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Toward a Reflective Culture of Teaching: A Landscape for Praxis

by

James P. Golubich

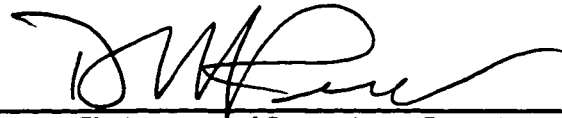
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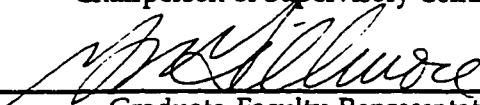
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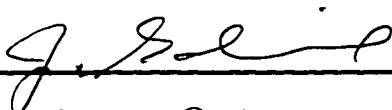
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Abstract

Toward a Reflective Culture of Teaching: A Landscape for Praxis

by James P. Golubich

Chairperson of Supervisory Committee: Professor Donna H. Kerr  
College of Education

The concept of teachers as reflective practitioners has occupied a prominent place in the current educational reform agenda. In both teacher education and public school restructuring literature, frequent reference is made to the importance of teachers having opportunities to be reflective about their work; however, these references often reveal a rather narrow conception of what constitutes the work of teachers and, consequently, the scope of their reflectivity. The position taken here is that, for substantive educational change to occur, notions of teaching must be expanded beyond the single domain of pedagogical practice to include broader contexts of schooling and education in a democratic society.

This work argues for a transformation of the culture of teaching from one primarily concerned with issues and techniques of classroom practice to one which includes dialogue and reflective inquiry regarding the moral and ethical aspects of schooling, social and political influences on the institution, and philosophical and theoretical foundations of pedagogy. A conceptual model of a "reflective landscape" — consisting of four domains embracing these broader issues — is presented to illustrate the inherent complexity of the act of teaching and to suggest that reflective practice is best considered as practice which is informed and guided by ongoing reflection in all of these domains. After examining aspects of the existing culture of teaching which deter or constrict reflective practice thus defined, qualities seen as essential to the development of a genuine reflective culture of teaching are discussed.

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## Preface

A little over twenty years ago, and after just one hour of my very first education course, I made the decision to become a teacher. Not because I had any particular fondness for children or a nurturing disposition. Nor was I driven by any compelling desire to contribute to the common good of society. There were no special teachers in my past who inspired me to follow in their footsteps, nor any academic discipline for which I felt a burning passion that I wanted to pass on to others. I was basically indifferent toward my own school experience – it was neither a golden period I wished to resurrect nor a traumatic ordeal that I needed to reconcile. I had put in my compulsory time and got the necessary tickets punched to move on. There was little about the school environment that would make me want to spend my adult life there. Obviously, I was not lured by an upward-spiraling career ladder or economic comforts; job security and stability were not high priorities in my 19 year-old mind. In fact, until that first day in Professor Henry Johnson's Philosophy of Education class, I had been quite resolute about not following my father's career path as a teacher and a principal. But this resolve was shattered on that day by my complete inability to answer Professor Johnson's first question, "What is education for?" Now, as a middle-aged seasoned veteran approaching the bell lap of his career, a part of me is still sitting in that back row seat and contemplating the answer to the very same question.

The impact of that day in Professor Johnson's class warrants some elaboration, for it is the foundation of what is to follow in this project. Actually, the question "What is education for?" was not posed directly to me, but was one of a barrage of questions aimed at the soon-to-be-graduated senior education majors who had put off the required foundations course as long as possible. For me, the course was just another selection in my buffet-style approach to college which had me changing majors on a regular basis. As a sophomore in a room full of graduating seniors, I was careful to remain innocuous. Following the obligatory class roster check, Professor Johnson began asking questions of the students. "Why do you want to be a teacher?" Hands shot up. "To help students reach their potential," said one. "Potential for what?" Fewer hands this time. "To be successful adults," ventured another. "So childhood is an undesirable state – your purpose is to shape them into adults . . ." "Well, no . . ." "Then what do you see as your purpose? You're about to go out and spend many years affecting the lives of young people. In what ways do you wish to affect them?" And so it proceeded, until soon there were no hands being raised and most eyes were cast downward. Professor Johnson pressed on, questioning the assumptions and grounds upon which much of the existing teacher education program was based and challenging the students to defend them. Undaunted by the absence of willing respondents, he called on people randomly from the class roster, emphatically insisting that they were morally obligated to address the

issues he was raising. Apparently many in the class disagreed, as enrollment shrank by more than a third by the second session.

As I left the class that day, I found myself intrigued in two different respects. The first was the richness of the questions themselves, and the way that attempts to answer them seemed to just prompt more questions. The second was more disturbing than intriguing, and centered on the obvious discomfort of the prospective teachers in the class and the defensive dismissals of the questions as irrelevant to the job of teaching. Once I entered the teacher education program myself, I began to understand why the students responded as they had to Professor Johnson's interrogation – their training had no connection whatsoever to the issues he was raising and it was far easier to keep it that way. For me, having chosen teaching *because of* the issues he raised, the pattern was reversed – it quickly became apparent that the training I would receive to gain certification was not going to touch on the questions that drew me into the field.

I endured the next two years of methods courses and field experiences. I learned to print with a potato, do the Hokey Pokey, and write behavioral objectives for both. Writing a good lesson plan, I found out, was a matter of following specified format and requiring 80% mastery, regardless of the content and substance of the lesson. My skillful operation of a filmstrip projector and rub-on letters earned me high marks in Instructional Technology and a part-time job offer to assist classmates who were struggling with these skills. During finals week, as my

roommates were studying molecular structures and drawing elaborate architectural plans, I was busy cutting out tagboard frogs for a bulletin board project. I learned classroom management techniques – especially how to bribe students to refrain from being disruptive through even the most tedious tasks and how, when the bribes failed, to issue punishments in a way that made them appear to be “logical consequences of poor choices.” Upon completing the requirements for certification and diploma, I felt that I could still be a teacher despite all the training, which I had come to view as a sort of academic hazing ritual.

The world of public schooling did lead me back to the issues raised by Professor Johnson, but not in the way I’d imagined. The culture I entered bore a discouraging resemblance to that of the campus education building from which I’d just departed. The dominant concerns were contract negotiations, planning time, discipline policies, class sizes, and nonsupportive parents. My colleagues were by and large dedicated, hard-working, and genuinely striving to be effective teachers. Yet there was never any discussion of what “effective” meant or what our efforts were dedicated toward. The ethic under which we all worked dictated that we do a good job according to criteria that was determined elsewhere. Teaching was a set of skills and behaviors, yet the dynamic within the classroom and in interactions with students suggested that much more was involved.

I went searching for a surrogate Professor Johnson. After obtaining a master’s degree in school administration, the feeling remained that the

education initiated by Professor Johnson was far from complete, and sought to locate an environment in which to engage the important issues he had raised. I eventually wandered into the cultural foundations department of a nearby university. This became my sustenance, the place to interpret my function as a teacher, to clarify my questions and to have new questions put before me. An interdependency developed. At the same time that my studies served as a vehicle by which to scrutinize my teaching practice, my experiences in the classroom became a perspective to which the academic work had to be accountable. Each of these two educational personas fed off the other, and to this symbiosis I attribute my remaining in education at all, for in those few short periods in which I did one without the other, my interest in both waned.

Finally, then, my personal dilemma is a yearning for the two cultures I've alternated between to become merged at last. As a classroom teacher, I have come to understand how heavy the weight of practical and procedural demands can be on teachers, and how the pressure of having to do this—and—that can supersede thoughtful consideration of any of it, especially when there exists no real forum for considering alternative perspectives nor a conducive atmosphere for generating them. At the same time, I have experienced the richness of multiple perspectives on my role as a teacher, and am compelled to wonder how — given the opportunity and a different occupational environment — a similar experience might affect others. This is not simply a desire to have philosophical company, but is rooted in the changing nature of public

education, the implications of current reform initiatives, and the inadequately resolved matter of the professionalization of teaching. In short, it seems odd that I should have had to look outside the culture of teaching to find venues where the question "What is education for?" is viewed as a relevant concern.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation to the following persons for their assistance in this project and all that led up to it: Professor Donna H. Kerr, for her unwavering insistence that I follow the path of my deepest-held convictions and for the inspired teaching that helped me to clarify these; Professors Kenneth A. Sirotnik and William D. Winn, for exposing me to perspectives of schooling and learning which figured prominently in this project; Professor Randy L. Hoover, longtime friend and mentor, for his tireless encouragement, intellectual support, and a faith in my abilities that often exceeded my own; and Patty, for patience and tolerance in tending to the emotional demands of my efforts, and for sharing the journey.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Professor Henry C. Johnson, Jr., whose deeply perplexing questions about what it means to teach not only launched a young man's career, but have continued to shape and sustain it for more than two decades.

## Introduction

This project is an expression of both despair and hope about public education and the profession of teaching. Specifically, both the hope and despair revolve around the increased currency of the idea of reflective practice in teaching. The hope is that we may be on the verge of breaking down some of the dichotomous thinking that has severely limited the ability of the educational community to effectively address the challenges of modernity. When educators are separated according to thinkers and doers, scholars and practitioners, and producers of knowledge and consumers of knowledge, the erection of an existential wall between them is inevitable. So the notion that public school teachers ought to think reflectively about what they do, while considerably overdue, is a refreshing prospect. At the same time, there are far too many instances of good ideas and ambitious projects gone awry in the history of public education which caution against unbridled optimism that a new era of “educational excellence” is in the making.<sup>1</sup> Presently, it is too early to either begin anticipating the heights that will be scaled by schools which are full of reflective teachers or to start digging a burial plot for the idea. It is not too early, however, to begin moving the dialogue about teaching as reflective practice into the locales where it is supposed to occur — our public schools.

The concept of teacher reflection has occupied more than a few academic careers over recent decades, but has barely touched the careers of

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<sup>1</sup> Cuban, L. (1990) Reforming again, again, and again. *Educational Researcher*, 19, 3-13; Sarason, S.B. (1990). *The predictable failure of educational reform: Can we change course before it's too late?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

those whose reflectivity is at issue. Now, as the term “reflective practice” begins to circulate through the rhetoric of school reform and teacher development, it behooves us to examine critically what is meant by the term for those who employ it and to determine if it represents all that it should. My own position will be that its popular usage is quite limited in scope and, if there are sincere expectations that substantive educational change will hinge on a reflective and responsive cadre of teachers, then the concept needs to be expanded considerably into areas which reach beyond the procedural mechanics of classroom instruction but which nevertheless affect the basic nature of school policy and instructional practice.

In the first chapter, I will examine some of the ways that teacher reflection is treated in various strands of educational literature. Reform documents at the state and federal level, for instance, make sweeping rhetorical claims about the importance of reflective teachers if reforms are to be successful, but then proceed to portray reflection in terms of additional staff development training to learn new skills and to share ideas. In a similar vein, a substantial portion of professional development literature restricts the concept of teacher reflection to the domain of the technical and practical, and views additional time and collegial interaction as means for encouraging reflection within the overall project of school restructuring. I will give the work of Donald Schön a fair amount of attention in this section, primarily because his concept of reflection-in-action features the kind of spontaneity and flexibility that is necessary in dynamic interactions which are the norm in classroom environments.

Furthermore, his application of the idea of “artistry” to describe the reflective activity of successful practitioners figures prominently in later discussions. Moving from the modest conceptions of reflection found in mainstream literature, more intellectual approaches to teacher inquiry — grounded in ethical perspectives of social, political, and organizational structures — will be mentioned as a foreshadowing of the reflective framework to be presented in a later chapter.

The second chapter is an exploration of the dynamics of reflective practice in the context of the inherent complexity of teaching and learning. I argue that attempts to simplify teaching out of compassion for the perceived workload of teachers — as well as an orientation to standardization and uniformity — are misguided in several respects. First, they promote the delusion that the principle of “one size fits all” is a viable assumption for dealing with a population of learners with diverse abilities, interests, and motivations. As a result, the hyped promise of simplified procedures exacerbates the frustrations of teachers who are left ill-prepared to deal with the unique idiosyncrasies that emerge in the course of interacting with dozens of distinct personalities. Second, teachers gradually become conditioned to view their work from the perspective of technical rationality, which Schön and others describe as the application of pre-ordained solutions to problems which are identified as being of a particular type. This orientation, quite conspicuous in packaged learning materials, requires only that teachers be able to follow a sequence of prescriptive steps without considering or questioning the assumptions upon which the program or materials are based. Consequently, when they

are faced (inevitably) with unpredictable dynamics in situations which are not covered in the original design, they are unable to reflexively make the judgments necessary to craft an effective response. Third, the denial of the complexity of teaching, by offering an endless stream of surefire panaceas, is highly seductive to an occupational group whose culture continually reinforces the perception that its members are both overworked and underappreciated and expects new ideas to be distilled to the bare minimums of implementation. This chapter, then, is concerned with debunking the notion that reflection can justifiably be conceived as meditative time to ponder minor adjustments to classroom strategies or to swap tricks of the trade with colleagues.

Having rejected the idea of reflective practice being based solely on the practical elements of teaching, I propose a more robust framework for considering reflection. Building from theories discussed in the previous chapter, the framework consists of several domains of reflection, each of which is seen as intensely interactive with the all of the others. Though presented conceptually as consisting of four distinct areas, it is intended as a fluid and dynamic model, where perspectives acquired in one domain affect the ways that perspectives from other domains are apprehended and interpreted. I refer to the entire structure as a reflective landscape, invoking the imagery of perpetually varying traversals which present different viewpoints and reveal previously unnoticed features (or suggestions) as one perceives the landscape from new vantage points. This reflective landscape is ultimately aimed at improving teaching practice, but it does call for a decidedly intellectual approach to a wide

spectrum of educational concerns from which school practice should be derived.

