

A CRITIQUE OF SCHÖN'S VIEWS ON TEACHER EDUCATION: CONTRIBUTIONS AND ISSUES

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In addressing fundamental questions about professional practice, Schön has contributed significantly to our thinking about curriculum and supervision. What is the nature of professional practice? What knowledge and competence are needed? What possibilities exist for articulating and codifying professional practice? What modes of education and initiation are appropriate for professional practice? Through analyses and case studies across the range of professions, Schön addresses these questions, both generically and concretely.

SCHÖN'S MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Schön argues for a new epistemology of professional practice, with its point of departure in the competence and artistry already embedded in the indeterminant zones of skillful practice. He explores the nature of appropriate education for such practice and proposes a central role for the reflective practicum. Thus, he broadens our horizons, reduces our isolation, and points the way to new linkages. He demonstrates that these fundamental questions of teacher education are common across the diverse professions and the arts. For example, many astute observers of teaching—most notably Jackson, Lortie, and Dreeben—have characterized it as complex, conflict-ridden, and endemically uncertain.¹ Few researchers or teachers would disagree. These observations tend to be linked with arguments about poor prospects for developing an adequate knowledge base for teaching and questions about the status of teaching as a true profession. Through analysis of case examples across the professions, Schön powerfully demonstrates that these qualities of complexity characterize every professional practice.

As another example of linkages, we can see echoed across the professions the perennial, cyclical debates about the nature of teaching—as technology,

¹Philip W. Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968); Daniel C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Robert Dreeben, *The Nature of Teaching* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1970).

craft, or art—or about the nature of supervision—as applied science (e.g., Hunter) or reflection-in-action (e.g., Sergiovanni, Garman).² Moreover, Schön focuses our attention on undervalued aspects of every professional practice—the “practical knowledge,” the artistry, the reflection-in-action essential for dealing with problems that do not yield to technical instrumental solutions.

Here, the history of curriculum reform in medical education, a profession often viewed as prototypical of the major professions, is instructive. As medicine took on professional status in the early 20th century, the model for medical education originating at Johns Hopkins University lay firmly in the basic laboratory-science disciplines, it included two years of basic science study, followed by two years on hospital wards where students learned to apply basic science knowledge to clinical medicine.³

During the last 35 years, we have witnessed significant reforms in medical education, tending on the whole to increasing early curricular emphasis on the problems of actual medical practice. This era of reform began in the early 1950s when Case Western Reserve University organized its preclinical curriculum around the study of organ systems through interdisciplinary presentations of the basic and clinical sciences and a patient-based introduction to clinical medicine.⁴ The majority of American medical schools adopted this curriculum model, and it remains predominant. In the mid-1960s, several medical schools went beyond disciplinary integration to experiments with problem-based curriculums in which carefully chosen medical problems provide the organizational framework for studying the basic and clinical sciences. This curriculum model, now adopted at Harvard Medical School, has been held up as a beacon for medical education for the 21st century.⁵ As medicine has become more secure in its professional status, it has increasingly found its focus in the problems of medical practice and its sources in the relevant basic and clinical sciences.

As a further example of the linkages, investigators in teacher education have repeatedly referred to the significant knowledge base for teaching embedded in the practice of master teachers. These researchers have argued for the need to articulate and codify this knowledge base for the benefit of

²Madeline Hunter, *Mastery Teaching* (El Segundo, CA: TIP Publications, 1982), Thomas J. Sergiovanni, “Toward a Theory of Clinical Supervision,” *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 9 (Winter 1976): 20; Noreen B. Garman, “Reflection, the Heart of Clinical Supervision: A Modern Rationale for Professional Practice,” *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 2 (Fall 1986): 2.

³Abraham Flexner, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, Bulletin No. 4 (New York: Carnegie Foundation, 1910).

