FROM STUDIO TO CLASSROOM—OR NOT?

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In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Schön describes a reflective practicum using the architectural studio as the model. He validates this prototype by equating the design process with reflection-in-action, employing Dewey’s definition of the designer as one who converts indeterminate situations to determinate ones.

Beginning with situations that are at least in part uncertain, ill-defined, complex, and incoherent (“messes,” as Russell Ackoff, 1979, has called them), designers construct and impose a coherence of their own. Subsequently they discover consequences and implications of their constructions—some unintended—which they appreciate and evaluate. Analysis and criticism play critical roles within their larger process. Their designing is a web of projected moves and discovered consequences and implications, sometimes leading to reconstruction of the initial coherence—a reflective conversation with the materials of a situation.¹

As an extension of his constructionist philosophy, Schön maintains that practitioners are “makers” because they construct situations.

He devotes most of the remainder of the book to a careful description and analysis of various reflective practicums patterned on this model. Three other professional practicums serve as examples: for musicians, for psychoanalysts, and for those using counseling and consulting skills. The focus of the discussion in all four examples is the interaction between the coach and the student. Despite the value and centrality of the relationship between the coach (mentor, supervisor, cooperating teacher, professor) and student teacher in a reflective practicum, Schön’s model has limitations in its application to teacher education.

THE REFLECTIVE PRACTICUM—PROBLEMS

Certain problems derive from the primary prototype—the architect’s studio—mainly because the situation involves the creation of a concrete

product. In describing design as a reflective conversation with the situation, Schön talks about practitioners stringing out a "web of moves". Each move the designer makes has to consider previous moves, as well as "the tree of further choices to which it leads, each of which has different meanings in relation to the systems of implication set up by earlier moves."2 He proposes that part of a professional's virtuosity lies in her ability to string out design webs of great complexity. But even the best cannot string out indefinitely. At certain points, she decides to make a move, and then she evaluates the results. The designer evaluates the moves by looking at expected and unexpected outcomes.

The web-stringing activity appears similar to the lesson-planning process. The teacher, however, cannot realize the outcomes until he has enacted the lesson. Even then, many problems with being able to "see" the product at all remain—ranging from biased and selective perception to the difficulties of determining what actually ended up in the minds of the learners.3

Jackson has eloquently discussed this problem in his 1986 essay, "The Uncertainties of Teaching." He points out another problem with the model, deciding when to stop. "Indeed, the very question of when the teacher's job is done, forget whether well or poorly, is problematic much of the time; it must be established by agreeing in advance upon some fairly arbitrary cutoff point, a time to call it quits, such as a date on the calendar or a set number of instructional sessions."4 Schön suggests one stopping point—when the practitioner has created something she "likes."

The other examples of reflective practicums focus less on the design of a product and more on the relationship between coach and student. The model also has problems in the transference to teacher education. Schön argues that part of the reason the model works so well is that it parallels the relationships the students have or will have in practice. The supervisor and student engage in behaviors similar to those the student engages in with his own client. The training of a psychoanalyst is one example in what Schön refers to as a case conference, "the therapist reenacts with his supervisor the world of his interaction with his patient."

The relationship between supervisor and student teacher does not mirror the relationship between teacher and students. Certain aspects do relate, for example, the supervisor can model appropriate attitudes toward the learner and learning. But the interpersonal dynamics, context, and technologies differ. The supervisor—student-teacher interaction equates more with Schön's reflection-on-action than with reflection-in-action. Certainly, the cooperating

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2Ibid., p. 62.
3For the former, see Thomas L. Good, Bruce J. Biddle, and Jere E. Brophy, Teachers Make a Difference (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975). For the latter, see Donald A. Norman, Learning and Memory (New York: Freeman, 1982).
teacher can model classroom behavior through demonstration teaching, but the reflection-in-action cannot be made as explicit as it can in the one-on-one reflective practicum Schöns describes. But what the successful supervisor of student teaching may do better is to model in pre-planning and post-debriefing sessions the behaviors that the student teacher should engage in before and after teaching the lesson, thus affecting the classroom reflection-in-action indirectly. This effect is powerful and important, but it needs to be better explicated and analyzed than Schöns has done so far.

Schöns acknowledges that some of the problems of professional practice are due to a conflict of role frames and value systems. As a solution, he suggests that participants negotiate contracts in which both parties agree to follow his “Model II” set of values. Some of those values include seeking out and providing others with directly observable data and correct reports; creating the conditions for free, informed choice; and trying to create for ourselves and for others awareness of the values at stake in decisions, awareness of the limits of our capacities, and awareness of the zones of experience free of defense mechanisms beyond our control. These values are valuable and worthy of pursuit, but the process of negotiating contracts between one teacher and up to 180 young people, who are often not present by choice, is exceedingly complex, especially in the environment of the public school system. Schöns himself points out the difficulty in carrying out the practice in the established bureaucracy of educational settings.