Finally, the last chapter deals with the most problematic aspect of my thesis — where and by whom should the reflective landscape be constructed? Given my assertion that unreflective practice is the bane of educational improvement, and my skepticism that modifications in the organizational structure of teachers' work *necessarily* will lead to changes in how that work is approached, I see no alternative but to aim for the heart — the culture of teaching. A self-empowered, autonomous, and inquiry-oriented teaching force is the only way that sustained educational improvement will be realized. This claim does not discount the need for other salient agents in public education to make supportive contributions to this effort, but it does imply that unless the culture of teaching shifts from one of complacency, docility, and a self-perpetuating identity of victimization to one of professional assertiveness, moral responsibility, and an ethic of self-renewal, the contributions of these other agents will be for naught. Teacher educators, reform architects, and staff development designers all are caught in the bind of having to negotiate their agendas with consideration of the culture with which they are dealing. It is readily apparent that this results in minimal or unintended change, as well as healthy doses of resistance and turmoil. By placing the activities of teachers on something conceptually similar to the reflective landscape contained herein, and working towards the creation of a vibrant reflective culture of teaching, educational improvement can become an ongoing substantive endeavor rather than a series of episodic phases of form.

### On Methodology

I understate when confessing that, in this project, I've drifted from a number of the hallowed conventions of scholarly inquiry. For one, I have chosen to approach the entire project from my role as a teacher instead of as a detached analyst of public schooling. My motive is simple — I want my profession to elevate itself, to place itself in the broader context of educating persons and shaping a society rather than constricting its interests to the operation of a classroom and meeting arbitrary standards of accountability. Since I am speaking as a teacher, I have assumed the liberty of dismissing some of the conventional alibis for the problems facing public education, especially those that rely on the premise that if only X or Y were different, we would have a world-class educational system. Instead, I place the burden of action on myself and my professional community. Because I hold a sincere belief in the integrity and intentions of teachers, as well as the value of rigorous dialogue, I am comfortable in criticizing aspects of teacher conduct which are indefensible, regardless of the origins or contributing factors. This is a departure from the common tactic of treating teachers as hapless pawns in a bureaucratic machine who, if rid of the shackles that bind them, would burst forth with an impassioned commitment to resolving social injustice, advancing the cause of democratic liberty and responsibility, and initiating unprecedented pedagogical innovation. Since I have long objected to the pandering and gratuitous tone of what I take to be a hollow rhetoric, my focus is directed at what we can do for ourselves — both within the confines of the shackles that do in fact bind, and with a vision of shedding

them on terms that we have had a voice in determining. As I see it, we can continue to eat the cake that is thrown at us or begin to cultivate our own fields.

In addition to making occasional reference to my own anecdotal recollections of events or situations which seem relevant to the issues being discussed, I have solicited the comments and perspectives of four other educators with respect to this project. They do not constitute a representative sample of practicing educators; instead, I asked them to contribute based on recommendations and referrals as to their propensity to view their work reflectively. Interviews were taped and transcribed, each lasting between one and three hours.<sup>2</sup> I used a standard protocol, but deviated from it as the conversations warranted. The input of these educators should not be taken as an attempt at qualitative research methodology. I sought and used their comments strictly as an additional source of perspective on the ideas I will be presenting; some of them are supportive and corroborative and others are oppositional and contradictory to my claims. I present their remarks at various points in the discussion to either complement or challenge my own positions. Since the four interviewees are not technically research subjects, or case studies in the classic sense, and since their comments will simply be interjected at various points in the ensuing discussion, it seems appropriate to introduce them at the outset.

Matt: Matt has been involved in public education for about ten years, seven of those as a middle school teacher and the past three as the director

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<sup>2</sup> Interviews were conducted in November and December of 1996 and January of 1997.

of a teacher development center (TDC) in the same suburban school district in which I work. While teaching in the middle school, Matt had been instrumental in a number of efforts to restructure middle school organization, the most notable being an alternative program revolving around the instructional uses of technology. The program was conceived and implemented with the cooperation and support of Apple Computer's ACOT (Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow) division and was designed to explore the possibilities of a technology-rich classroom environment. After two years, the TDC was launched as a means to disseminate the principles and techniques which emerged as a result of this venture. Actually, Matt's TDC was one of four established in the local region with the mission of promoting the use of educational technologies in the classroom.<sup>3</sup> Initially, all were dedicated to a notion of technological literacy for teachers and operated from a position that teachers who were adequately trained to use hardware and software would do so in their classrooms. Matt was the first to recognize that this was an incomplete equation. His TDC program gradually evolved from a technology-centered orientation to one that focused primarily on beliefs about learning and teaching as prerequisite to the integration of technology. At the time that we talked, Matt indicated that dealing with applications of technology was almost an afterthought in the five-day TDC sessions. Instead, he has increasingly geared these sessions to "career-long questions that teachers bring to the table . . . that span the whole range of

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<sup>3</sup> The TDCs were funded through a national grant which sponsored an alliance of the four local districts. As of this writing, two of them have ceased to operate due to reallocation of funding.

characteristics of our endeavor — the moral, the interactive, the adult, the community — things that clearly aren't being addressed." Matt's experience as a facilitator of scores of these discussions has reawakened in him a desire to return to the classroom. The three years in the TDC have given him "some new filtering material. I've had a chance to be really thoughtful about some things that weren't strongly in my practice then that I would be eager to try out now. Kind of reality therapy — what's it like to really enact this?" In the meantime, Matt sees his function as one of helping teachers to confront the tensions and anxieties that their work presents in a manner that leads to a sense of empowerment rather than impotency, a task that often leaves him feeling "like a salmon swimming upstream."

*Kate:* Kate, now in her first year as an elementary school principal in a large urban district, had previously held a variety of teaching positions including elementary school as well as secondary mathematics and science. Her motivation for becoming an administrator was a sense of anger at what she felt was a condescending attitude by administrators toward teachers. Kate makes frequent reference to what she calls "thinkers and talkers" — the experts who "know what's best for everyone else" yet have little, if any, recent experience with the realities of working in public education. She is passionately critical of the ways in which academic "thinkers and talkers," administrators, and others (i.e. unions) tend to marginalize the knowledge and integrity that teachers bring to their jobs, and sees her role as primarily one of getting teachers to assert their deserved authority as classroom experts. At the same time, Kate exhibits a

certain ambivalence regarding the place of reflection in teachers' work. On the one hand, she describes good professional development as that which "directly pertains to the classroom . . . and models the techniques that will be used without all the philosophy — here's how to impart it," and questions whether teachers are ready to engage in thoughtful dialogue about deeper issues of schooling. On the other hand, she becomes irate when teachers are blamed for jumping on ill-fated bandwagons which they did not themselves create — "they do what they're told and then get attacked."

Though I had not met Kate prior to my interview with her, it turns out that we had both gone through the same principal-preparation program (I preceded her by several years) which has a rather strong emphasis on reflective inquiry. When I asked her if more reflectivity on the part of teachers might help to make them more selective about which bandwagons to join, Kate lamented the general reluctance of teachers to "get close to the bone" with respect to being decisive about complex issues. She sees this as being a matter of "emotional liberation" which needs to be nurtured by leaders who are unafraid to expose their own anxieties and vulnerabilities. Kate then told a poignant story of her own failed attempt to do this. She had planned to open a faculty meeting by sharing a poem dealing with the unique relationship between teachers and children. An overhead transparency with the poem was on the projector and copies were ready for distribution, but as teachers filed into the room, Kate felt a pang of anxiety about how the poem (and she) would be received due to its emotionally intimate content. She quickly removed the poem from the

projector and conducted the meeting in the standard businesslike manner. Her candor in revealing this incident, along with her fond recollections of the reflective seminars which were a staple of her principal–certification program, suggests that Kate is grappling with balancing her role as caretaker of the pragmatic concerns of teachers with her more idealistic notions of leadership as elevating the educative endeavor in the hearts and minds of the entire school community.

*Eileen:* Eileen has taught high school math for nearly two decades, and has been extremely active throughout her career advancing the causes of teacher professionalization, interdisciplinary cooperation, and school restructuring. She is passionately critical of the inherent contradictions between the increased demands on teachers to implement ambitious reform programs and the disabling conditions under which most teachers must work, particularly those involving departmentalization of curriculum, grading policies, and the structure of the school day, all of which she believes deny both teachers and students the opportunity to perform at an optimum level. It is disturbing for Eileen to reflect on these issues, which not only represent for her “things in which the system works against the purposes of education” but also “my own role as a participant and functionary of the system that has some pretty significant consequences.” Since she sees herself and most teachers as being caught in a struggle of “just coping,” the notion of reflectivity “can be sort of a joke — I think about it and then have to file it.”

Eileen has voluntarily reduced her contract by twenty percent this year in an attempt to afford herself some time and mental space to remain

thoughtful about her work — something she finds all but impossible under normal circumstances, which she calls a “rat race.” While she is generally encouraged by the directions of current reform efforts, she reacts strongly to the subject of additional demands being placed on the already overburdened shoulders of teachers. Just about every aspect of the notion of reflective practice is tied to the issue of time — time for personal health, time for collaboration, time for acquiring new skills and improving instructional methods, and time for reading and thinking. Eileen believes that most teachers are inclined to be reflective and growth-oriented but are circumstantially prohibited from acting on these inclinations. To the extent that teachers’ time and energies are devoted primarily to the grind of keeping up with day-to-day demands, thoughtful consideration of new ideas in teaching and learning is perpetually deferred. When change becomes mandated by policy, reflection again yields to the push to acquire whatever new skills are necessary to implement the new policy.

Although Eileen has taken personal measures to maintain a reflective approach to her teaching, she is quick to note that the financial hardships of a reduced contract do not represent for her an acceptable solution. In her judgment, teacher reflection requires time that is simply not there and, until structural changes are made which provide adequate time, teachers can be expected to do little more than focus on not falling off an ever-accelerating treadmill.

*Jan:* Jan, a veteran elementary teacher in an affluent community, takes a markedly different stance than Eileen and Kate, who lean toward the idea of reflection as something of a luxury which can be indulged only after

practical concerns are well in order. Like Matt, Jan sees reflection and practice as inseparable; the value of each is diminished in the absence of the other. Jan, however, is somewhat more forceful than Matt about placing responsibility for reflectivity on teachers as a matter of professional imperative. While she recognizes the deleterious effects of bureaucratic management and politically-motivated policy-making structures, Jan targets the culture of teaching as an equal and witting participant in the creation of existing conditions of schooling. Perhaps the most conspicuous thread running through the more than three hours of interviews with Jan was the virtual absence of an inclination to romanticize the occupation of teaching, invoking neither the image of the dedicated and selfless pedagogue nor the rhetoric of oppression and victimization. Instead, she adheres to the principle that teachers are adults who make a conscious choice to enter a field which impacts the lives of young people and, ultimately, the society. As such, reflecting on how one goes about this activity is neither an option nor a luxury — it is at the core of what it means to assume the role of teacher.

Significant events in Jan's career have contributed to her current outlook. While she recalls having a consistently progressive approach to teaching, her orientation consisted mostly of "feelings or instincts I had with my own brand of politics; I couldn't articulate those things." About five years ago she entered a graduate program with an emphasis on multicultural and equity issues. Here she was introduced to viewpoints and literature which provided her with a language for the beliefs and principles which she intuitively felt but was unable to express effectively.

So empowered, she began to vocally question and challenge various aspects of the status quo — particularly with respect to the handling of minority children and children with special needs. As she tells it:

Once I started getting into a reflective mode of practice, I started wondering why we used the books we did; about the power issues behind who is choosing the curriculum, why we were teaching what we were teaching anyway . . . and now there's probably no way to separate the politics of schooling with what I do in this classroom with the kids. And while we can't always change some of [the political aspects], I became a lot braver and a lot more aware of dealing with them.

The next thing that I noticed was that I started to really annoy my colleagues (laughs). This is why I'm new at this school this year — I started to ask a lot of questions about the way we did things at our school. I got into *a lot* of trouble asking those questions.

Jan makes a point of contrasting her previous school with the one in which she now teaches. The former was defined by a powerful core of “old guard” teachers who sought to keep things just as they'd always been, and change was resisted and deemed unnecessary, even when “some of it really wasn't working for kids anymore as the population of that particular school changed.” Her present school, led by a strong principal who challenges her staff to be reflective, is a far better environment, yet Jan remains cautious about rocking the boat much in her first year there. The

reflective atmosphere her principal is trying to establish is still in its infancy, and Jan detects a considerable degree of what Kate identified — a reluctance to deal with provocative issues which might trigger conflict. She is sensitive to the cultural factors within teaching that contribute to this reluctance, yet she remains convinced that substantive change can only occur from the inside, from “the people who will ask questions, the kind that ask the questions that drive the ‘powers-that-be’ crazy.”

This last quote from Jan underscores another major concern of this project — *where will the people who ask these questions come from?*

Each of the four interviewees has constructed a notion of reflectivity that bears upon his or her practice, yet none of them mentions his or her immediate professional milieu as the source of this reflective orientation. Rather, the educational cultures they operate within are basically seen as impediments to reflective practice. Both Kate and Jan indicate that the perspectives they acquired through their graduate programs are not very compatible with the perspectives of their colleagues in the schools where they work. Matt and Eileen dedicate much of their energies to advancing the idea of reflection as a necessary function of being a teacher, but find themselves in a culture and system which, for various reasons, is generally incongruent with such a notion.

The differences between the interviewees’ concepts of reflection are also of interest. Matt and Jan are partial to reflection that deals with education writ large — the social and cognitive underpinnings of how schools and learning are organized. Eileen and Kate are more grounded in a pragmatic outlook which positions reflection in the sphere of classroom

techniques and teacher work conditions; reflection represents a chance to catch one's breath and devise ways of performing the craft with greater skill and effectiveness. Both perspectives have merits which ought to be considered in any attempt to merge the ideas of reflection and practice.

