Schön, the argument that reflection is a critical step in professional development is historically rooted in a tradition of learning theory. Kolb's (1984) exploration of experiential learning traces a common theme — developed by Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget — that learning is dependent on the integration of experience with reflection, and of theory with practice. While each of these theorists argued that experience is the basis for learning, each also maintained that learning cannot take place without reflection. All viewed learning as a sequential process, consisting of four stages: concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts or generalizations, and active experimentation.

Experience provides the basis for learning: a problem or unexpected event prompts an inner sense of discomfort and perplexity. If this event is to create change, or to stimulate growth, the person must make meaning of that event, examine it, and appraise the activity. Out of this process of observation and reflection comes new meaning, alternative perspectives, and new views about how things work. These new perspectives then provide the rationale for experimentation. The learning process ends and begins anew as these new ideas become integrated into behavior.

While experience may serve as the stimulus for learning, reflection is the essential part of the process that makes it possible to learn from experience. Without reflection, theories of action are not revised and, until new concepts, ideas, or theories of action begin to influence behavior, learning will not occur.

Professional growth often depends not merely on developing new ideas or theories of action, but on eliminating or modifying those old ideas that have been shaping behavior. As Kolb explains: "All learning is relearning. Everyone enters every learning situation with more or less particular ideas about the topic at hand. . . . Some of our theories are more crude and incorrect than others. . . . Thus one's job as an educator is not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones" (1984, p. 28).

Before ideas can change, they must be identified. Our behavior is shaped by our ideas — ideas which have been shaped by countless experiences, cues, and reinforcements from our culture. In some cases, these ideas or theories have outlived their usefulness. New knowledge may have generated more appropriate, more effective ideas. Yet, because our old ideas are so deeply engrained, they may continue to shape our behavior even though, at some level, we accept the validity of the new information. In the vernacular of

reflective practice, this appears as a contradiction between the espoused theory and the theory-in-use. Our actions are not always consistent with our intent; what we say we believe (espoused theory) sometimes differs from what we actually do (theory-in-use). These contradictions are quite common in the school context, but in many cases they are detected only through a process of careful observation, initiated in response to a perceived problem.

Studies of time on task and equity in the classroom illustrate the discrepancies between intent and behavior, and show how we often fail to understand our own behavior and its impact. There are few teachers or administrators who would not wholeheartedly agree that all children should be treated equitably within the classroom. Yet the reality is far different. Observational studies have repeatedly demonsrated that children are treated differently depending on such characteristics as gender, race, and ability level. There are few school personnel who would dispute the statement that schools are places for learning. Yet, observation shows that over the period of the day, there is relatively little time devoted to instruction. Administrators, too, have learned that, although their first priority is instructional improvement, their time is diverted into countless other directions.

Theory X and Theory Y, described by Douglas McGregor (1960), provide another illustration of the discrepancies between espoused theory and theory-in-use. The Theory X-Y distinction poses two different and contrasting sets of assumptions about people. Theory X assumes that the average person resembles the Army's "goldbricker" who inherently dislikes work and will avoid responsibility wherever possible. People who hold this view tend to believe that people will do what they have to do only if they are closely supervised and controlled by someone — typically a higher echelon authority — who knows the "right" path. While there are few people would claim to espouse these views, there is evidence that suggests that Theory X is a widespread theory-in-use within our schools. Whether one looks at relationships between administrators and teachers, between schools and community, or between teachers and students, the impact of Theory X is apparent in assumptions, language, and actions. Teachers assume that the inner-city parents' failure to attend PTA meetings represents a lack of concern, and they become reluctant to contact parents to provide information or obtain support. Administrators assume that teachers' lack of creativity in the classroom signifies a lack of caring or commitment, and they utilize the supervisory process to provide judgment rather than support. In each of these examples, there is an assumption that people act out of less-than-noble motives. In some cases, this assumption may be correct; in others, it may not. The important point, however, is that the assumption directly or indirectly influences the

actions and interactions which follow, whether it be in the form of an up-raised eyebrow, a particular tone of voice, or a decision about policies and procedures.