⁴Greer Williams, *Western Reserve's Experiment in Medical Education and Its Outcomes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁵Association of American Medical Colleges, *Physicians for the Twenty-First Century: Report of the Panel on the General Professional Education of the Physician and College Preparation for Medicine* (Washington, DC: AAMC, 1984).

novices. Feiman Nemser and Floden have commented as recently as 1986 that the "practical wisdom of competent teachers remains a largely untapped source of insights for the improvement of teaching."⁶ Schön powerfully demonstrates this view and this quest across the professions.

In turn, Schön provides us with new perspectives on articulating master practice by exploring traditions of initiation into artistic practice in several professions and the fine arts. He recommends a generic form, the reflective practicum, as a central component of professional education. He analyzes characteristic master novice interactions in the practicum—encapsulated in the labels *follow me*, *joint experimentation*, and *hall of mirrors*—and thus he provides perspectives on the supervision process from the range of professions.

Schön's arguments for reflection-in-action and reflection-about-action as a form of research—and for research that would formulate the practices of master practitioners—is consistent with an increasing body of research on teaching, which Shulman has labeled the *teacher cognition and decision-making paradigm of research on teaching*.⁷ The basic aspiration of these researchers is to identify teachers' constructs, implicit theories, and strategies for action. They ask questions such as: What factors do teachers consider in instructional planning? What qualities characterize teachers' thinking and decision making during instructional action? What is the nature of teachers' perspectives, belief systems, and implicit theories about teaching and learning? This type of research, conducted by such investigators as Munby, Russell, Lampert, and Elbaz, holds great promise of providing useful perspectives for guiding teacher education.⁸

THREE CONCERNS

However, I have several concerns about Schön's formulations. In teacher education, no widespread institutional forms exist for the reflective practicum—both structures and supervisory skills in guiding reflection-about-action. Many highly touted ideas in education have floundered because they have not found a practical format in practice. Yet this deficiency should not be a cause for pessimism but an invitation to invention.

⁶Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Robert E. Floden, "The Cultures of Teaching," in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 3rd ed., ed. Merlin C. Wittrock (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. 505

⁷Lee S. Shulman, "Paradigms and Research Programs in the Study of Teaching: A Contemporary Perspective," in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 3rd ed., ed. Merlin C. Wittrock (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 3–26.

⁸Hugh Munby, "Metaphor in the Thinking of Teachers. An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 18 (April–June 1986): 197; Thomas Russell, "Beginning Teachers' Development of Knowledge-In-Action" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 1986). (ERIC ED 270 414); Magdalene Lampert, "Teaching About Thinking and Thinking About Teaching," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 16 (January–March 1984): 1–18; Freema Elbaz, *Teacher Thinking. A Study of Practical Knowledge* (New York: Nichols, 1983)

This is a time of ferment in teacher education, reflected in several recent mission statements and, thus, a time for rethinking the forms of initiation into teaching.⁹ Medical education, which has a prototypical reflective practicum in its traditions of clinical education for third- and fourth-year students and medical residents, provides another example. Clinical education, as well as patient care, is organized in teams in teaching hospitals, each including an attending physician, residents, and medical students. Students learn clinical medicine in the context of increasing responsibility for patient care. Concomitantly, they learn in traditions that institutionalize reflective inquiry, for masters as well as novices. Every teaching hospital has traditions of daily case based conferences—attending rounds, morning report, grand rounds—during which master practitioners and novices blend practical and research based inquiry in the context of patient care. The recommendations for education in almost every recent mission statement—for master teachers, career ladders for teaching, school-university collaboration, and team teaching—might provide forms for the type of reflective practicum institutionalized in medical education.

A second concern relates to the dichotomy that Schön appears to introduce between reflection in action and technical knowledge and science based knowledge in his strong support for the importance of reflection in action in professional practice. This apparent dichotomy, I suspect, is an artifact of conceptual and rhetorical emphases introduced to focus on a neglected aspect of practice, but it conveys an inappropriate view of the nature of knowledge needed for professional practice. We may be convinced that reflection in action is essential in professional practice, but what informs reflection? Certainly experience, examples, observations, puzzles, descriptions, experiments, and back talk, as Schön would say, however, the special body of knowledge available for teaching should also inform and guide reflection about it.

