

## *Response*

### **TOWARD A PRACTICE OF SCHOLARSHIP: BEYOND THE PRIVATE COLD WAR METAPHOR**

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A recent newspaper commentary has suggested that the rapid radical changes taking place in Eastern European countries has caught the American government by surprise.<sup>1</sup> No longer can it use familiar but fear-evoking rhetoric to engender support for massive defense spending designed to protect the United States and the Western world from the "evil empire." The enemy now appears to be crumbling. In George Bush's own words at his inaugural address last January, "Its old ideas [are being] blown away like leaves from an ancient, lifeless tree." Yet in a real sense, the administration seems to be more comfortable in calling for the demise of totalitarian regimes than it is in observing their cataclysmic disintegration.

In similar vein, Blumberg's article, "Toward a Scholarship of Practice," represents fighting epistemological rhetoric. He has not taken into account the changing nature of the educational context in the last three years or so. At the end of the article, one wonders whether Blumberg is aware of or concerned about the progress other scholars in the study of practice have made or whether he is more comfortable waging his own private cold war against what he euphemistically labels *science*.

The article puts me on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, I have considerable respect for an eminent and scholarly professor; I find myself agreeing with his message. The article addresses a relevant, significant problem for professors of instructional supervision. It depicts a difficult dilemma confronting all who want to contribute to practice through the ranks of the university professoriate. Blumberg tries to propose a way out of this unfortunate state of affairs. He warns that we are worshipping the golden calf of cognitive rationalism (which most universities are tending to impose on professional schools) and thus advancing our own careers rather than contributing to an understanding of practice. This criticism is always timely, and we must pay full attention to the essential question regarding the role played by

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Calami, "America Out of Step: Bush Stumbles as Wall Tumbles," *Vancouver Sun* (November 25, 1989), *Southam News*.

professors of instructional supervision in studying and improving practice. On the other hand, however, the article does not exemplify what I regard as the craft of scholarship.

Scholarship can be characterized as a craft practiced by persons (sometimes even by professors) interested in becoming more skillful at what they do, who value producing a more highly refined piece of scholarly work than they had been able to do previously, and who use knowledge that helps them to express their ideas with greater clarity and cogency. Like any craft, scholarship is essentially learned by doing. Schön has characterized this paradox of learning:

The paradox of learning a really new competence is this: that a student cannot at first understand what he needs to learn, can only learn it by educating himself through self-discovery, and can only educate himself by beginning to *do* what he does not yet understand.<sup>2</sup>

Schön describes three ways in which reflection contributes to the process of learning by doing. First, reflective practitioners get curious about things pertaining to their craft; second, they learn from past experience; and third, they combat normal cynicism.<sup>3</sup>

If we interpret Blumberg's article as his attempt to learn scholarship by doing it reflectively, then the article falls short on all three counts. First, Blumberg is not curious about the craft of scholarship in and of itself but about how to reinterpret the perceptions, as distinct from actions or practices, of a small group of professors who want to be respected as scholars. Second, he does not appear to have taken into account, and therefore has not learned from, the past experience of scholarship focusing on practice. Third, far from combating normal cynicism, Blumberg introduces a heavy dose of his own about professors' motivations for doing what they do. These shortcomings are most unfortunate because Blumberg is one professor whose courageous ability to play the *enfant terrible* role over the years has provoked many students of practice to rethink their views. Moreover, his practice of scholarship in previous years suggests that this article does not represent his usually keen, incisive, and erudite mind. Three points support my criticism that this article does not constitute an exemplar of scholarship.

First, Blumberg comes dangerously close to setting up science as a straw argument; he defines science only as the "search for universal truths." That definition, represented by the dominant cognitive-technical-rational paradigm, is only one way of doing science. Other views are possible, particularly if we understand science to mean ways of knowing and generating knowledge (the original Greek term *scio* means knowledge). A useful starting point for

<sup>2</sup>Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner. Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), p. 85 (italics added).

<sup>3</sup>Donald A. Schön, "Coaching Reflective Teaching," in *Reflection in Teacher Education*, ed. Peter P. Grimmett and Gaalen L. Erickson (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), pp. 19-29

discussing what constitutes "doing science" would be Habermas or van Manen.<sup>4</sup> Habermas outlines three ways of knowing: the dominant technical-rational paradigm, *Naturwissenschaft*; the hermeneutic or phenomenological paradigm, *Geisteswissenschaft*; and the critical social theory paradigm, *Kritischwissenschaft*.

Given these three paradigms of science, Blumberg is clearly arguing for a rigorous, systematic study of practice that differs in its essence from attempts to develop a technical-rational science or "scientism" (the appearance of science). Scientism has its roots in the misplaced application to the study of human interaction of cognitive-rational methods associated with the natural sciences. Blumberg justifiably decries this unmindful aping of natural science paradigms, suggesting that it trivializes the study of practice.<sup>5</sup> The questions he poses for generating nontrivial knowledge essentially address how supervisors generate meaning about the things they do in practice. Habermas argues that this kind of study constitutes a legitimate form of science—*Geisteswissenschaft* as distinct from *Naturwissenschaft* (which Blumberg equates to science) and *Kritischwissenschaft* (critical knowledge whose purpose is to emancipate practitioners from humanly constructed distortions and constraints)—in the phenomenological tradition of *verstehen*, understanding. The purpose of the endeavor is the pursuit of meaning, not the pursuit of truth or fact.<sup>6</sup>

Because Blumberg does not grapple with the questions of what science is and what constitutes knowledge, the article lacks a scholarly ring. This omission also leads him to suggest that a "second type of knowledge," one that deals with self-understanding, personal skills, and "know-how" (Schön's "knowing-in-action") is "much less amenable to the development of a body of knowledge." This comment suggests that Blumberg is either unaware of or is deliberately discounting Connelly and Clandinin's work on teachers' practical knowledge, Schön's work on practitioners' knowing-in-action, and Shulman's research program studying the wisdom of practice.<sup>7</sup>

Second, Blumberg's writing without reference to other scholars working in nontechnical paradigms mistakenly suggests an inaugural call for an episte-

<sup>4</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. John Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Max van Manen, "Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical," *Curriculum Inquiry* 6 (No. 3, 1977): 205–228.