The contributions of these four individuals to this project have been extremely valuable. I have indicated that I chose to write from the perspective of a teacher, but more than a few times I have felt myself dealing with problematic propositions by shifting from the voice of teacher to one of critic and pundit, a convenient maneuver when reality poses an obstacle to the straight path of an argument. While I am certain that I have lapsed here and there, the added voices of four practicing educators has been immensely valuable in keeping me more alert to my original intentions — to envision both a notion of reflective practice and a professional culture that is conducive to the emergence of teachers who are inclined, indeed compelled, to ask questions of themselves as well as the powers-that-be. Ideally, the point will not be to drive anyone crazy, but to bring forth a dialogue and ongoing process of renewal which will make reform "movements" unnecessary.

## **Chapter One — Reflective Practice in the Context of School Reform**

This chapter will deal with the concept of teacher reflection, or reflective practice, as it is currently presented and treated in professional development literature. While this project is not necessarily one about current educational reform efforts, there are elements of these efforts that help to lay a foundation for the proposals I will be developing later. What many of these elements have in common are striking similarities with past failed attempts at educational improvement which attempted to implement changes at the fringes and on the surface of school life, and which quickly succumbed to the staunch resistance of entrenched patterns of school culture. Moreover, close examination of both the reform movement's stated goals and contemporary models of teacher education (both preservice and inservice) reveals a qualitative disparity between our expectations for students, on the one hand, and the kinds of skills, attitudes, and behaviors of teachers that are presumed sufficient to address these expectations, on the other hand.

I begin by examining some aspects of existing reform proposals, touching briefly on the explicit measures aimed at improving student learning, then focusing more intensely on the implicit assumptions about teacher learning and teachers' roles as agents in the process of educational improvement. The middle part of the chapter summarizes some of the more prevalent conceptions of reflection, generally — and reflective practice, specifically — as they are presented in contemporary professional development literature. The final section questions the adequacy of these

notions of reflection in the context of the ambitious goals for educational improvement being pursued by the nation's schools.

### What's Not To Like?

There have been both proactive and reactive forces driving the educational reform movement of the past two decades, and determining which is the more dominant influence can often be problematic. The reactive element probably reached its apex with the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report,<sup>1</sup> and the impact of that document has carried over into enduring attitudes of mistrust, skepticism, and discontent on the part of the public towards its educational system. The sources of these attitudes are many and varied. They include poor student performance in international comparisons, claims by employers that graduates lack essential or even basic skills, strained relationships between school personnel and parents over respective supervisory responsibilities, frustrations with school discipline in the face of increased youth violence and anomie, and so on. The fact that attribution of these problems is often aimed at schools, when in fact the issues are far more complex, has not spared educational institutions from the tangible consequences of perceived culpability. Calls for privatization and marketplace competition,<sup>2</sup> legislative constraints on school funding, political attacks on teachers' unions, and special-interest grappling over curriculum priorities and methodologies are just a few of

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<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Chubb, J.E. & Moe, T.M. (1990). *Politics, markets, and America's schools*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution; Perelman, L.J. (1992). *School's out*. New York: Avon.

the causes of what might be described as a “defensive malaise” affecting schools and school personnel.

At the same time, the impending start of a new millennium has provided educational policy makers and reformists with a symbolic horizon, or “millennial vision,” for conceptualizing a new era of public education.<sup>3</sup> Though targeted at real and perceived challenges of the 21st century, one could argue that the contents of the current reform blueprints would have been timely responses to social and economic conditions which have been some time in the making. Indeed, the basic tenets of the “new” reforms are hardly new at all. Darling–Hammond notes,

. . . American education has been down this path before. The criticisms of current educational reformers — that our schools provide most children with an education that is too rigid, too passive, and too rote-oriented to produce learners who can think critically, synthesize and transform, experiment and create — are virtually identical to those of progressive educators at the turn of the century, in the 1930s, and again in the 1960s. What John Dewey called the “old education” in 1900, with “its passivity of attitude, its mechanical massing of children, its uniformity of curriculum and method” was to be replaced with a child-centered approach that focuses on the needs and aptitudes of students.

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<sup>3</sup> Popkewitz, T.S. (1991). *A political sociology of educational reform: Power/knowledge in teaching, teacher education, and research*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Many contemporary reforms were pursued in each of these eras: a "thinking" curriculum aimed at "higher order" performances and cognitive skills, team teaching, cooperative learning, student-centered instruction, and authentic assessment. Indeed, with the addition of a few computers, current scenarios for 21st century schools are virtually identical to John Dewey's 1900 vision of the 20th century ideal.<sup>4</sup>

In any case, there is much to admire — or, to put it another way, there is little to argue with — in the various sets of goals for a renewed public education system, at least at the more global levels of articulation.<sup>5</sup> Take for instance, this selection from Washington State's reform plan:

- All children can learn, and can do so at higher levels, if we raise our expectations of them.
- Statewide learning standards are necessary.

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<sup>4</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. (1996). *Developing a new paradigm for school reform*. National Commission on Teaching & America's Future [Online]. Located at <http://www.columbia.edu/~meg47/natlcmns.html> (INTERNET).

<sup>5</sup> Educational reform means many things to many people, and the full range of interpretations is well-represented in a vast number of books, articles, and documents. No attempt will be made here to do justice to all of the different perspectives of how school reform is best carried out. The water gets rather murky as one moves from the general to the specific, where "effective instruction" can mean back-to-basics for some while others see it as individualized problem-based learning. Similarly, "parental choice" can refer to anything from the elimination of forced busing and a return to neighborhood schools to a full-fledged voucher system including the funding of private and religious schools. For the purposes of this section, it is assumed that most local reform efforts are tied in some way to state reform plans which, in turn, are tied to the national effort put forth in Goals 2000: Educate America Act. If nothing else, there's a substantial financial incentive to assure a reasonable degree of alignment.

- Learning standards must include the traditional basic core of learning but, in addition, learning must include knowledge and skills required for success in the future society and global economy.
- Student assessment should be based on performance and mastery of content.
- Instructional practices should be premised on the needs of individual students.
- Accountability, professional development, technical assistance, and universal access to education technology are also essential components of the process.
- For changes to result in lasting progress, the power of decision making must remain close to the classroom. Local community participation in education and shared decision making must be promoted.
- Systemic reform requires long-term legislative and fiscal commitment.<sup>6</sup>

Equitable opportunities for learning, high standards of achievement, preparation for work in a technological information-based economy, safe drug-free and violence-free schools, preparation of students to think critically and participate responsibly in a democratic society, lifelong learning, and improved methods of teaching and assessing students seem clearly designed to address the dominant

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<sup>6</sup> Washington State Commission on Student Learning (1996). *A Framework for Excellence: Basic Assumptions for Improvement* [Online]. Located at [http://www.wa.gov/school\\_reform/framework.htm](http://www.wa.gov/school_reform/framework.htm) (INTERNET).

perennial concerns of parents, communities, and businesses while, at the same time, conveying a proactive and preemptive posture toward “future” challenges.

Of course, reform initiatives — even with the added weight of policy behind them — may not differ much from campaign promises made by politicians to garner public approval. Issues of viability, feasibility, and the design of specific measures toward achieving the desired outcomes tend to be far more difficult to address. Not only is consensus on these issues more elusive but, as the history of school reform has repeatedly taught us, implementations of reform agendas often yield results (*when* they yield results) which bear little resemblance to those which were initially envisioned. Reasons for this can include variance in interpretations of what the reforms mean as well as an array of institutional bureaucratic factors which impede and resist changes to the status quo, and/or a flawed strategy for implementation. In many of these cases, it can happen that not only have goals not been met, but that the actual effects of the reform efforts are as undesirable as what they were intended to replace.

Consequently, here I focus on the explicit and implicit *means* by which the more generic reform goals are to be pursued, especially those which deal specifically with the role of teachers as agents of educational improvement. There is no lack of rhetoric in reform literature as to the centrality of teachers if substantive changes are to occur, and it appears that teachers may receive a bigger portion of the resource pie than they are accustomed to receiving. Of interest to this discussion are the

assumptions about teachers' work and professional development that will determine the priorities and activities which will be undertaken in the interests of helping teachers more effectively participate in the reform of public education.

### Defining the Role of Teachers in School Change

Regulations do not transform schools; only teachers, in collaboration with administrators and parents, can do that. Thus, rebuilding the human infrastructure of the educational system through strategic investment in the recruitment, preparation, induction, and ongoing learning of teachers is a key strategy for school reform.<sup>7</sup>

The above statement is fairly representative of the treatment of teachers in reform literature in which several themes are consistently present: 1) reform efforts to improve student learning are fundamentally dependent upon the work of teachers; 2) the reforms make it necessary that teachers acquire a substantial number of new skills and methodologies, i.e. technology, authentic assessments, teaching for critical thinking; 3) high-quality and ongoing professional development programs are essential if teachers are to reach and maintain the high standards of performance that will be expected of them; 4) adequate resources must be invested to support ongoing teacher growth.

The first and fourth of these would seem to be so self-evident that their mention is unnecessary, but for teachers they offer a recognition that

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<sup>7</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. (1996). *Developing a new paradigm for school reform.*

has long been felt to be absent. A deeper examination of the second and third items, however, holds the key to understanding what the architects of reform perceive to be the role of teachers, and it is with this perception that I will take issue later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters as I develop my theoretical framework. It is not my intention to denigrate the sincerity or the integrity of those authors who are thoughtfully engaging the complex issue of teacher development so as to both meet the challenges of reform and to elevate the professional conditions under which teachers operate. Indeed, after nearly two decades of being a teacher and participating in staff development programs — both as recipient and facilitator at the school, district, and university levels — the current recommendations represent a major advance over what has traditionally been offered. The concern from which this project stems is that existing conceptions of teachers' roles in school change and educational improvement are more restrictive than they ought to be, and that promises of "empowerment" and "autonomy" are illusory or, at best, diluted versions of the qualities that are necessary for substantive and continuing school improvement to occur.<sup>8</sup>

If we look at some of the references to teachers in reform documents, we can begin to construct an image of the involvement in

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<sup>8</sup> Both "autonomy" and "empowerment" are controversial terms, and have connotations which are felt by some to be in opposition to such concepts as community, human interdependency, and equality. See, for instance, Taylor, C. (1992). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 109-121; Britzman, D.P. (1991). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. Albany: SUNY Press. These compelling distinctions are set aside as the terms are used here, and refer primarily to the suggestion of an increased voice and agency in teachers' professional activities.

school change that is anticipated for teachers. In Washington State's Education Reform Act, for example, the section titled "Preparing Professionals" includes the following,

Teachers require support to update their skills for the demands of the new education system. In order for Washington's students to meet the high standards being developed by the state, teachers will need to know and be able to implement the essential learnings and assessments, innovative instructional practices, applications of their disciplines to the world of work, effective uses of technology, family partnership-building, planning with other educators and community members, and a host of other issues specific to each discipline.<sup>9</sup>

At a superficial glance, this appears to be a rather benign statement suggesting that some training will be needed and, as the document continues, that ample opportunities for this training need to be made available. But, as I indicated earlier, there is an important difference between vision statements and plans for their implementation. A basic assertion of the Washington State Commission on Student Learning is that the state believes "The state's most productive roles in school improvement are in providing appropriate incentives, frameworks, and support for improvement— rather than in mandating the methods of

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<sup>9</sup> Washington State Commission on Student Learning (1996). *Framework for excellence: Preparing professionals*. [Online]. Located at [http://www.wa.gov/school\\_reform/oppo.htm](http://www.wa.gov/school_reform/oppo.htm) (INTERNET).

implementation.”<sup>10</sup> *Local control* is the operative phrase of assurance that state agencies are not interested in issuing a string of directives for all the state’s schools to follow. However, if we look more closely at the above quote about preparing professionals, and if we are aware of what various terms actually refer to, the outlook for local control has a different feel to it.

In the first two sentences, we see reference to “high standards being developed by the state” and a statement that “teachers [must] be able to implement the essential learnings and assessments.” It follows that the essential learnings and assessments — what will soon be the “stuff” of classroom instruction — are derived from the state-set standards for all students. What is not evident in the vision statements is the scope and breadth that the standards and essential learnings/assessments have assumed in the two or so years since the original declarations of local control were made. The initial list of learning standards occupied just a few pages and dealt with the general goals cited earlier. Eventually, however, a snowball effect began to occur, and we teachers now have several pages of “essential learnings” for each goal and at each grade level and for each discipline and it is from this expansive collection that assessments will be constructed — by the state. It does not take much imagination to foresee the kinds of training that will be both sought by teachers and offered by staff development services. Nor is it difficult to get

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<sup>10</sup> Washington State Board of Education (1995) Final report to the legislature on the schools for the 21st century program: Executive summary [Online]. Located at <http://cisl.ospi.wednet.edu/CISL/Legislative/SCH21ST/S21EXCSUM.html> (INTERNET).

a sense of the role that teachers will play in this scenario. Concepts such as autonomy and empowerment stretch any sense of credulity when the program has been laid out from start to finish.

Most veterans of public schools would correctly note that this is nothing new, which is precisely the reason why it is so significant to this discussion. In a later chapter, the matter will be revisited in the context of school culture. For now it serves to shed light on how we teachers are viewed (and perhaps view ourselves) and the pervasiveness of what Apple described as the process of “deskilling and reskilling” which rests on “the separation of conception from execution” and makes it possible for supervisory agencies to assume “technical control [which comes] from what seems to be a legitimate overall structure . . . [whereby] . . . the job, the process, and the product [are] defined as precisely as possible on the basis of management’s, not the worker’s, control over the specialized knowledge needed to carry it out.”<sup>11</sup> In the present case, we can see how this is being played out. The generic goals of reform, as has been noted, represent ideas that most teachers would readily embrace, though there may be some anxiety over the practical implications of the goals. The reform architects, having secured assent to the “legitimate overall structure,” were well-positioned to assume technical control by crafting the itemized matrices of specific curricular items corresponding to the goals and, simultaneously, pledging support to teachers in the form of training for the skills and knowledge that will be needed to implement the reforms.