These examples illustrate how deeply-engrained assumptions (theories-in-use) may contradict what we espouse, may shape our behavior in ways that may not have the desired impact, and may defeat our best efforts to change. In these situations, the desire to change, or to develop more positive modes of interaction, are blocked by deeply engrained ideas: "Resistance to new ideas stems from conflict with old beliefs that are inconsistent" (Kolb, 1984, p. 28).

Reflective practice challenges us to discover those habits of belief or behavior which preserve the inadequacies of the current system and prevent the introduction of new and better approaches to education. Through the reflective process, we subject our own actions to critical assessment. By posing questions about our own behavior—What am I doing? Why? With what effect?—we develop new perspectives, new ways of looking at our own actions, and a new awareness or understanding of our behavior. In Brookfield's terms, through reflection, or critical thinking, "patterns of behavior become clear, habitual responses are identified and insights dawn regarding the nature of our assumptions and motivations." With this under-standing, "People can make some judgments about the effectiveness of different actions in changing some aspects of their lives, and they can try to learn from whatever errors they have made" (1987, p. 78). As we become more aware of our theories-in-use, we become more aware of contradictions between what we do and what we hope to do; as a result, we can shape new directions.

KNOWLEDGE OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

By increasing self-awareness, the reflective process creates opportunities for continued professional growth. Reflective practice also contributes to professional growth in another way. As the above examples demonstrate, professionals are often unaware of the many ways in which their own behavior is self-defeating. At the same time, they are often unaware of the many ways in which their actions are highly effective.

A good educator—teacher or administrator—is a skilled craftsman, but that knowledge is not always at a conscious level. Effective practices become as deeply engrained in behavior as ineffective practices. Over the last decade, efforts to discover more about the craft of teaching have demonstrated that the master teacher is often unable to explain what combination of strategies

leads to their impressive results, which are readily apparent to administrators, other teachers, students, and parents. It goes without saying that there is mastery, but being able to share that knowledge to help someone replicate the skilled performance is another matter.

If one aspect of professional growth is to identify and change those habits which minimize our effectiveness, another equally important aspect is to recognize and support those habits which enhance professional accomplishment. If reflective practice challenges educators to identify which aspects of performance need improvement, it also challenges them to elucidate and clarify the successful strategies that are evident in the practice of skilled practitioners. Reflective practice asks not only that we develop a conscious awareness of the craft of practice, but also that we develop an ability to articulate that knowledge. In Friere's language, as Kolb (1984) explains, we are required to "name the world"; and, in naming, we give meaning to the world around us. By articulating tacit knowledge, professional skills can be shared and can become part of an enriched body of knowledge which will serve as an explicit guide for others who seek to improve their performance.

The reflective process also increases our understanding and awareness of the problems of practice. Much of the work of professionals, including that of teachers and principals (Barth, 1981), is not visible to the public, or even to other teachers and principals. Those aspects of work which are revealed, or open to public view, are limited. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), for example, discuss the tendency of teachers to hide the "imperfect processes of their thinking," allowing their students to glimpse only the polished products" (p. 215). Typically, problems of practice are among those aspects of professional work which are hidden from view.

Because of the assumption that learning is a lifelong process, that people — and organizations — are engaged in a continual process of improvement, reflective practice brings the discussion of problems into a public forum. While it is assumed that the practitioner can be highly effective in generating solutions to problems, it is also assumed that problems are a normal part of the reality of practice and are often rooted in the system, rather than in personal inadequacies. Within the reflective practice framework, problems are not a stigma nor a sign of failure, but a challenge to seek new and better ways, and to create knowledge. Problems become, not dirty linen to be kept from the public's view, but opportunities for dialogue, learning, and change.

Reflective practice legitimizes discussion of these "imperfect processes." At the classroom level, Sarason (1971), Shor (1980) and Belenky et al. (1986)

found that critically reflective teachers — teachers who make their own thinking public, and therefore subject to discussion — are more likely to have classes that are challenging, interesting, and stimulating for students. At a more abstract level, this type of problem-oriented discussion enriches our knowledge and understanding of the reality of professional practice, and enhances the opportunity for professional growth and for organizational reform. The perception of a problem, or the perceived discrepancy between the reality and the ideal, serves as stimulus for observation, reflection, and, ultimately, the generation of possible solutions. Without a clear understanding of the problem effective solutions are unlikely, and the reflective process engenders understanding.