Lortie’s work reinforces the position that the nature of teaching is complex, entrenched, and difficult to change. In this setting, it is hard to find encouragement for teachers to pay the price of reflective practice, especially because reflection may temporarily inhibit action. The schools have little patience for this inhibition, and the novice teacher must have strong internal motivation to do so.

The success of a reflective practicum depends on the student’s ability to assess her own learning, says Schöns. He leaves it to the coach and student to develop this critical expertise in the course of their interactions with each other. The sole means for accomplishing the objective is for both to reflect aloud on their own learning, learning about one-on-one interaction, that is. But even when the practicum closely parallels a one-on-one interaction, Schöns admits that the proceedings are likely to be difficult. The reflective practicum in teacher education has additional problems of how to provide novices with the means and incentives for continuing to engage in reflective practice under often unfriendly conditions with large numbers of nonvoluntary “clients.”

**REFLECTION—TO WHAT ENDS?**

Does such a thing as bad reflection exist? Schöns suggests that the practitioner may evaluate the results of his experiment in reframing a problematic

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situation by his ability to solve the new problem he has set, by his appreciation of the unintended effects of action, and by the achievement of coherence. But given the "uncertainties of teaching," how can a teacher apply such criteria? Since he often cannot tell if or when he has solved the problem set, the answer is not straightforward.

Schön proposes an additional criterion for evaluating a reframing of the problem—its ability to keep the inquiry moving. But this criterion, without the others, is not much more informative. If the ends are as arbitrary as Jackson suggests, then reflective teaching is almost synonymous with ongoing inquiry. But aimless inquiry is useless.

Educators must continue to grapple with the problems of decision making in an indeterminate situation. Schön suggests that reflection is triggered only when results are surprising and undesirable, but teachers must be encouraged to reflect, no matter what their reaction to what they think is the outcome. Even though they must be made to understand that they can never assume they have achieved a final end, let alone the right one, they cannot be paralyzed to action. So they must also be helped to find means for framing problems and evaluating outcomes. The "logic of affirmation" in one sense does not apply, but in another sense "I like it" may be all teachers have to go on, so they, more so than many other professionals, must continue to reflect on their own appreciative systems and role frames.

Schön's prototype reflective practicum does not include means for addressing these exigencies of the teaching profession. Therefore, I would classify it, using Zeichner's paradigms, as 'traditional-craft teacher education.' Its critical component, the coach-student relationship, closely resembles the apprenticeship of the craft tradition. The problem with this orientation, according to Tom, is that "it has a tendency to be tied to the replication or imitation of current practice." The accumulated practitioners' experience is passed on by word-of-mouth or through demonstration. This method is especially dangerous in the teaching profession because critical self-reflection has not been a part of the tradition. Thus, the shared information is especially likely to be idiosyncratic and conservative. The problem may in part be avoided if the coach is not only reflective but can model and reinforce that reflective behavior as well.

In that case, we might be able to classify Schön's reflective practicum as 'inquiry-oriented teacher education.' Even then, it would not have a particu
larly strong inquiry orientation, as measured by Tom’s dimensions. Looking at the ontological status of the educational phenomena dimension, for example, Schön’s approach focuses more on an ongoing inquiry into classroom events than on the two higher levels of the scale—the political and ethical principles of teaching and the “just society.” I agree with others, including Tom and Zeichner, that reflective educational practice cannot and should not ignore these issues.

Schön is not explicit enough about this question of “rightness” in the reflective process. He hints at a position in an extensive consideration of an example of reflective practice from a science-based profession. The focus of concern was a problem of malnourishment in an area of Colombia. Schön concentrates on the different role frames different professions grappling with the problem applied to the situation. These role frames helped to determine the problems set, the strategies employed, and the facts treated as relevant. Schön elaborates on the solution a systems engineer, Dean Wilson, tried. The reader infers that Wilson’s was a better approach, especially because it attempted to reconcile several conflicting perspectives. But Schön does not reveal how we may evaluate whether one role frame is better than another; in fact, at times he even seems to contradict himself by implying that any well-constructed role frame is all right.

Potential seeds of solution to these shortcomings lie within Schön’s own work in his constants of reflective practice:

- the media, languages, and repertoires that practitioners use to describe reality and conduct experiments
- the appreciative systems they bring to problem setting, to the evaluation of inquiry, and to reflective conversation
- the overarching theories by which they make sense of phenomena
- the role frames within which they set their tasks and through which they bound their institutional settings

These critical issues demand conscientious definition. Unfortunately, Schön gives them short shrift. He claims that it was beyond the scope of his first book to pursue that line of inquiry very far and suggests that a promising topic for future research would be to examine how these constants develop. I believe that the endeavor was a missing prerequisite to his subsequent recommendations for professional education.

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12Ibid., p. 270.
I maintain a difference does exist between right and wrong reflection, in fact, for education at least, the ends of reflection are equally as important as the reflective process. Schön's constants may hold promise for helping us to understand and to foster "right" reflection. Teachers need to consider the political and ethical principles underlying teaching and the issue of the role of education in a just society. Otherwise, the reflective practicum, like clinical supervision, can be "used to raise purely technical questions about classroom instruction."

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