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<sup>11</sup> Apple, M.W. (1982). *Education and power*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 140–155.

So what is the role of teachers? Simply to assimilate the skills and content that is handed down from above — to learn how to teach the essential learnings and get students to pass the performance assessments.<sup>12</sup> The ingredients have been altered, but the recipe is the same. The traditional order of things remains intact. Teachers are indeed essential to the process, but not to its design and development — only to its execution.<sup>13</sup> Aronowitz and Giroux have called this process a "proletarianization of teacher work" whereby,

. . . decisions and questions over what counts as knowledge, what is worth teaching, how one judges the purpose and nature of instruction, how one views the role of school in society, and what the latter implies for understanding how specific social and cultural interests shape all levels of school life, is removed from the collective influence of teachers themselves.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> One of the interviewed teachers, Eileen, was quick to point out that there *were* teachers on the committees that drafted the essential learning matrices. While this is better than no representation at all, I would dispute that this qualifies as empowerment, except for perhaps those half dozen teachers who served on the committees. The fact remains that all curricular and assessment decisions have been "handled" for the rest of us.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting a few other measures which served to circumvent the initial promises of valuing teacher input in the reform process. After convening a group of teachers from throughout the state to work on designing the assessments, this task was eventually contracted out to a consulting firm. Many teachers had undertaken their own efforts to become skilled in alternative assessment techniques and had done considerable work to develop their own instruments and strategies. Recently it was announced that every teacher in the state would be receiving the same 8 hours of training in specific assessments that are geared to coincide with the state's essential learnings. After years of declaring that technology was properly viewed as a tool in support of learning, there has been an upsurge in districts seeking to make technology a separate curricular area, with discreet skill competencies to be assessed at each grade level.

<sup>14</sup> Aronowitz, S. & Giroux, H.A. (1993). *Education still under siege*. Westport, CN: Bergin & Garvey, 37–38.

### The Allure of the Reflective Practitioner

To the extent that the above portrayal of how the implementation of educational reforms appears to be developing is even generally accurate, it is somewhat curious that the notions of teacher reflection and reflective practice are receiving so much attention in educational discourse. The idea that teachers need to reflect on their work is contained in most reform policy documents, and it is a dominant theme in scholarly literature dealing with teacher education and professional development. However, there appears to be considerable variation in what is meant by the terms reflection and reflective practice. The purpose of this section is to examine the various connotations of reflection which relate to the business of teachers.

Virtually every recent discussion of teacher development and teacher education raises the issue of reflective practice by teachers, a concept which has gained widespread favor among educators since the publication of Donald Schön's influential *The Reflective Practitioner*.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the appeal to educators of Schön's concept is that it makes an explicit link to practice and acknowledges the craft knowledge that is so central to teachers' work; that is, it has allowed the focus of teachers' knowledge base to be shifted from the theory and research of *others* to the experiential wisdom that *teachers* acquire in the course of their work, though it is not clear that this was quite Schön's intent. As we will see, there are many positions one can occupy within the ideas of "reflective"

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<sup>15</sup> Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

and “practice” when considering what it means to be a reflective practitioner. The challenge is to enjoin — as much as possible — the richest meanings of both parts of the concept.

Zeichner has observed that, within teacher development and teacher education circles, the idea of reflection is invoked by so many parties and in so many different ways, “. . . in reality one cannot tell very much about an approach to teaching or teacher education from an expressed commitment to the idea of teachers as reflective practitioners.”<sup>16</sup> Zeichner is describing a common symptom of the bandwagon phenomenon which so often plagues education — in the absence of careful consideration and dialogue of what a given idea actually means, it is applied so ubiquitously as to have little, if any, meaning at all; the eventual consequence is the abandonment of the entire notion. While reflective practice is cavalierly tossed about as the cornerstone of teacher autonomy, empowerment, and enhanced professional stature, there is hardly any consensus among educators as to what reflective practice actually entails. In fact, Zeichner even suggests that much of the treatment of reflective practice as a vehicle for teacher development is more insidious: “an illusion . . . has been created that has maintained in more subtle ways the subservient position of the teacher.”<sup>17</sup> I will be returning to this claim shortly in the context of reform and professional development literature, but will preface this discussion with a brief

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<sup>16</sup> Zeichner, K. (1996). Teachers as reflective practitioners. In K. Zeichner, S. Melnick, & M.L. Gomez (Eds.), *Currents of reform in preservice teacher education*, New York: Teachers College Press, 200.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

summary of some of the prevailing theoretical foundations of reflective practice.

### Schön's *Reflective Practitioner*

The major premise underlying Schön's "reflective practitioner" is that the traditional method of approaching professional practice — as a set of scientific principles which can be applied to the solution of any given problem, which Schön refers to as "technical rationality" — does not address what actually happens in the practical activities of professionals. Schön attributes the emergence of technical rationality to a perceived crisis in professional knowledge rooted in a growing skepticism about professional effectiveness. The response by many professions was a redefinition of professional activity to be the practice of "instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique."<sup>18</sup> According to Schön, however, professional practice is characterized by a series of "indeterminate situations," or problems of sufficient complexity and uniqueness that attempts to classify them in order to correlate them to prespecified solutions — per universal principles of the particular discipline — are certain to be unsatisfactory.

Under technical rationality, problems are identified and then matched to the appropriate solution. Schön argues that the process is far more complex, and that problems are rarely amenable to a quick and tidy processing because of a wide range of extenuating circumstances and

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<sup>18</sup> Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

factors between seemingly similar problem situations such that a solution in one case is unlikely to be precisely the best solution in another case. The reflective practitioner, for Schön, engages a type of “artistry” in dealing with indeterminate situations. This artistry is applied not just to solving problems but also to identifying problems that may have otherwise gone unnoticed had one relied on the protocols of technical rationality. Schön describes this as a process of “framing and reframing” a problem, whereby one sets out by choosing certain things to which notice is given. The technical practitioner will adhere to the initial framing and select a solution on this basis. The reflective practitioner, on the other hand, will take cues from the initial framing and be perceptive to inconsistencies or confounding circumstances. The practitioner will then reframe the problem in light of newly presented data within the problem situation, or as considered solutions are applied and reveal additional inconsistencies, which Schön refers to as “surprises” — either pleasant or unpleasant. The artistry of the reflective practitioner, then, is a way of, metaphorically, engaging in a “reflective conversation with the materials of a situation.”<sup>19</sup>

Schön distinguishes between reflection-*in*-action and reflection-*on*-action as being two distinct activities of the reflective practitioner. Most of his attention is directed to the first type of reflection, where the knowledge acquired in experience is used spontaneously and intuitively, or *tacitly*, to adapt to given situations for which purely instrumental problem-solving is inappropriate or even impossible. The second of these

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<sup>19</sup> Schön, 21.

represents the post-action pause where one thinks back, in Deweyan fashion, on the reflection-in-action "conversation" and its consequences, thereby constructing knowledge which will be tacitly referenced in future situations. Schön's treatment of reflection-in-action is perhaps his greatest contribution to enlightening the manner in which the work of teachers is considered, though I will suggest later that it is a watered-down version of reflection-on-action that underlies many notions of reflective practice.

While the concept of technical rationality describes much of what goes on in institutions of education, the notion of professional artistry is a particularly useful descriptor for what happens in the classrooms of excellent teachers. When one considers the environment in which teachers operate, with dozens of students representing a myriad of learning needs and styles, it is clear that a considerable degree of artistry is at work, and this artistry either flourishes or is stifled relative to the extent of technical rationality that is exerted on the situation, whether by the teacher or by external sources elsewhere in the system. Where it is allowed to flourish, the teacher performs much like a jazz musician, playing off the cues and patterns that emerge from the other band members (students, other teachers) and collaboratively shaping the piece (instructional situation) in ways that could not have been scripted or anticipated. This, of course, suggests a highly sophisticated form of reflection-in-action which relies on the communicative rapport between participants, a well-developed reflexive knowledge of (musical/educational) elements and conventions, and an ability to

anticipate, or sense, where a given path is heading, and a readiness to change course when the path is lost. Jan recognizes this dynamic at work in her own classroom,

I think there's value in being planned, and thinking about where you're going and how you're going to do it with the kids, but it's a very human situation, so I think there's a balance to be had between maintaining a loyalty and devotion to your plans and your time schedule and assessing the mood of your kids and your class that day. . . . I always feel like I'm surfing on things — on my curriculum or my community within the classroom. So I will monitor my teaching and my day and my approach all day long. That's not to say that I don't have definite goals or definite skills that I want to teach the kids. Most of the time it goes OK, but I'm an opportunist, and if something comes up that we need to talk about or if it is a teachable moment, I'll do it.

Especially if it has to do with how we are functioning as a group.

Yet even in the most rigid of classroom environments, and where "artistry" may seem to be a misnomer, a type of reflection-in-action is still in operation, if only toward the end of maintaining the desired structure and order of the classroom. And herein lies what I consider to be the problem of espousing the notion of reflective practice without giving careful consideration to the content of the reflection and the context of the practice. Some may contend that in this portrayal I am confusing

reflection-in-action with the natural effects of technical rationality. However, I would argue that the dynamic nature of classroom life itself supports my usage here. Regardless of whether one's orientation is "teacher-as-artist" or "teacher-as-technician," the classroom presents an ongoing stream of situations and problems which require fairly spontaneous and reflexive action, and which often yield rapid feedback. In this sense, there is indeed a process of framing and reframing problems, albeit not in a very desirable manner. This is not to fault Schön who, along with other advocates of reflection and similar concepts, has in mind a richly developed knowledge base upon which reflective practice is based. But, as we will see, this is not the case in many discussions which present a much thinner idea of teachers as reflective practitioners.

### Reflection — Critical and Otherwise

The appeal of Schön's notion of the reflective practitioner, at least for those closest to the practitioner's realm of education, seems to be its overt validation of the professional's "wisdom of practice" as a viable and essential element of a professional knowledge base.<sup>20</sup> From a premise that technical rationality is an insufficient epistemological model for many types of practical problem-solving (which includes the identification and setting of the problem), Schön offers an alternative epistemology by revealing dimensions of professional practice for which strict scientific methods are inadequate yet are routinely addressed by virtue of the

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<sup>20</sup> Shulman, L.S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57:1, 1-22.

practitioner's "knowing-in-action" being applied in a reflective manner. The seeds of Schön's concept have been around for some time. Dewey's important work on reflective thinking had already largely explained the process of framing and reframing a problem as actions are taken to solve it, and how the knowledge thus gained is used in the consideration of future problems.<sup>21</sup> Knowing-in-action is also quite similar to Polanyi's idea of "tacit knowing" which had long been established as an alternative epistemology to scientism and positivism.<sup>22</sup> Both of these promote the idea that knowledge is constructed in the course of acting upon situations that are puzzling, perplexing, or problematic. Schön has successfully integrated these ideas into a single concept of the reflective practitioner, and has contextualized it specifically in the world of the professions. In this sense, Schön's work is distinguished from earlier similar concepts by being "pre-extrapolated" for application to professional practice. At the same time that Schön should be credited for such a coherent and well-articulated presentation which has captured the attention of so many scholars and practitioners alike, its very quality of accessibility lends it to potential abuses by those whose inclination is to reduce and simplify even that which should be simplified no further, resulting in the dilution of a potentially rich idea that strips away its inherent value.

This is what has begun to happen as the teachers who will be commissioned with making the new educational reforms successful are

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<sup>21</sup> Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: D.C. Heath.

<sup>22</sup> Polanyi, M. (1958). *Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

casually given the title of reflective practitioners with few perceivable changes in their professional development. Specifically, I fear that a trend in some of the professional development and educational reform literature is to concoct a "populist" image of the reflective practitioner as one who can safely eschew philosophical, ideological, and theoretical modes of inquiry in favor of the practical knowledge which is acquired simply through the experience of teaching. Such a reduction is somewhat easier to execute with Schön's approach to reflective practice than with the view taken by other advocates of teacher inquiry and reflection, who include in their idea of reflective practice a degree of *praxis* where rigorous thinking and practical action serve to inform one another, and if either is missing the possibility of educational improvement is diminished.

As influential as Schön's work has become, reservations have been raised regarding the applicability of his principles to the field of teaching, especially as a model for teacher education. Shulman has questioned Schön's use of extreme dichotomies in drawing a sharp line of demarcation between a technical knowledge base and intuitive artistry, thereby obscuring the potential merits of teaching "in a manner that combines the technical and the reflective, the theoretical and practical, the universal and the concrete."<sup>23</sup> Gilliss has suggested that Schön's chosen contexts of design and music may not lend themselves to as easy a transfer to teaching as some educationists would like to think due to various fundamental differences in the ways that professional schools in these

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<sup>23</sup> Shulman, L.S. (1988). The dangers of dichotomous thinking in education. In P.P. Grimmett & G.L. Erickson (Eds.) *Reflection in teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 33.

fields function. For one thing, "Unlike typical entrants to teacher education faculties, music students, for example, are already highly competent in their disciplines . . . [and] are sufficiently familiar with the basics of their discipline to be in a position to experiment with various solutions to unique problems of performance."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Fenstermacher has taken particular issue with Schön's omission of research and theory as part of what the reflective practitioner reflects, or should reflect, *with*. Fenstermacher, like Shulman, worries that Schön has set up a "Good vs. Evil polarization of science and practice" which denies the role that research and theory can have in informing practice.<sup>25</sup> Fenstermacher argues, instead, for a coupling of the two in the form of what he calls "practical arguments . . . a reasonably coherent chain of reasoning leading from the expression of some desired end state, through various types of premises to an intention to act in a particular way."<sup>26</sup> Admittedly fond of the concept of a knowledge-in-action, he contends that it is unnecessarily weakened by the either-or separation of knowledge gained through research and that which is acquired through practical experience. The concept is better served, for Fenstermacher, by aspiring to "a bridge between 'the high, hard ground' [of research and theory] and the 'swampy lowland' [of practice in indeterminate situations]."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gillis, G. (1988). Schön's reflective practitioner: A model for teaching? In P.P. Grimmett & G.L. Erickson (Eds.) *Reflection in teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 51.