CARING AND COLLABORATION

As the articulation of craft-knowledge, reflective practice further enhances professional growth and development by facilitating dialogue among practitioners. This dialogue, in turn, establishes a basis for understanding, caring, and cooperation in the workplace.

The process of describing one's own experience increases opportunities for communication and collaboration. The reflective process enables us to share our experiences. When sharing takes place in a public forum, with other like-minded colleagues, the process of communication leads not only to new knowledge but to greater understanding of others as well as understanding of self. Real communication, a sharing of experiences, and the resulting empathy and understanding cannot take place without the self-awareness which comes from reflection. Out of this communication comes understanding and a sense of community, a commonality of purpose despite differences of opinion. "If one can discover the experiential logic behind these ideas [those of the 'other'], the ideas become less strange and the owners of the ideas cease to be strangers. The world becomes warmer and more orderly" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 115). Through reflection and through communication focused on common professional concerns, the ideas of others become less strange, those others cease to be strangers, and the search for new and better ways of achieving professional goals becomes a public and collaborative process, rather that an isolated and individual effort. This process of sharing ideas and experiences requires the individual to stretch his or her own vision, and "Through mutual stretching and sharing, the group achieves a vision richer than any individual could achieve alone" (Belenky et al. 1986, p. 119).

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Although it is perhaps an oversimplification, reflective practice is a process that requires the application of critical thinking skills to professional problems. Habits of reflection are habits of critical thought. As we have seen, reflective practice enhances professional growth in several ways. Because it requires us to examine the ideas and assumptions which shape our behavior, it leads to a greater self-awareness. By exploring the dynamics of practice, reflection expands the repertoire of strategies available to the practitioner. Because it is designed as a problem-solving technique, reflection increases our understanding of the problems which confront educators on a day-to-day and long term basis and encourages practitioners to design and implement responses to these problems. Because it utilizes personal experience and encourages dialogue, the reflective process establishes the basis for collaboration. All of these outcomes enable the individual practitioner to become more skilled; they also contribute to organizational effectiveness.

Reflective practice allows — in fact, demands — that we "call into question the assumptions underlying our customary, habitual ways of thinking and acting and then be ready to think and act differently on the basis of this critical questioning" (Brookfield, 1987, p. 1). These habits of reflection or critical thinking, and this willingness to question and to scrutinize current ways of doing and thinking as a means of finding new and better ways, are closely linked to organizational effectiveness. Organizational studies in a variety of contexts conclude that the most innovative and productive organizations are those which encourage their members to scrutinize organizational behavior, to challenge existing practices, and to continually look for better ways of doing things (Brookfield, 1987). Kanter's 1983 study, for example, found that most innovative and adaptive companies were distinguished by "the willingness to move beyond received wisdom, to combine ideas from unconnected sources, to embrace change as an opportunity to test limits" (p. 27).

If critical thinking is important for organizations in general, then critical thinking is particularly important for schools. Teaching and administration are tasks that are characterized in organizational literature as ambiguous and unpredictable, and although they share common problems of practice, these problems differ in ways that require unique, tailored-to-fit, responses. Under these conditions of variety, ambiguity, and stress, Lowy, Kelleher, and Finestone (1986) found that the most effective managers were those who were open to information, acknowledged the need to learn on the job, and were constantly seeking ways in which existing practices might be improved.

Reflective practice, then, is viewed as a professional development technique that enhances organizational, as well as individual, performance.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE:
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

The common-sense aspects of good ideas often belie their significance. Reflective practice suggests that critical assessment of professional performance is key to becoming a skilled practitioner. This concept also maintains that personal and subjective aspects of professional practice need to be recognized and examined, that learning which is experiential, personal, and collaborative maximizes professional growth, and that learning is a process which is intended to achieve not only knowledge but understanding. In many ways, these ideas are consistent with the most important learning theories that were expounded during the last century. Yet, as the following discussion suggests, the practice of professional education often reflects different and contrasting theoretical perspectives.