<sup>5</sup>Blumberg is not the first scholar to make this suggestion. Since 1974, Lee Shulman has maintained that by concentrating solely on teachers' behavior and ignoring their thought processes, research on teaching was producing trivial findings.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Donmoyer, "The Rescue from Relativism: Two Failed Attempts and an Alternative Strategy," *Educational Researcher* 14 (December 1985): 13–20.

<sup>7</sup>F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, "Personal Practical Knowledge and the Modes of Knowing: Relevance for Teaching and Learning," in *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing*, ed. Elliot Eisner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Lee S. Shulman, "The Wisdom of Practice: Managing Complexity in Medicine and Teaching," in *Talks to Teachers*, ed. David C. Berliner and Barak V. Rosenshine (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 369–386.

mological shift. That is just not so. Even if we restrict the purview of our commentary to the delimited (and possibly unrepresentative) sample of Bolin's original survey, how could Blumberg be unaware of the invited addresses given to the Special Interest Group in Instructional Supervision at the American Educational Research Association conferences in the last three years?<sup>8</sup> Schön, Elliott, and Shulman have all addressed this group and issued impassioned pleas for a scholarship of practice.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, while emphasizing that supervisors are practitioners with all the implications that he derives from that state of affairs, Blumberg does not recognize that university professors are themselves engaged in practice—the practice of teaching and research. They are also practitioners who pragmatically design studies to serve multiple purposes—to satisfy funding agencies and research universities for whom questions of efficacy do not appear to be trivial and to inform practitioners (including themselves) who are more interested in experiential, practice-oriented learning. Professors live in a world of multiple realities, and many decisions they make can be understood in terms of a trade-off or compromise among the many demands that multiple realities impose on the professoriate. It is an oversimplification, then, to suggest that professors play off practice against science to enhance their academic careers. In some circumstances, professors, like practitioners in the school system, have no other option (except to quit being a professor).

What I am arguing for here is a more complex understanding of the research-practitioner world of the professor. Any junior professors who ignore these multiple realities to engage in Blumberg's limited view of a "scholarship of practice" may well find themselves in a similar position to beginning teachers who want to use the cooperative team-learning model in instruction but ignore the need to prove to the school community that they can manage a classroom effectively. No matter how disdainfully we perceive the processes of teacher induction or pre-tenure socialization, these processes are still realities that people aspiring to an educational or scholarly career must deal with. Failure to do so may well deny them the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations. In well-conceived ways and under favorable circumstances, it is possible to serve a professor's career needs and those of practice (albeit in different ways) in any given endeavor. Blumberg's freedom to write as he does and submit his work to a refereed journal is living proof of this complexity inherent in our motivation.

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<sup>8</sup>I suspect that most respondents in the original Bolin sample were members of this Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association.

<sup>9</sup>Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); John Elliott, "Teachers as Researchers: Implications for Supervision in Teacher Education" (invited address given at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 1988); Lee S. Shulman, "The Wisdom of Practice: Managing Complexity in Medicine and Teaching," in *Talks to Teachers*, ed. David C. Berliner and Barak V. Rosenshine (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 369–386.

Rather than engage in bellicose rhetoric about a scholarship of practice, Blumberg's position would have become much more cogent and therefore persuasive had he tried to model the practice of scholarship. In so doing, he would have recognized that much progress has been made during the last three years or so in the direction he is suggesting. He would also have realized that his own thinking is still largely constrained by the private cold war metaphor (which he coined so appropriately about supervisors and teachers back in 1974) and that the scholarship of practice as a field of study is not.

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Kridel, Craig, ed. *Curriculum History. Conference Presentations from the Society for the Study of Curriculum History*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989. 243 pp. \$27.50.

This book presents the society's 23 best papers from its first 10 years, including addresses by five of its presidents (Davis, Tanner, Schubert, Strickland, and Nelson) and several treatises on writing curriculum history. Also included are topical histories of facets of curriculum, such as general education, evaluation, graded schools, the Eight-Year Study, and the contributions of such curriculum leaders as Tyler, Dewey, Melklejohn, Bond, and others. Finally, international historical perspectives are given on the project method (Germany and United States), on Irish schooling, and on Norwegian curriculum reform. This first book from curriculum historians demonstrates the range and value of their work for the field of curriculum.

Sergiovanni, Thomas J., and John H. Moore, eds. *Schooling for Tomorrow: Directing Reforms to Issues That Count*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989. 397 pp. \$36.95.

Papers prepared by more than 20 distinguished educators for a 1987 conference on restructuring schooling provide the basis of *Schooling for Tomorrow*. The book examines both current efforts to improve schools and promising new directions for school reform. The contributors consider reforms that could substantially affect teaching and learning, discuss issues of professionalism, and examine the restructuring of school management. The book offers a broad background for exploring school reform, yet permits easy identification of chapters relevant to specific questions.

—Nancy Hoffman

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