<sup>25</sup> Fenstermacher, G. (1988). The place of science and epistemology in Schön's conception of reflective practice? In P.P. Grimmett & G.L. Erickson (Eds.) *Reflection in teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 45.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

While teachers and teacher educators may find many of Schön's ideas appealing and useful for developing notions of teachers as reflective practitioners, the reservations expressed above should also be given serious deliberation. Given the propensity within education for capsulization of complex ideas, it would not take much for concepts like knowledge-in-action to be interpreted as a validation of teachers responding to indeterminate situations based on hunches, expediency, and various random amalgams of "what works" without being required to justify the responses with something akin to a practical argument.

Indeed, we can get a glimpse of this risk by viewing the treatment of reflective practice at two levels of teacher development. The first includes references and rhetoric about teachers as reflective practitioners in reform documents (federal, state, and local) and mainstream professional development literature.<sup>28</sup> The second level consists of those programs, policies, and initiatives that are actually occurring as implementations of the first level, and will be drawn from a combination of teacher comments and anecdotes (including my own), and staff development catalogs and materials. The discussion will be brief, as it will continue on as a thread throughout later chapters, and is intended to provide a segue into

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<sup>28</sup> By "mainstream" I am referring to the books, journals, and pamphlets of the agencies and associations whose audience is most likely to be the practitioners of public K-12 schools; i.e. district administrators, principals, teachers, and those who specialize in workshops and other contracted staff development services. Excluded from this group are scholarly journals and books which tend to find their readership at universities and high-level thinktank organizations (often staffed by current and former university scholars). Of course, there is a range of "centers" and "research foundations" which fall somewhere between these two, somewhat arbitrary, classifications.

developing an expanded notion of teacher reflection whereby teachers can gain genuine power and control in the process of educational change.<sup>29</sup>

It is somewhat ironic that many conceptions of reflective practice deviate considerably from Schön's own version, which has been so instrumental in bringing the term into the mainstream educational lexicon. Whereas Schön's work deals primarily with the dynamics of "in-action" aspects of knowing and reflecting, the operative model of teachers as reflective practitioners commonly found in the teaching literature are those who "reflect on their practice" in the literal sense. In the latter usage, reflective teachers are those who take the time to reflect back on how things are going in their classrooms — what worked and what didn't and what could be done differently — and then incorporate this reflective data into subsequent instruction. Additionally, this process is seen as more valuable and productive if it is done collaboratively with fellow teachers and other school personnel. Phrases such as "teachers must be actively involved in learning and must have opportunities to discuss, reflect upon, try out, and hone better instructional approaches" and "[collaborative] groups may focus on improving classroom instruction by encouraging teachers to reflect on their experiences and share lessons learned with others" are typical of the appeals for more time and interaction if teachers can be expected to be reflective about their work.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The selection of policies and programs presented here is not meant to suggest that there are not exceptions to this characterization; nor do I intend to disparage the whole of these programs or their intentions. Rather, I hope to establish that, despite considerable talk of new paradigms, the operative elements of the old paradigms — hierarchy, efficiency, and control — are still very much in evidence.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Education (1995). *Teachers and GOALS 2000: Leading the Journey Toward High Standards for All Students* [Online]. Located at <http://gopher.ed.gov/>

Time and collaboration, then, are two major linchpins of school-based reflective practice and are highly prioritized as targets of restructuring, which is as it should be.<sup>31</sup> It is obvious that without adequate time, teachers are hard-pressed to even examine the current day's events, not to mention getting together with colleagues to discuss innovations and new techniques. However, while I fully support the urgent demands by teachers for time and collaborative opportunities to "hone better instructional approaches," I am uneasy with what is left out of the equation. Specifically, I am concerned with what the time and collaboration will and will not be applied toward, as well as the manner in which the opportunities will be made available to teachers. Despite the best intentions of proposals for "educative communities"<sup>32</sup> and "design studio" models of professional education,<sup>33</sup> there is a formidable mind-set within the organizational structure of schools which suggests that the range of delivery modes for professional development will be rather limited. For instance, the following includes some recent developments, as well as some general trends identified by the interview participants:

- Technology workshops which teach skills but neglect any dialogue on why or how or if technology is a valuable educational tool. Given that a

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G2K/ teachers/time.html (INTERNET); National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (1995). *Learning to Walk the Reform Talk: A Framework for the Professional Development of Teachers*. East Lansing, MI: NCRTL Publications, 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Time and collaboration are also building a strong presence in teacher education reform, as evidenced in calls for longer internship experiences and collegial cohort groups. See, for instance, Clift, R.T., Houston, W.R., & Pugach M.C., Eds. (1990). *Encouraging reflective practice in education: An analysis of issues and programs*. New York: Teachers College Press.

<sup>32</sup> Bullough, Robert V., Jr. & Gitlin, Andrew D. (1994). Challenging teacher education as training: Four propositions. *Journal of Education for Teaching*. 20: 1, 67-81.

<sup>33</sup> Schön, *Educating the reflective practitioner*.

"minimum competencies" document was just drawn up, one can expect sessions to reflect these contents (Internet, graphics tools, keyboarding, etc.).

- A two-day session dealing with a newly adopted writing curriculum, where the emphasis was on how to use the teaching manual and supplemental materials, especially the sections on games and warm-up exercises. Demonstration lessons were also included.
- One of the "new ways of teaching and learning" that is expected of us includes alternative assessment methods. The state hired a consultant to develop a uniform inservice (four two-hour sessions) to teach teachers how to implement the assessment instruments that correlate to the state performance assessments (This when the same reform agencies acknowledge the ineffectiveness of this type of inservice!!). Eileen, who serves on her district's assessment committee and is part of this plan, expresses her reservations with the approach: "I have my doubts about whether those eight hours will be used in ways that really help people learn about assessment . . . so it could end up being some jargon that just comes in from the top that doesn't necessarily get translated." Jan expresses similar reservations:

They're basically training teacher tutors, and they go in and it trickles down that way. I think it's really good that we're educating each other, but when you think about the amount of time the state has put into developing these standards, and then they want to give someone a one or two day inservice and say "OK, now go and educate your

staff on it," — and in less time than that — "and then next year you might get another little session."

I don't think so, and it will only be the people who will ask questions, the kind that drive the powers-that-be crazy asking the questions, who will get a handle on all of it.

- In the name of democratizing professional development, course offerings are left to market forces. Those with high enrollments persist, those with "less comfortable" topics are eliminated. Those with college credit attached tend to be popular. Jan, frustrated that many of the sessions she signed up for were canceled due to low enrollment, describes the typical fare of staff development offerings,

There are a couple of discipline classes, several computer classes, how to work with the new science materials — those remain — but in terms of really looking at issues . . . there are always the time-management things — those are fairly regular workshops. But I don't see anything in there like how to be effective in a continually diversifying school population, for instance.

Matt corroborates Jan's observation, "It's skill training without even a hint that any thought is required."

- The issue of time continues to be dealt with as a special event, i.e. half-day release for a whole school or district. Often the topics are pre-selected and tied in with a new math or science curriculum (again, sample lessons and teaching tips). In any case, the time is provided as

sort of an "oasis" with little ongoing thread of dialogue or follow-up after the sessions are concluded. They are almost universally aimed at "nuts-and-bolts" training issues.

I am not suggesting that any of these are in and of themselves improper or without value. Teachers need and are entitled to support services to help them improve their instructional skills. What I am suggesting is that caution must be taken lest an expansion of these types of professional development offerings are expected to lead to an emerging flux of reflective practitioners. Even in the case of less structured and programmed opportunities for time and collaboration, there is still a strong likelihood that the focus will remain tied to what teachers perceive as their given role, which is one of execution and not conception or design. Hargreaves has coined the term "contrived collegiality" to describe this process of encouraging and supporting collaboration among teachers, but restricting the collaboration to an agenda defined by others.<sup>34</sup> So when we talk about teachers needing time to think about their practice and to engage in collaborative activities, we have told only part of the story. If we are sincere about transforming the role of teachers in the effort toward improving schooling, then a normative framework needs to be put on the table so that we might see just what teacher reflection can and should consist of, and how it can contribute to educational improvement.

Having dealt with mainstream sources of educational reform at some length, and having suggested that they offer incomplete portrayals of

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<sup>34</sup> Hargreaves, A. (1990). *Contrived collegiality: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studied in Education.

what reflective practice might be, attention can now be turned to those models of teaching that directly challenge the established order of school organization. Considerable work has been done in putting forth more robust models of reflective practice by teachers, and these are notably distinguished from the mainstream conceptions by their focused attention on modes of reflection that lie beyond, yet remain immutable influences upon, the daily business of classroom teaching. Most of this work is by teacher educators with a theoretical bent and is aimed at guiding the educational programs of preservice teachers. It is unfortunate that these same ideas do not figure prominently in the professional development literature regarding inservice teachers, since it is veteran teachers who — to a certain extent — construct and maintain the culture that future teachers will someday inhabit (and to which much of teacher education eventually adapts itself). The extent of this work is quite rich, and full coverage is beyond the scope of this project. A number of the key contributors will be cited as the discussion proceeds, but I think that early attention needs to be given to a select few who have largely influenced the direction I will be taking, especially in terms of the dimensions in which reflective practice can be considered. These include views of teaching from a political perspective, from a cultural perspective, and a socio-ethical perspective.

All of these views share an underlying belief that the practice of teaching cannot be separated from the moral, ethical, social, cultural, and political components of education as an institution in a democratic society. And whether the emphasis is on cultural hegemony or social injustice or

political domination, there is consistent agreement that teachers' reflective attentions must extend beyond the immediate technical concerns of classroom instruction. My purpose in this chapter is only to give a general summary of these positions, while reserving for later a more detailed account of their contributions to an expanded notion of reflective practice.

Perhaps one of the more extreme perspectives of the role of teachers is contained in the radical pedagogy of such theorists as Giroux and Aronowitz. Influenced by Paulo Freire's work in helping Brazilian peasants recognize and liberate themselves from political oppression through literacy, radical pedagogy sees modern education as being fundamentally a capitalist system of ideological domination and sociocultural marginalization which perpetuates an imbalanced distribution of political and economic power. Applying Marxist theory, schools are seen to "function as agencies of social and cultural reproduction [which have] legitimated capitalist rationality and sustained dominant social practices."<sup>35</sup> Marxist interpretations of schooling as state-engineered reproduction, however, underestimate "how teachers, students, and other human agents come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence . . . [and by] . . . downplaying the importance of human agency and the notion of resistance, reproduction theories offer little hope for challenging and changing the repressive features of schooling."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Aronowitz, S. & Giroux, H.A. (1993). *Education still under siege*. Westport, CN: Bergin & Garvey, 65

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; 66-67.

This hope, then, is embodied in the principles of resistance, empowerment, democratic vision, and transformative action. The proper function of schools is to approach education and knowledge as fundamentally "emancipatory" whereby teachers, students, and parents come to adopt a critical perspective of the society and begin to analyze and assert their own traditionally oppressed voices in shaping a democracy that genuinely empowers the majority of its members. A primary responsibility for teachers is a transformative one, which requires an intellectualism based on:

an understanding of how knowledge and patterns of social relations steeped in domination come into being in schools, how they are maintained, how students, teachers, and others relate to them, and how they can be exposed, modified, and overcome, if possible. We suggest that such a strategy can be organized around a pedagogy that argues for a notion of critical literacy and cultural power, while simultaneously presenting a strong defense for schooling as a public service.<sup>37</sup>

Another perspective of power relations embedded in schooling deals more explicitly with the control of knowledge as a means of cultural reproduction. Michael Apple directs his attentions primarily at the forces within the bureaucracy of schooling which both regulate "official knowledge" and maintain a docility among teachers so as to ensure that such knowledge will not fall under the gaze of critical eyes. He essentially

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.; 127.

describes a systematic disempowerment of teachers through the process of deskilling, which was mentioned earlier. The result is that "official knowledge" is then passively disseminated by teachers and consumed by students — to a greater or lesser degree — so that a "common culture" is perpetuated. Apple characterizes the current pushes for a national curriculum and national testing as a conservative agenda to stifle the emergence of alternative notions of a common culture, which might suggest "we should *not* be talking of something uniform, something to which we all conform. Instead, what we should be asking is 'precisely, for that free, contributive, and common *process* of participation in the creation of meanings and values.'<sup>38</sup> It is the very blockage of that process in our institutions that must concern all of us."<sup>39</sup>

The blockage, Apple suggests, is partially rooted in a susceptibility by schools to the influence and pressure of powerful interest groups and external forces, such as textbook publishers (themselves highly vulnerable to pressure), conservative groups, and extraneous events in the society-at-large, i.e. shifts in the economy, unfavorable media attention. The bureaucratic response to these pressures is increased standardization and homogenization of both curriculum and instructional methods. The result is a hidden curriculum producing a "commodification of culture" in which the official knowledge becomes a form of cultural and social

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<sup>38</sup> Williams, R. (1989). *Resources of hope*. New York: Verso, 35–36.