A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

By emphasizing the importance of ideas and the subjective aspects of personal experience, reflective practice rejects certain aspects of the scientific tradition and suggests the need to develop new ways of knowing. That ideas influence action is not a new concept. Barbara Ward (1959) identified five ideas that changed the world. Ortiz and Marshall (1988) have traced theories of classical organization to gender discrimination, antagonism between teachers and administrators, and the perpetuation of bureaucratic strategies of organization and control. Effective schools' research has identified vision, expectations, values, and organizational culture as important components of effective leadership, and of effective schools. These findings reflect a growing recognition that qualitative inquiry into the personal and subjective elements of organizational behavior is not only appropriate but essential, if we are to understand administrative processes and improve them. Surprisingly, this approach represents a major conceptual and methodological shift.

Traditionally, behavioral research, including research on school management and reform, has largely ignored ideas, intent, or other subjective aspects

of behavior. Social science, in its quest for scientific legitimacy, has modeled itself after the physical sciences and has adopted their criteria of empiricism and objectivism. Education, to establish its own "scientific" validity, has also accepted these standards, and has excluded from its focus "subjective" elements of their human experience.

This strict empiricism is challenged by reflective practice as an inadequate representation of behavior that limits our ability to understand. Musing that "There's something extremely slippery about the concept of behavior," Ossorio (1975), for example, maintains that any description of behavior which fails to address intentions, desires, and feelings is deficient and incomplete. As an alternative to traditional concepts, he conceptualizes behavior not merely as observable actions, but as intentional action — that is, action in which the person engages in order to achieve a specific outcome. Within this model, a successful performance is one in which a person chooses and negotiates a course of action that achieves the intended results.

Reflective practice incorporates this concept of behavior as intentional action, and it emphasizes the necessity to examine those subjective, and often unique, aspects of behavior which distinguish one person from another, and provide a rationale when rational answers fail. To understand behavior, to understand the "artistry" of practice, requires the examination of the unique attitudes, assumptions, and motivations that shape the behavior, as well as the actions, in which the person engages as a chosen means to the goal.

AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

Reflective practice redefines both the concept of learning, and the role of the learner in the learning process. By emphasizing the importance of both personal experience and ideas, reflective practice establishes the importance of theory, but counsels against the study of theory in isolation from practice. Recognizing that the search for knowledge begins with experience and that no learning takes place unless the learner is both involved in and transformed by the learning process, reflective practice also emphasizes that the practitioner is central to the learning process.

The role of the practitioner becomes central to the learning process in another way. The concept of reflective practice assumes that the learning process is purposeful, and that it is a search not merely for knowledge, but for understanding and meaning which lead to change. Through their experience, practitioners have developed knowledge and can therefore play a key role in the construction of new knowledge, and in the development of a knowledge base which can advance professional practice.

Again, these assumptions appear obvious, but, as Kolb explains, "In the overeager embrace of the rational, scientific and technological, our concept of the learning process itself was distorted first by rationalism and later by behaviorism. We lost touch with our own experience as the source of personal learning and development" (1984, p. 2). The impact of this loss can be readily detected in professional education. Professional education too often rejects the lessons of experiential learning and, instead, adopts a didactic model in which responsibility for defining learning objectives remains external to the learner; a model in which the learner is viewed as a passive recipient of information, rather than an active and equal partner in the construction of knowledge; a model which relies on external expertise to the exclusion of personal experience; a model which is individualistic, rather than collaborative. Reflective practice encourages us to recognize again the importance of experience in the learning process.