This body of knowledge includes explanatory theories, such as Piaget's theory of cognitive development, or Dewey's theory of the relationship between knowledge and experience. Doctrines also fit here—general frames of reference or philosophical assumptions, such as the five curricular orientations identified by Eisner and Vallance.¹⁰ The body of knowledge also includes applied theories and practice theories—practitioners' doctrines, their generalizable strategies, and their decision parameters for carrying out the strategies in actual classrooms.¹¹ To inform reflection-in-action in professional

⁹The Holmes Group, *Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group* (East Lansing, MI: Holmes Group, 1986), American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, *Report of the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education* (Washington, DC: AACTE, 1985), Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Hyattsville, MD: Carnegie Forum, 1986).

¹⁰Elliott Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance, *Conflicting Conceptions of the Curriculum* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1974).

¹¹Ilene B. Harris, "An Exploration of the Role of Theories in Communication for Guiding Practitioners," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 1 (Fall 1985) 27–55.

practice, we must have this body of knowledge. Medical education, for example, gives substantial evidence that problem solving is not content-free. Physicians' performance on patient management problems appears to depend in part on content repertoires.¹²

A final concern. The dichotomy that Schön appears to introduce between tacit and codified knowledge again conveys an inappropriate view of the knowledge useful in professional practice. We must stress written codification of effective practice in education and the use of these codifications. As Lortie comments, "we do not find in education an equivalent to the centuries of codified experience encountered in law, engineering, medicine, divinity, architecture, and accountancy. . . . What meaningful record exists of the millions of teaching transactions that have occurred since the City on the Hill?"¹³ For example, teacher education could benefit from developing a body of cases, informed by codified case analyses, because cases do not speak for themselves.¹⁴ I suspect that Schön would agree with this suggestion because he did include case studies of reflective practice in *The Reflective Practitioner* and in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*.

WHAT'S AHEAD

I conclude with an anecdote and a warning. During the last year, the educational policy committee of our medical school has been engaged in an often acrimonious debate about curriculum organization, evolving now in some support for a problem-based curriculum organization. Recently, the committee was planning a retreat for the course directors who carry out the curriculum. One member said, "Now, we need to meet with the course directors so that they can implement our points." Another member issued a quick rejoinder. "They cannot implement our points. They can only implement the points they come to believe in and understand." This means, I think, that they can begin to carry out some version of a problem-based curriculum only if they believe in its value and begin to understand the principles and teaching strategies associated with it, an understanding that goes beyond the rhetoric of problem-based learning.

So, too, with Schön's ideas. The term *empowering* is currently popular among professional educators and is entirely consistent with his ideas. In leaving a recent conference, however, I heard someone say, "Everyone's talking about *empowering* this year, I wonder what it will be next year?" So,

¹²Eta S. Berner, "Paradigms and Problem-Solving. A Literature Review," *Journal of Medical Education* 59 (August 1984): 625.

¹³Daniel C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 58.

¹⁴F. Michael Connelly, "How Shall We Publish Case Studies of Curriculum Development? An Essay-Review of Reid and Walker's *Case Studies in Curriculum Change*," *Curriculum Inquiry* 8 (Spring 1978): 73-82.

the warning: If the concepts encapsulated in the term *empowering* are to become more than the rhetoric of the moment in education, we must do the hard work of persuasion, of debate, of tentative experiments, we must find the appropriate institutional forms. As Reid has argued in a recent issue of the *Educational Researcher*, the task is not easy. institutions resist changes in their traditional forms.¹⁵

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¹⁵William A. Reid, "Institutions and Practices Professional Education Reports and the Language of Reform," *Educational Research* 16 (November 1987): 10-15.

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