<sup>39</sup> Apple, M.A. (1996). *Cultural politics and education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 40.

capital whose distribution resembles and reinforces the distribution patterns of capital outside the school.<sup>40</sup>

Apple's analysis is fairly consistent with the premises of the radical pedagogy perspective. Both point to a pattern of repression and hegemony in the general society, both see the institution of schooling as a primary carrier of the status quo, and both point to a collection of covert and overt strategies which serve to instrumentalize teachers and schools by continually eroding their autonomy and empowerment. And while both see potential for some change occurring *within* schools through the efforts of teachers, parents, and students with more enlightened curriculum and critical pedagogies, there is a distinct hint that the kinds of radical social change that they envision is somewhat dependent on enabling events occurring *outside* local schools.<sup>41</sup> In this view, education is part — albeit a crucial part — of a more far-reaching plan for social reconstruction toward a highly idealized democratic vision.

Zeichner, along with Liston and others, have formulated a more moderate rendering of the critical pedagogy proposed by radical theorists such as Giroux. Categorizing prevailing notions of reflective practice into four traditions — *academic* (conveyance of subject matter), *social efficiency* (execution of strategies suggested by experts), *developmentalist* (sensitivity of teaching to students' interests and patterns of growth), and *social-*

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<sup>40</sup> Apple, M.A. & Weis, L. (1983). Ideology and practice in schooling: A political and conceptual introduction. In M.A. Apple & L. Weis, (Eds.), *Ideology and practice in schooling*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Apple's concluding chapter in *Cultural politics and education*, and also Giroux's and Aronowitz's recommendations for teachers' social/political activism both inside and outside the school setting. Both accounts suggest the limitations of driving social reform by simply nurturing a critical literacy in students.

*reconstructionist* (reflection on teaching as promoting social justice and democratic ideals)<sup>42</sup> — Zeichner and his colleagues have structured their approach to reflective practice on the premise that too many programs at the preservice and inservice levels of teacher education are situated in various combinations of the first three traditions, when it is the *socio-political* approach that holds the key to a concept of reflective practice that leads to both teacher empowerment and authentic democratization of schools, not as ends in themselves, but as means to a social reconstruction towards a more just and humane world.

Decrying the tendency in education to honor only that knowledge which is produced by university researchers and other experts, Zeichner stops short of accepting teachers' craft knowledge, even when teaching is seen as a moral craft,<sup>43</sup> as a sufficient basis for reflective practice or teacher involvement in school reform. Advocating a strong component of "moral deliberation" in any teacher education program that claims to promote reflective teaching, Zeichner suggests that support should be forthcoming only if "it [the program] is connected to the struggle for greater social justice and somehow contributes to the lessening of the pain and suffering associated with the unjust distribution of entitlements, including education, in many countries."<sup>44</sup> Although the tone of this comment seems to place Zeichner squarely in the radical school of

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<sup>42</sup> Zeichner, K.M. & Tabachnick, B.R. (1991). Reflections on reflective teaching. In K.M. Zeichner & B. R. Tabachnick (Eds.), *Issues and perspectives in inquiry-oriented teacher education*. London: Falmer Press, 1–21.

<sup>43</sup> Tom, A.R. (1984). *Teaching as a moral craft*. New York: Longman.

<sup>44</sup> Zeichner, K. (1996). Teachers as reflective practitioners. In K. Zeichner, S. Melnick, and M.L. Gomez (Eds.), *Currents of reform in preservice teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 206.

thought (a placement he would probably not deny), it is different in that Zeichner is referring to the development of a consciousness and a sensibility that prospective teachers must have if they are to play a part in educational improvement. He and Liston take issue with the inclination of some radical theorists who imply that teachers should use the classroom as a political bully pulpit, and they are open to the concept that "other defensible moral positions exist" besides those espousing the schools' culpability in contributing to an unjust society. Recognizing that "other reasonable individuals do not share the radical point of view . . . a reflective and critical approach to the moral education of teachers would recognize this plurality and enable future teachers to identify and choose between sufficiently articulated and reasonably distinct moral positions."<sup>45</sup>

Since my concern in this project lies with notions of reflective practice as applied to the teachers who already inhabit our schools and classrooms, I will close this section with what I consider to be a highly useful approach to teacher reflection that deals specifically with practicing teachers rather than with the programs for educating prospective teachers. Kenneth Sirotnik has written extensively about school improvement based upon the notion of "the school as the center of change" by which he argues that schools should not only be the "focal point or target of educational change and improvement efforts [but that] the school should be the *place* for inquiry and reflective practice — the place for critical thinking, dialogue, decision-making, action-taking, and evaluation in

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<sup>45</sup> Liston, D.P. & Zeichner, K.M. (1987). Critical pedagogy and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 169: 3, 122.

educational change and improvement efforts."<sup>46</sup> Sirotnik uses the term "critical inquiry" for his theoretical framework and presents it as a structure for viewing practice as "the subject of deliberate reflection" which places under critical scrutiny all the values, beliefs, knowledge, and information which shape the organization and practice of schools, which are then examined in the context of the following generic questions:

- 1) *What are we doing now? How did it come to be that way?*  
(framing the discussion in a current and historical context)
- 2) *Whose interests are — and are not — being served by the way things are?* (confronting political reality and embedded values and interests)
- 3) *What information and knowledge do we have — or need to get — that bear upon the issues?* (demanding informed and broadly considered inquiry)
- 4) *Is this the way we want things to be? What are we going to do about all this?* (linking the thought with action, which will then be reviewed, revised, and so on)<sup>47</sup>

There are several notable features of Sirotnik's framework. First, it is designed to take place within the school environment by those who occupy that environment as immediate stakeholders; this is qualitatively different than the reflective exercises that might occur in preservice

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<sup>46</sup> Sirotnik, K.A. (1989). The school as the center of change. In T.J. Sergiovanni & J.H. Moore (Eds.) *Schooling for tomorrow: Directing reform to issues that count*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 90-91.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100. Questions are verbatim; parenthetical notes are my paraphrasing of the author's explications.

education programs. Second, it requires that participants be self-critical (both individually and as groups) and also critical of those conditions and practices which have come to be through complacency and/or tradition. Third, there is an explicit call to action based on the inquiry, and this practice informs subsequent inquiry — a praxis; the inquiry is not completed if it does not lead to an effect on practice, even if that action is an affirmation of what is currently being done. Fourth, the inquiry process is cyclical and continual — any action taken remains open to further critical examination whenever the generic questions are posed. Fifth, and what I believe to be Sirotnik's fundamental point, the inquiry empowers teachers (and other participants) to effect genuine change at the center of their professional culture — the school; values of social justice and equality are still operative, but in a context less abstract than that targeted by the radical theorists. In a word, the consequences of critical inquiry that is centered in the school are more *tangible* than if one is examining classroom practices with an eye as to how they might impact the state of the world. Perhaps the bumper sticker "Think global – Act local" is a message with merit.

### Summary

I intend this chapter to serve as a foundation for what is to come. I have tried to establish three main points from which to proceed. Early on, I expressed some reservations about the current educational reform movement, particularly with the treatment of the role of teachers in the reform efforts. I argued that official rhetoric about the vital place of teachers in a successful reform program is contradicted by an emerging

pattern of traditional top-down factory-model measures in which goals, standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school management are set at a high organizational level, i.e. state commissions. These are then passed down to local districts which repeat the process and pass their agenda to the schools whose chief task is to struggle with compliance. Moreover, I claimed that the "new skills" and "new roles" for teachers are being addressed in much the same manner in which they've always been addressed — with highly-structured skill training designed to help teachers implement the programs that have been instituted. Putting a "spin" of empowerment and autonomy on this training should not obscure its basic quality of "deskilling."

Within this context, I set out to explore the (curious) proliferation of references to teacher reflection and reflective practice. Though Schön's popular concept of reflection-in-action appears to be highly influential in descriptions of what the new practice of teachers should resemble, I note that much of the staff development literature is oriented to reflection-on-action, and for the provision of set-aside time for teachers to look back on "what works" in their own and others' classrooms and to share ideas for future reference. Indeed, one teacher education program, touting its orientation to reflective practice, boasts of its "Reflection Day" in which supervising teachers and student teachers are paired up (once!) to reflect on a predetermined topic.<sup>48</sup> While a premium value is placed on time and

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<sup>48</sup> Wildman, T.M., Niles, J.A., Magliaro, S.G., & McLaughlin, R.A. (1990). Promoting reflective practice among beginning and experienced teachers. In R.T. Clift, W.R. Houston, & M.C. Pugach (Eds.), *Encouraging reflective practice in education: An analysis of issues and programs*. New York: Teachers College Press, 139-162.

collaboration, both of which I agree are essential, there is little discussion of what kind(s) of reflective practice are likely to result from these resources. In other words, if we don't have much of an idea of what we mean by reflective practice, the equation of  $\text{TIME} + \text{SHARING} = \text{REFLECTIVE PRACTICE}$  is of questionable validity.

I closed the chapter with a discussion of some notions of reflection which are not prominent in the mainstream conversation of school practice and professional development of teachers (though moreso in teacher education). Each of these offers a multi-dimensional framework suggesting that questions of "what works?" can be properly answered only by addressing a corollary question of "toward what ends and for whom does it work?" This is to say that teachers, if they wish to be reflective practitioners, must consider an expanded perspective of what it means to be reflective about teaching and how this reflection manifests itself in one's practice.

## **Chapter Two — Reflection as Second Nature: Tacit Awareness and the Complexity of Teaching**

It is, of course, encouraging that recognition is being given to the importance that teachers receive opportunities to reflect on their work. Yet this recognition alone does not constitute a major shift in the way teachers or their roles are perceived. A thin conception of teacher reflection — whether by reform designers or professional development specialists or teachers themselves — does little to advance the cause of educational improvement and the empowerment of teachers as autonomous professionals. Insofar as prevailing notions of teacher reflection are limited to the implementation of policies and practices which have their origins largely outside the sphere of teacher influence, then declarations of an expanded role for teachers in educational reform are somewhat disingenuous. In reality, it is the same role with slightly different packaging. While teachers may enjoy some additional time to meet with colleagues, there is an implied assumption that this time will be devoted to skill acquisition and dissemination of “effective” strategies — which have long been the traditional staples of teacher activity and, I contend, provide an impoverished model of reflective practice.

At the close of the last chapter, I referred to several notions of reflection which view teaching as a fundamentally intellectual and moral endeavor in which the actual classroom activities of teachers are seen as functions of a broader scheme of critical inquiry and deliberation regarding the purposes of education and the role of schools in a democratic society. Inherent in all of these conceptions is an implicit confidence that teachers

are fully capable of such tasks as planning lessons, assessing student work, communicating with parents, maintaining discipline, and mastering subject matter. Consequently, the focus shifts to ideologies, beliefs, and values which determine the *nature* of these tasks — how subject matter will be presented, what students will be asked to do and how it will be assessed, the methods of classroom management which best reflect the principles of democratic participation, and so on. Through such a process, teachers are genuinely empowered to participate in the full spectrum of issues that affect schooling and public education, including policy, curriculum, and school organization, as well as the kinds of training and support that will be necessary to support the goals and principles which are continually being examined, revised, and improved through ongoing dialogue and reflection.

What I wish to propose in this and the following chapter is a kind of nexus between the various notions of reflective practice to which I have thus far referred. It is quite a distance from Reflection Day to Sirotnik's critical inquiry, radical pedagogy, and postmodernist educational criticism. I have neither the capacity nor the inclination to argue that reflection should be primarily directed at education understood as an instrument of class domination, or genderization, or racial oppression, or social injustice, or economic competitiveness, or basic literacy, or individual development, or any other of the many interpretive strands to which many educational scholars address their attentions. My argument is that teachers ought to see themselves as affected by all of these issues, and that each of them needs to be acknowledged as one plays the role of the

reflective practitioner. Being fully aware and sensitive to the already substantial taxation on teachers' time and energy, I cannot in good conscience build an argument for the idea of *adding* reflection to practice, as though they are two distinct activities. Instead, I believe that the two terms of the concept must be interwoven in such a way that a vital symbiosis is revealed, where both terms cannot be seen to exist independently of one another. This notion bears a close resemblance to the mechanics of Schön's major thesis, but with an expanded articulation of the reflective material which is brought to bear on the indeterminate situations of education.

Therefore, it is necessary to begin to merge some of the avenues of thought on reflection and reflective practice. Before we can honestly make a claim about the assumed benefit of teachers as reflective practitioners, we must start to discuss how we see reflective practitioners differing from what is currently the norm and how reflection will in fact lead to better practice. The purpose of this chapter is to begin to explore some possible dynamics of reflective practice – in which the reflection has a direct effect on how practice is approached and executed. The emphasis here will be less on what should be reflected upon (i.e. social justice) and more on how a rich and multi-dimensional model of reflection can contribute to a) autonomous and empowered teacher activity, and b) a more broadly informed and responsive pedagogical practice that is considerate of many aspects of schooling.

### Reflection as Dispositional Habit

When all is said and done, and regardless of what specific topics one might prefer for reflection to be centered on, a major part of the idea of reflective practice comes down to a matter of how one thinks reflectively. Schön has acknowledged a debt to John Dewey in the formulation of his own concept, and Dewey's account of reflective thinking in *How We Think* and *The Quest for Certainty* is quite extensive and comprehensive. While some may charge that Dewey's idea is rooted in a largely empirical and scientific approach to resolving problematic situations, it does not follow that his general explication cannot be worthily adapted to our present discussion. For if one looks closely, Dewey's reflective thinking is essentially a process of framing and reframing problems and assessing attempted solutions, then resuming the framing process. Zeichner's concept of "moral deliberation" can be traced to Dewey's more generalized notion of deliberation in all purposeful thought (and preceding purposeful action), and Sirotnik's critical inquiry certainly is consistent with Dewey's definition that "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought."<sup>1</sup>

Dewey's reflective thinking contains a number of elements whose consideration is essential before one attempts to join reflection and practice. In fact, Dewey builds much of his case on the premise that

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: D.C. Heath, 9.

reflective thinking is epistemologically irrelevant to human affairs without a correlate in action.<sup>2</sup> It is in his theory of reflective thought, however, that we find a number of highly useful concepts which are often absent in contemporary educational discourse dealing with teacher reflection. And while Dewey's language does lend itself to interpretations which fail to account for the moral and ethical considerations which must be antecedents of most educational decision-making, it does not encroach upon his work to weave these into an examination of his general principles.