In their study, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky et al. (1986) identify progressive stages of knowing. At successive stages, the role of the learner in the learning process changes and the learner begins to use information from a wider variety of sources. At the more primitive stages of knowing, the learner acts as a passive recipient, a vessel into which knowledge is poured, or relies solely on intuition to the exclusion of the experience or knowledge of others. At a more advanced level, called "procedural knowledge," the learner accepts the dictates of the scientific rational model in its perceived need to exclude the personal and the subjective, to detach oneself, and to pursue objective truth in a value-free (and therefore "superior") way. At the most advanced level of knowing, "constructed knowledge," the learner moves beyond the confines of earlier stages and uses both objective and subjective ways of knowing, personal experience, and the experience of others; the learner seeks to achieve understanding, and actively participates in the construction of new knowledge.

Reflective practice, in a sense, encourages us to seek a different and more effective way of knowing, and to become "constructed" knowers. It encourages us, not to disavow procedural knowledge or scientific detachment, but to expand the scope of inquiry, and to expand the sources of information as a means of pursuing professional development. By emphasizing the importance of experience and self, reflective practice encourages constructed knowing. Reflective practice, like constructed knowledge, requires not the exclusion of rationality, but the reintroduction of those aspects of thought and action which have been excluded from conscious attention. Reflective practice and constructed knowledge both maintain the importance of careful,

systematic observation and conscious, deliberate and rational analysis. They also incorporate those subjective aspects of experience which have typically been excluded from consideration, and this inclusion enriches rather than dilutes the search for meaning.

Reflective practice also parallels constructed knowledge in its emphasis on the collaborative and collegial nature of learning. Reflective practice begins with the self, but it achieves fruition when reflection leads to communication and collaboration. Reflective practice accepts Kolb's counsel that "The learning process must be reimbued with the texture and feeling of human experiences shared and interpreted through dialogue with one another" (1984, p. 2). In so doing, it becomes a search not merely for expression, but for meaning — a search which takes place not through monologue, but through dialogue and conversation. It begins with the mind but makes room for the heart which, as Robertson Davies' (1985) character Simon Darcourt so elegantly expressed, leads to real understanding.

> Science is the theology of our time, and like the old theology it's a muddle of conflicting assertions. What gripes my gut is that it has such a miserable vocabulary and such a pallid pack of images to offer to us . . . The old priests in his black robe gave us things that seemed to have concrete existence; . . . the new priest in his whitish lab-coat gives you nothing at all except a constantly changing vocabulary which he - because he usually doesn't know any Greek - can't pronounce, and you are expected to trust him implicitly because he knows what you are too dumb to comprehend. It's the most overweening, pompous priesthood mankind has ever endured in all its recorded history, and its lack of symbol and metaphor and its zeal for abstraction drive mankind to a barren land of starved imagination. But you, Maria, speak the old language that strikes upon the heart. You talk (about the Recording Angel and you talk about his lesser angels), and we both know exactly what you mean. (p. 16)

In contrast with a scientific tradition which minimizes the importance of ideas, emotions, and experience, reflective practice emphasizes the value of both experience and reflection. It is a dynamic process that seeks to advance the quality of professional practice. Emphasizing the integral nature of ideas and action, reflective practice seeks not only to expand knowledge, but to achieve meaning and to use that meaning to transform action. Reflective practice recognizes the importance of dialogue for learning, emphasizes the importance of collaborative effort toward common goals, and calls for the learner to be actively involved in the learning process, to become not a passive recipient of information, but a creator of knowledge.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE:
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Reflective practice has important implications for the preparation and development of professional educators, but its implications are equally important for schools and for educational reform. There are few who would deny that there is a need for major structural reform in schools. Confronted with changing social and demographic conditions, increasing alienation on the part of staff and students, and escalating costs with no commensurate increase in results (particularly for the most vulnerable segments of society), schools must find more effective ways to achieve their goals. Reform is desperately needed, but our experience over the last few decades has shown that traditional approaches to reform are largely ineffective. As Sarason reiterated in 1971, "The more things change, the more they stay the same" (p. 172).

Reflective practice offers an alternative approach to change, one which emphasizes people and ideas. Reflective practice proposes that people can shape organizations. This notion, like other aspects of reflective practice, seems to reflect common sense, yet digresses from the predominant theories-in-use. As Bolman and Deal (1984, p. 237) point out, the proposition that "organizations can be significantly influenced by the theories of their participants" diverges from traditional social science models in which "the significant causal arrow is from the phenomena to the theory," and questions the assumption that "there is an objective reality that exists independent of human theories about it and simply waits for us to understand it."

Reflective practice assumes that two elements are necessary if individuals are to bring about change: reflection and agency. Through reflection, professionals develop ideas about how to do things more effectively, and they transform these ideas into action. Whether or not change occurs depends on whether or not people have ideas, and on whether or not they experience a sense of agency or personal causality that enables them to become actively involved in the change process and to introduce new strategies within the classroom, the school, the district, or the community.

Within this theoretical framework, effective organizations will be those organizations which encourage reflective practice both individually and collectively. Effective organizations will be those which encourage collaborative problem-solving and innovation. When we examine the nature of organizational life in the majority of schools and school districts throughout the country against these two standards, the reality falls short of the ideal.

There is little time or support for reflective practice on the part of individual teachers and administrators, and the environment of the work place is typically not structured to support reflective practice on a school-wide or district-wide basis.

REFLECTION IN SCHOOLS

Reflective practice maintains that the habit of reflection is an important component of effective organizational leadership, and is essential for educational reform.

> When we become critical thinkers we develop an awareness of the assumptions under which we, and others, think and act. We learn to pay attention to the context in which our actions and ideas are generated. We become skeptical of quick fix solutions, of single answers to problems, and of claims of universal truth. We also become open to alternative ways of looking at, and behaving in, the world. When we are critical thinkers within our intimate relationships we learn to see our own actions through the eyes of others. At our workplaces, we seek . . . to take initiative in charting new directions and in designing the form and content of our activities. Without critical thinking our personal relationships become atrophied, our workplaces remain organized as they were twenty years ago, and our political involvements dwindle to the point of total nonparticipation. (Brookfield, 1987, pp. x, 1)

Yet, despite the recognition that reflective practice, or critical thinking in Brookfield's terms, is important for individual and organizational growth, schools have been negligent in their efforts to nurture and support critical thinking. Citing Peters and Waterman (1982) among others, Brookfield concluded that "Workplaces in which innovation, creativity, and flexibility are evident are workplaces in which critical thinkers are prized" (1987, p. 139). In schools, however, the reverse is often the case. Critical thinkers are often not prized, and innovation, creativity, and flexibility are not evident. Schools typically do not reward or encourage critical thinking, nor do they establish conditions that enhance critical thinking, reflective practice, or professional growth. Those who rise to the top tend to be those who "don't blot the copy"; critical thinkers are categorized, not as desirables, but as troublemakers.

If schools have been negligent in providing work environments that nurture and develop these important skills, then professional education has also been negligent. There has been a growing emphasis on the need to develop the thinking skills of elementary and secondary students. Yet,

ironically, and perhaps in response to practitioners' demands for "relevant" education, the importance of critical thinking skills for teachers and school administrators has not received as much attention.

Reflective practice assumes that learning is a lifelong process and that artistry is a standard of performance far beyond basic competence. In theory, we espouse these assumptions; yet, in practice, we act as if the need for continued learning reflects incompetence. Our actions imply that there should be no need for continued learning, that the acceptance of employment assumes a skilled performance. We espouse the view that one becomes a skilled practitioner through an ongoing process of experience, reflection, and experimentation, but our actions contradict our words. We espouse the importance of staff development while cherishing the notion that "good teachers are born not made". We give lip service to the need for staff development, yet staff development services — and budgets — are frequently low priorities. We reward those who are apparently successful and we reject those who admit to problems and ask for help, whether these people are teachers with discipline problems or principals in schools with low test scores.

Reflective practice assumes that problems are opportunities that support professional growth and enhance organizational effectiveness. In contrast, perhaps in response to continued external review and criticism, schools tend to engage in a conspiracy of silence. There is little open discussion of problems, and only a few instances of collaborative problem-solving efforts. Rather than being workplaces which encourage the risk-free discussion of problems, schools are too often environments in which problems are denied and hidden. Rather than rewarding those willing to identify and grapple with problems, the system seems to look more favorably on those who "don't rock the boat." Instead of recognizing that so many of the important problems confronted by schools are shaped by social reality, we continue to view problems as individual deficiencies.