Before the process of reflective thinking can be engaged, according to Dewey, there needs to be some perplexity, confusion, or doubt. This then prompts the formation of suggestions which offer some way out of the perplexity. In short, "The nature of the problem fixes the end of thought, and the end controls the process of thinking."<sup>3</sup> However, Dewey makes an emphatic point that reflective thinking is not simply a matter of perplexity and emerging suggestions; rather, it is embodied in how one treats the suggestions and judges their worth in terms of the problem at hand. The objective is not merely to eradicate the perplexity, but to search for the best resolution that is available. Dewey cautions against the situation in which

. . . the person may not be sufficiently *critical* about the ideas that occur to him. He may jump at a conclusion

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<sup>2</sup> Dewey, J. (1929). *The quest for certainty: A study of the relation of knowledge and action*. New York: Minton, Balch, & Co. See especially Chapters I & VI.

<sup>3</sup> Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 15.

without weighing the grounds on which it rests; he may forego or unduly shorten the act of hunting, inquiring; he may take the first "answer," or solution, that comes to him . . . One can think reflectively only when one is willing to endure suspense and to undergo the trouble of searching. . . . To be genuinely thoughtful, we must be willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt which is the stimulus of thorough inquiry, so as not to accept an idea or make positive assertion of a belief until justifying reasons have been found.<sup>4</sup>

Teaching is by nature an extremely complex activity. Ambiguity and perplexity — the motivations for reflective thinking — are in no short supply. Attempts to mask the complexity by imposing simplistic procedures or techniques are not only certain to fail in this regard, but have an added negative effect by inhibiting the occurrence of reflective thought in those who most need to confront the inherent complexity of teaching. The common practice in staff development programs, for instance, of bypassing theory and moving directly to practical execution is just such an example of what Dewey warns against, in that it encourages the fallacious belief that a single technique will fit all cases and all circumstances. Consequently, when faced with the perplexing situation where the technique is ineffective, the teacher is likely to seek what Dewey calls "emotional congruity" whereby the suggestions that emerge are

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 16.

controlled by a conditioned desire to have them “[fit] agreeably into a single picture.”<sup>5</sup>

In saying that teachers need to reflect on their teaching, little is indicated as to the qualities that teachers are expected to bring to the process. As I’ve indicated, it often seems as though the dominant consideration is the effectiveness of execution — “did that work?” In the parlance of teaching, this is gauged by some form of objective assessment of achievement or some subjective assessment of how the lesson or whatever was received by students. In either case, the focus is entirely on methodology and is motivated by the fact that I, as a teacher, was charged with teaching X to my students for the purpose of achieving outcome Z. Having employed method Y and measured outcome Z, I reflect on whether method Y was adequate or needs to be revised to achieve a higher degree of Z. The reflection here is one-dimensional. All of the elements of instruction and my behavior in implementing them have been prescribed for me. When my efforts are unsuccessful, my perplexity arises with respect to the equation  $X+Y=Z$ , and not the terms of the equation. It does not occur to me that there may be something wrong with X, Y, or Z as elements of instruction. Instead, I am likely to repeat the operation again and again in the hope that Z will eventually be obtained. I may toy with quantities by increasing Y or dividing X into parts,  $X_1$  and  $X_2$ . I may, at last, conclude that X and Y are fine, but the student is incapable of achieving Z, in which case a scaled-down  $x+y=z$  may be recommended. In all of these “solutions” I am seeking an emotional congruity with the single picture of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14.

a viable  $X+Y=Z$  without even considering the value or justifiability of the grounds for using  $X$ ,  $Y$ , or  $Z$ . What I am lacking is the predisposition to critically judge the full range of factors and the interactions among these factors which contribute to the complexity of teaching.

Judgment holds a central position in Dewey's notion of reflective thinking, for it is through judgment that one ascertains which aspects of a situation or problem — as well as emergent suggestions — are relevant and which are irrelevant. He does not, however, offer much insight into how judgment is developed; nor does he offer much insight on what guides the judgment of the reflective thinker except for the criteria of instrumental efficacy in resolving the perplexing situation. This omission of the role of values and beliefs in reflective judgment has lent to Dewey's reputation as a strict pragmatist and empiricist; but within his epistemological argument that knowing is directly related to practical activity, he provides ample room for the function of values but maintains that this function is only valuable to the extent that it leads to practical solutions to perplexing situations. The function of values in reflective thought, therefore, is defined by practical problems, specifically, "How shall we employ what we know to direct the formation of our beliefs about value and how shall we direct our practical behavior so as to test these beliefs and make possible better ones?"<sup>6</sup> While some may object to the idea of "testing beliefs," I see this statement as essentially advocating an ongoing process of critical reflection — or judgment — which results in

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<sup>6</sup> Dewey, *Quest for certainty*, 43.

more desirable practical activity and a more refined apprehension of our values and beliefs.

As we consider judgment and reflective thinking in teaching, then, we are left with the rather straightforward notion that complexity is not something to be diminished, but instead should be embraced as the most fertile context for reflective practice to be realized. First, an appreciation of the many elements that play upon any given educative episode reveals a wider range of possible suggestions for dealing with the many instances of perplexity and ambiguity. By this principle, not only might I have considered that X or Y or Z were lacking in some essential way, but I might have considered a whole array of other factors which might have been at the root of my frustration, thereby expanding the range of options I might consider as solutions. Second, my ability to apprehend a wide range of ambiguous elements which affect my teaching is directly related to the breadth and depth of the resources I bring to the reflective inquiry of perplexing situations. By resources I am referring to a reflexive awareness of such things as a coherent philosophy of education, a knowledge of alternative pedagogical and curricular models, a sense of how policy and political factors structure the school environment in which students and I coexist, a sensitivity to social conditions which affect the existential quality of students' lives, and a command of instructional methodologies which are effective in various contexts, among other things. These are not resources that can simply be "front-loaded" in teacher education programs, but are cumulative and continually developing structures of knowledge which both inform reflective thinking/practice and are

informed by it. I will refer to these resources as a being part of a reflective framework, or “reflective landscape,” for which an explanation of the metaphor will be given below. When these resources are inert or weakly developed, one can easily become dependent on universal equations and formulas in an effort to establish emotional congruity.

### Reflection as Indwelling

It is widely noted that much of the knowledge and practical wisdom that teachers acquire through their classroom experience is not easily articulated by those same teachers, yet is fully operational in their practice.<sup>7</sup> That is, teachers often may be unable to explain the reasoning for certain decisions they make in practice, yet they know intuitively that the decision was warranted given the circumstances. In this sense, they are employing “knowing-in-action” which, according to Schön, is built upon a “repertoire of examples, images, understandings, and actions” accumulated from previous experience.<sup>8</sup> Borrowing from Polanyi’s concept of *tacit knowing*, through which “we know more than we can tell,”<sup>9</sup> Schön is suggesting that the meanings contained within this repertoire are held tacitly and brought to bear upon present situations without our full awareness of their suggestive input, or their operation below the threshold of explicit articulation. In practice, “seeing *this* situation as *that* one, one may also *do* in this situation *as* in that one

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<sup>7</sup> Clarke, A. (1995). Professional development in practicum settings: Reflective practice under scrutiny. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 11:3, 243-261; Elbaz, F. (1983). *Teacher thinking: A study of practical knowledge*. London: Croom Helm.

<sup>8</sup> Schön, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books, 137.

<sup>9</sup> Polanyi, M. (1966). *The tacit dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 4.

(original italics)".<sup>10</sup> As the immediate knowing-in-action gives way to reflection-in-action, modification — or "reframing" — is applied as similarities and differences between *this* and *that* situation are revealed. However, *the distinction between knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action is a vitally important one*, and cuts to the core of my argument. A closer look at Polanyi's theory may help to clarify my insecurity over the consequences of failing to make this distinction. What follows, then, is a reiteration of some of Polanyi's illustrative examples, and one by Schön, and an attempt to extrapolate the core ideas contained in them to the context of reflection in teaching.

In one of his more well-known examples, Polanyi presents the case of a blind person using a stick, or probe, to make sense of his/her surroundings. Initially, the probe is awkward and uncomfortable — it consumes most of our attention to simply manipulate it and get accustomed to its sensation on our hand. At this stage, we have little awareness of what it is that the probe is striking. Eventually, with practice and experience at using the probe to explore various objects, we come to attend less to the probe's sensation on our hand and more on what lies at the other end of the probe, the new object of our attention and that which we seek to identify and understand. We begin to internalize the subtleties of the probe's pressing on our hand as we start to perceive *through* the probe to what the probe is revealing to us. Polanyi refers to this as the relationship between the two terms of tacit knowing, the *proximal* (the probe) and the *distal* (that which we apprehend through the probe). In

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<sup>10</sup> Schön, 139.

short, as we attend *from* the proximal terms *to* something else (the distal), “we pour ourselves out into them (the proximal) and assimilate them as part of our own existence . . . We accept them existentially by *dwelling in* them.”<sup>11</sup>

The case of computers provides another glimpse into this dynamic of indwelling. Millions of people now use computers to perform tasks that a) formerly required more time and labor, and b) were not conceivable or feasible prior to the emergence of computer technology. Like the person just learning to use a probe, the computer user must first gain a familiarity with how the tool works. Initially, using the computer is both awkward and only marginally productive. Many frustrated novices express the feeling that they accomplished more in the old way in which they’ve always done it. Their experience is that they are attending more to the computer than to the performance of the task. As they come to learn the logic of the computer and become familiar with how certain functions are executed, these fade from the zone of focal awareness, giving way to more attention on the performance of the task at hand. With expertise come two additional developments. One is that almost no attention is paid to the operation of the computer; it becomes an extension of the user, functioning in a subsidiary fashion to the ideas and goals of the user; in attending *from* the computer as the proximal term *to* the execution of the job as the distal term, the user is, in a very real sense, dwelling in the computer while all attention is on the task. Second, as immersion in the

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<sup>11</sup> Polanyi, M. (1958). *Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 59.

task develops, it is possible that the task will suggest additional capabilities of the tool which were once hidden. Until complete indwelling has been achieved, the user is somewhat bound by the limitations of his/her knowledge of what can and cannot be done. To this extent, the task may be partially defined (or constrained) by one's technical knowledge of the computer; the problems that arise lie in the use of the technology. At some point, though, as the attention takes a dramatic turn toward the task — the problems that arise and the potential solutions that are suggested lie within the project. It is here that the existing framework of technical experience and knowledge is expanded through the attempts to address the new goals related to the task itself.

Contrast this scenario with the one that has characterized the treatment of computers (if not most learning) in schools. Here the proximal and distal terms are practically one and the same. Led by an agenda of competencies in "computer literacy," students are routinely led through a series of lessons on how to word-process or make a picture or enter data into a spreadsheet. Many of these activities terminate, however, upon demonstration of the particular skill rather than leading to application of the skill towards some area of intellectual curiosity or personally meaningful task. It is much like teaching a blind man to use a stick but not letting him venture out with it to explore his world. Such logistical contrivances as the computer "lab"<sup>12</sup> and rotating access via

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<sup>12</sup> An ironic term since a laboratory is typically a place where one uses specialized equipment to explore answers to questions and to seek knowledge through experimentation. Yet, in all too many computer labs, the activity consists of direct instruction, prescribed tasks, and reproduction of work done in the classroom, i.e. transcribing written works originally composed on paper.

schedules virtually negate any opportunity for students to use their acquired skill towards a meaningful task of their own devising.

Both Polanyi and Dewey are adamant that the value of knowledge exists in its practical application, yet in schools we repeatedly find skills and information taught with no practical application in mind. It is possible that the computer teacher may “reflect” on how the lesson went or how well the students learned the skill or whether they seemed to enjoy the class. It is even possible that the teacher demonstrated reflection–*in*–action by employing various strategies to adapt to students with varying degrees of prior experience or manual dexterity. But does this constitute reflective practice? Has not the teacher overlooked some important considerations in this instructional episode of students learning computer skills, such as *why* the students are learning the skills or to what purpose such skills might be applied? Has the teacher reflected on the constraints imposed by the lab setting and restricted access afforded by the schedule? If so, the next consideration is what options exist for changing the arrangement? I do not wish to belabor this analysis here, as it will be revisited in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

My interest in the concept of *indwelling* is based on a substitution of intellectual tools, including beliefs and values, for tools and probes in describing how a multi–faceted reflective framework can contribute to a more sophisticated level of reflective practice than that which exists predominantly within the parameters of practical experience or the realities of organizational structure. It is not enough, however, to argue just for the reflective framework to be multi–dimensional. This construct

must be integrated with the idea of reflection occurring on a number of planes which include, but also extend beyond, the realm of the practical. In reality, however, we cannot have one without the other just as we cannot have a distal term without a proximal term — what I attend *to* focally is comprehended according to what I am attending *from*. The depth of my attention and comprehension of the object of my focal awareness is deeply influenced by the quality and substance of that which I am attending *from*. It follows, then, that any information, theories, or beliefs that have become part of my reflective framework have the potential to shape my perception and interpretation of that on which I am focusing my attention. At first glance, this claim may seem to contradict my earlier criticism of “front-loading,” but the difference is that I am not referring to a static repository of inert knowledge which one rifles through when confronted with a perplexing situation, in which case indwelling would be impossible. If a theory or fact must be consciously retrieved and examined for possible connections to the issue at hand, then they have not truly been assimilated and are therefore not as yet fully useful. On the contrary, I am simply suggesting a reflective framework which is in continual formation, but maintain that the formation is enriched by a broader base of experience than is provided by direct practical activity alone.