These patterns of organizational behavior are not exclusive to schools. Belenky et al.'s examination of women's experience in higher education suggests that the university classroom does not always support the development of reflective skills. Their study shows that in many instances the learning process has become a game in which words are used to batter rather than to encourage, a game which the authors trace to the emphasis on scientific rationality and the perceived need to pursue truth in an impersonal and value-free way. In this "doubting game," the objective is to criticize; to discover the flaws; to look, not for a better way of doing things, but for something wrong — "a loophole, a factual error, a logical contradiction, the

omission of contrary evidence" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 104). In this environment, revealing problems or imperfections is as risky as it is within the school workplace.

If organizations, schools, and universities want to foster reflective practice in the workplace or the classroom, they must create an atmosphere that values communication, participation, and the ability to openly discuss problems without fear of embarrassment or retribution. They must focus their efforts on finding ways to make things work, rather than on trying to find a list of reasons why things would not work. Whether or not this type of environment develops depends to a certain extent on structural characteristics. Two characteristics associated with critical thinking and innovation are decentralization and horizontal communication (Brookfield, 1987). Current efforts to reform decision-processes by involving more members of the school community — teachers, administrators, and community members — are positive signs. Yet, a great deal remains to be done to modify the predominant organizational model which is characterized by highly centralized decision-making processes and a predominantly vertical pattern of communication which restricts both the quality and quantity of information distributed throughout the organization.

As a basis for change, schools must become organizations which support reflection, and which enable people to examine ideas and actions openly, critically, and collaboratively. If schools are to change, theories-of-action must change.

AGENCY IN SCHOOLS

Reflective practice emphasizes not only ideas, but the transformation of these ideas into action. If vision and ideas distinguish effective leaders, so does their ability to translate these ideas into action. Schön's concept of reflective practice incorporates a view of human motivation which assumes that individuals want to become more effective, and that they naturally strive to improve their performance (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Through this search to master themselves and their environment, individuals ultimately determine whether organizations will be effective. Effective leaders are agents of change. They disregard the system, they break the rules, and their behavior is shaped by a unique vision. Like Don Quixote, they dare to dream, but their tilting at the windmills of bureaucratic decay and inefficiency is more informed and more successful than that of the legendary Quixote. Nonetheless, these visionaries, these agents of change, tend to be the exception rather

than the rule, in a system which can't seem to figure out how to cut through its own red tape to make things work.

If change is to occur, organizations must enable their members to be active participants in the organizational process. Unfortunately, there is evidence that this basic pre-condition is absent. Erickson's comment in 1972 that administrative powerlessness is one of the most pervasive realities of organizational life is still valid. Although the aggressive stance of some teachers in seeking empowerment may be viewed as a rejection of powerlessness and a desire to exercise causality, symptoms of powerlessness — low morale, lack of innovation and creativity, alienation, and depression — persist among teachers, administrators, and students. Whether or not change occurs depends as much on preconceived notions about what is possible and permissible as on the reality. This pervasive belief that individuals are powerless to change the "system" undermines the possibility of change. Unless schools can reverse these attitudes and create conditions that engender a sense of efficacy, no change will occur.

What can schools do to reverse this trend? How can they encourage reflection and agency among teachers and administrators? At a very basic level, they must become organizations which place people's needs first. Argyris & Schön commented that the "ineffectiveness, costliness, and deteriorating quality of products and services were found to be based on the fact that organizations were designed originally to ignore human nature, to ignore individuals' feelings and most of their abilities, and to exploit them" (1974, p. xi). The subordination of the individual to the system and the failure to recognize personal needs fosters alienation, powerlessness, and detachment. John MacMurray's (1961) metaphor of the spectator is particularly appropriate for describing the behavioral and attitudinal impact of this depersonalization:

> Social history is a drama which unrolls itself before him, and which he watches and understands. But he also has a part to play upon the stage. In his public capacity a role is assigned to him, and it is his task to play his role properly; and he can only do this by suppressing his own self-expression and acting in the way that the author of the drama intended the part to be played. He must identify himself with his role - his station and its duties - and suppresses his impulse to be himself. He can be himself only as a spectator, not as an actor. (p. 142)

Schön's concept of reflective practice assumes that change depends on agency, personal causality, leadership, and responsibility. An organizational

environment which encourages and rewards reflective practice is an organization which supports agency, and is an organization which enables individuals to act rather than to react.

Reflective practice fosters self-actualization and engenders a sense of empowerment. Assuming that the system can change and that the practitioner's efforts at personal improvement will ultimately determine organizational effectiveness, the reflective process enhances the sense of self-control and engages the person in system change. Belenky et al. (1986) discussed how the opportunity to develop one's own voice—and to be heard—enables one to play a different role, to begin to construct reality, and to become an actor rather than a spectator. Brookfield, too, comments on the associations among critical thinking, empowerment, and active involvement in the change process: "When we think critically, we come to our judgments, choices and decision for ourselves, instead of letting others do this on our behalf. We refuse to relinquish the responsibility for making the choices that determine our individual and collective futures to those who presume to know what is in our own best interests. We become actively engaged in creating our personal and social worlds" (1987, p. x).

Effective leadership requires an environment that values reflective practice and critical thought; it requires an environment that makes it possible for people to transform ideas into actions. If change is to occur, schools, as workplaces must be redesigned. They must become organizations that enhance personal and professional growth. They must become organizations that foster communication, habits of reflection and critical thought, and a continuing commitment to improvement on an individual and collective basis. They must become organizations that enable individuals to transform new ideas into action. They must become organizations in which every member is expected to be a leader.

An organization which encourages reflective practice, establishes an atmosphere of open communication, and rewards efforts to address problems, is also an organization which recognizes the importance of understanding, empathy, and collaboration. In an atmosphere of caring and collaboration, individuals are less likely "to suppress themselves," and are more likely to dedicate their efforts to improving their own performance and the performance of the organization as a whole.

Reflective practice challenges professional educators, whether they are academicians or practitioners, to develop their own skills in reflective practice and to create an environment in which concerned constituents—teachers, administrators, and citizens—can work together to address the problems of schools. Reflective practice asks us to give up the "doubting game" and begin

playing the "believing game" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 113), and asks us to try to understand, to share ideas, and to use this collective knowledge and experience to discover new ways to make schools work better.

CONCLUSIONS

Reflective practice symbolizes dramatic changes in our ways of thinking, and poses challenges to those whose actions influence the quality of education — academicians, practitioners, administrators, teachers, parents and legislators.

Reflective practice challenges professional education to broaden its perspective and to revise its goals and methods. Emphasizing the importance of theory and ideas, experience and reflection, and the purposeful pursuit of knowledge, reflective practice challenges artificial distinctions and status differentials between theory and practice, intellect and emotions, academicians and practitioner. Reflective practice also recognizes and addresses the need for communication and collaboration.

Emphasizing the importance of the person as a key component in organizational change, reflective practice challenges educators to become personally and actively involved in the creation of better schools. It challenges them to examine the ideas which shape schools and to actively engage in reconstructing that reality. Without restructuring the underlying mindscapes, restructuring of schools will not occur.

However, if members of the educational community are to participate in the change process, and participate in the task of redesigning schools their efforts must be encouraged and supported. Accordingly, reflective practice challenges educational institutions to establish a learning environment in which educators can develop and utilize those skills, those habits of reflection and agency, which are so critical to continuing professional growth and organizational change.

Argyris and Schön proposed that organizations will be more likely to begin to "decrease the movement toward entropy and increase the forces toward learning and health" when they adopt "a theory of action which enhances human activity, responsibility, self-actualization, learning and effectiveness" (1974, p. xi). If schools are to change, they must first and foremost become workplaces that respond to human needs, and workplaces that support professional growth and enable educators to act as reflective practitioners. In becoming organizations which foster professional growth and development, schools will become more effective.

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