I can think of few places where the polarization of theory and practice, thinking and doing, and the abstract and concrete receive greater currency than in education. The exclusion from the concept of “experience” of such things as ideas, concepts, facts, theories, and

principles is wrong-headed and severely curtails the ways in which we can consider reflection as a function of enlightened practice. Schön offers an account of a personal case of reflection-in-action in which he builds a gate but notices that it wobbles. He “happens” upon the idea that cross-diagonal supports will stabilize the gate, but then he is faced with the problem of keeping the gate square. After a bit of reflection, he “discovers” that by measuring the diagonal boards to make them equal in length, he can achieve a gate that is both stable and square.

Now this is a perfectly good example of one type of reflective thinking, and Schön notes a probable similarity to experiences by other amateur carpenters, but is this a desirable analogy for what we envision of professional practice? Referring to the gate anecdote, Gilliss (1988) notes, “It was no doubt pleasurable for Schön to discover that he could solve the problem of stabilizing the gate. However, a professional gate-builder would already know how to carry out this task and would have completed the job while Schön was reflecting. Moreover, a novice gate-builder might equally well have found a solution by consulting a book on the subject or seeking help from a more experienced colleague. . .”<sup>13</sup>

While it is true that Schön’s next gate would benefit from the experience acquired in his first attempt, the issue Gilliss raises is one between discovery learning and the kind of informed reflection that we would expect of professionals. Indeed, in Schön’s primary examples of reflective practice and reflective coaching (architecture, music, and psychiatric

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<sup>13</sup> Gilliss, G. (1988). Schön’s reflective practitioner: A model for teachers? In P.P. Grimmett & G.L. Erickson (Eds.), *Reflection in teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 49.

therapy), we can assume that a significant amount of formal professional knowledge is already present. The architect as reflective practitioner, for instance, will have already acquired an understanding of basic design elements, materials, geometric principles, land use and environmental impact issues, as well as a range of architectural styles and their benefits/drawbacks. In dealing with a design problem reflectively, the architect is tacitly drawing from this foundation of knowledge as well as the practical “repertoire” of previous experience, buildings seen, and so forth.

It is the same with the musician who attends *from* the knowledge of rhythms, harmonics, and chord structures in attending *to* the focal object of the progressions, patterns, and interactions that are occurring within the musical performance. As Polanyi explains, if the musician places attention on the particulars of fingering or note-reading, then the performance (the whole) is likely to suffer. The musician, of course, had to at one time have attended to these particulars, but only as he comes to dwell in them so as to “be aware of them in terms of their bearing on the comprehensive entity” will they exist as tacit knowledge which can be applied in practice.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, we can apply this principle to the case of teaching. It is widely felt by both novice and experienced teachers that, with regard to their education and development, “[only] practice makes practice” and that pedagogical, philosophical, sociological, and cultural foundations of

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<sup>14</sup> Polanyi, *The tacit dimension*, 18.

education are of little value for life in the classroom.<sup>15</sup> Given their choice, preservice teachers would rather spend more time in the school setting learning how to manage a classroom full of youngsters and organize time for lesson preparation and grading student work than to study or discuss theories of learning, curriculum design, or the function of schools in modern society. Similarly, inservice teachers place a high value on the immediate “usability” of what they will be exposed to in staff development sessions.<sup>16</sup> Narrowly-conceived teacher education programs and policy positions which see the schools’ job as one of “delivering product” are surely contributors to this condition, but it remains that the consequences of this perspective have a direct impact on the ways that reflection is held by and for teachers. *When the basis of educational decision-making (the proximal) is practical efficacy, then the focal awareness of teachers will be directed at perplexing situations (the distal) which are defined only in these terms.* If the claim that teachers must assume a radically different approach to teaching and learning in order to address the goals of the new reforms is a sincere one, then an equally sincere effort must be made to provide the intellectual “tools and

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Sirotnik, K.A. (1990). On the eroding foundations of teacher education, in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1990, 710-716; Goodlad, J.I. (1990). *Teachers for our nation's schools*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>16</sup> The popularity of the “make-it-and-take-it” workshops of the learning-center oriented 70s has given way to opportunities for collecting/developing templates of lessons and unit plans which can be readily implemented back in the classroom. In essence, these sessions are more about providing some structured planning time than disseminating new ideas about teaching and learning. The theories and concepts underlying these new ideas are nearly vaporized in the effort to proceed on to the practical “nitty-gritty” which is consistent with the prevalent view of the teacher’s job as one of execution and not conception or deliberation.

probes" by which teachers can comprehend the new ideas and transform them into guides for practice.

A few years ago, I had a frustrating experience which I believe illustrates the above point. A national grant had been awarded to a regional consortium of my own and several other school districts for a project to advance the use of technology in student learning through a constructivist approach to instruction.<sup>17</sup> The grant provided for a week-long seminar purported to orient us to the principles of constructivist learning and methods by which technology could be used to support learning environments based on constructivist ideas. Now it just so happens that I was enrolled in a graduate course in instructional design at the time of this seminar, of which a major theme was constructivism and the potential uses of technology in learning. This coincidence of timing provided an intriguing opportunity to compare theoretical and practical approaches to the same topic. In the university class, there were numerous readings and discussions dealing with fundamental assumptions of contemporary constructivist theories, their origins, their implications for school organization and practice, characteristics of learning environments which would be supportive of student-centered knowledge construction, and various aspects of computer technology which seemed compatible with the goals and methods implied by constructivist notions of learning. In truth, the treatment was entirely

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<sup>17</sup> Which, incidentally, figures prominently among the instructional models underlying the reform goals, though there has been some retreat from the specific term of "constructivism." I suspect that the reason for this is in part related to the issues raised by the story I am relating.

conceptual and theoretical — it was up to us students to translate these ideas into practical applications if we were so inclined.

The seminar took place some time during these university sessions, and the total lack of overlap in presentation was striking. The seminar provided a short video segment of students using computers and video cameras in the course of an activity dealing with dissection of a bovine heart — a rather compelling vignette, I must admit. This segment was then translated and distilled into what were offered as the five elements of constructivist teaching: tasks, interactions, tools, situations, and assessments. Under each of these was a brief list of questions designed to prompt the development of an instructional episode (What will be students be doing?, What equipment will be needed?, How will students be arranged?), but not necessarily to encourage an assessment of how one's choices under this rubric coincided with any principles of learning. The remainder of the seminar was hands-on time learning how to configure hardware and operate software designed for the production of multimedia reports. With this training, we were sent back to our schools as "constructivist teachers."

Midway through the seminar I approached the facilitator and inquired if any background concepts would be presented to help us understand what constructivism was so that we could better assimilate it (assuming acceptance) into all aspects of our practice rather than special projects. Our conversation revealed his extensive familiarity with the literature and theoretical positions I was encountering in my class, yet he was adamant that such information was too complicated and

inappropriate for a seminar such as this one. His experience in staff development, he told me, was that underlying ideas were generally poorly received and that teachers are more comfortable when given an easy-to-follow set of guidelines for implementation.

Several weeks later, after having an opportunity to implement our constructivist activities, all of the participants met, shared experiences, and showed student products. Without going into detail, it suffices to say that the results represented every imaginable pedagogical position, from total step-by-step teacher direction of a history theme to projects which were seemingly devoid of any teacher involvement whatsoever. The only common element was the use of the multimedia technology.

Assessments of student learning similarly varied from rigid point structures to affective impressions of students who "had a ball" and "were really excited." Our "reflective" session did not allow for much dialogue or inquiry except for exchanging affirmations of the power of constructivism (as variously defined) supported by technology. There was little reference made to how the instruction facilitated the construction of knowledge or the cognitive processes that students engaged in; these considerations were overshadowed by concerns with noise level, scheduling factors, and off-task behaviors.

Now I am appreciative of the enthusiasm that can be generated from trying new techniques and methods. I sincerely believe that most participants in this seminar were significantly motivated by their experiences with using technology and straying (with license) from traditional materials. I believe that all enjoyed the opportunity to meet

and work with other teachers. But I question what we actually accomplished in the name of instructional improvement. In the absence of any conceptual principles to guide our endeavors, I suspect that we mostly “made it up” with respect to our prevailing beliefs and habits. In addition, the terms of the grant stipulated that after our “training” we would each return to our respective schools and share our newly acquired expertise with our colleagues. It is no surprise, then, that throughout the districts which participated in this project, there is considerable cringing at the mention of the word “constructivism.”

In all fairness, there were participants who did some exploring on their own, and a few articles surfaced over the next few months. My concern is with the overall approach which explicitly devalued the possibility that some intellectual consideration might result in more coherent and grounded practice. This is not to say that the seminar should have taken the same theoretical approach as the university class, but it is to suggest that a familiarity with the fundamental concepts and vocabulary found in the literature on constructivism would have allowed us to make more informed decisions as we set out to design instructional situations for our students. The one university class by no means qualified me as an expert, but the conceptual understandings that I did acquire — situating learning in a realistic context, cognitive apprenticeship, authentic tasks — certainly were influential as I considered my role as a teacher in this process. Indeed, the concepts themselves became far more meaningful and comprehensible as I engaged them in the context of actually working with students. Polanyi writes about theory in general, “[we] identify

ourselves with the teachings in question, by making them function as the proximal term of a tacit knowledge, as applied in practice. This establishes the [pedagogical] framework for our acts and judgments . . . For we are attending from the theory to things seen in its light, and are aware of the theory, while using it, in terms of the spectacle that it serves to explain . . . its true knowledge lies in our ability to use it.”<sup>18</sup> Stated more simply, “Knowledge and beliefs become meaningful only in practice; practice in turn shapes knowledge and beliefs.”<sup>19</sup>

It is therefore mistaken, I believe, to confuse theoretical and conceptual knowledge with technical rationality. In the case just presented, such knowledge served to inform and enrich, rather than constrain, both my reflection *on* what was occurring in my classroom and the reflection-*in*-action that guided my own observations of students, my interactions with them, and the spontaneous instructional choices that were made during this process. In contrast, I contend, the abbreviated five-element recipe that the seminar offered was not only of marginal value in dealing with the indeterminate situations of the classroom, but more than likely exacerbated them.

The nature of indeterminate situations is that circumstances and factors will pose for the practitioner problems which have no preordained answers, and for which spontaneous and reflexive responses will be required. This is all the more reason why, in discussing reflective practice

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<sup>18</sup> Polanyi, *The tacit dimension*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Nelson, B.S. & Hammerman, J.K. (1996). *Reconceptualizing Teaching: Moving Toward the Creation of Intellectual Communities of Students, Teachers, and Teacher Educators*, In M.W. McLaughlin & I. Oberman (Eds.) *Teacher Learning: New Policies, New Practices*. New York: Teachers College Press, 19.

in education or in any inherently complex field of endeavor, reductionist analogies and simplistic explications can actually be a detriment to understanding. While they may have value in framing an idea or situation, unless they are eventually reframed to account for their complexity, what they omit may be more important than what they reveal when translated into practice.

### Complexity and Ill-Structuredness

Cognitive Flexibility Theory (CFT) was developed by Rand Spiro and various colleagues to explain the failure of many instructional systems which attempt to simplify or impose a well-ordered structure on knowledge domains which are inherently complex, or "ill-structured."<sup>20</sup> An ill-structured domain is defined as one in which

- a) each case or example of knowledge application typically involves the simultaneous interactive involvement of multiple, wide-application conceptual structures (multiple schemas, perspectives, organizational principles, and so on), each of which is individually complex, and
- b) the pattern of conceptual incidence and interaction varies substantially across cases nominally of the same type (i.e., the domain involves cross-case irregularity).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Spiro, R.J. & Jehng, J.C. (1990). Cognitive flexibility and hypertext: Theory and technology for the nonlinear and multidimensional traversal of complex subject matter. In D.J. Nix & R.J. Spiro (Eds.), *Cognition, education, and multimedia: Exploring ideas in high technology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 163–205.

<sup>21</sup> Spiro, R.J., Feltovich, P.J., Jacobson, M.J., & Coulson, R.L. (1992). Cognitive flexibility, constructivism, and hypertext: Random access instruction for advanced knowledge acquisition in ill-structured domains. In T.M. Duffy & D.H. Jonassen (Eds.),

In these kinds of knowledge domains, many traditional instructional methods seek to superimpose a simplified structure to aid the learner. In introductory learning, where a basic grasp of key concepts is considered adequate and there are no expectations for transfer to other situations, this approach is of little consequence. But as one looks toward the more advanced knowledge acquisition of the professional or expert, this simplification process impedes comprehension of the full complexity of the knowledge domain and one's ability to transfer the application of concepts across cases which vary in certain significant aspects. The authors of CFT refer to this tendency to oversimplify as reductive bias, and it has a number of forms. The three that I see to be especially common in education generally, as well as teacher education specifically, are:

- *additivity bias*, in which parts of complex entities that have been studied in isolation are assumed to retain their characteristics when the parts are re-integrated into the whole from which they were drawn.
- *discreteness bias*, in which continuously dimensioned attributes are bifurcated to their poles and continuous processes are instead segmented into discrete steps.
- *compartmentalization bias*, in which conceptual elements that are in reality highly interdependent are instead treated in isolation, missing important aspects of their interaction.<sup>22</sup>

Much of the research and application of CFT has occurred with the use of computer-based hypertext instructional systems in the area of

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*Constructivism and the technology of instruction: A conversation.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 62.

medical education, where diagnoses and treatments must be sensitive to idiosyncrasies of individual pathological contexts, even though there may be similarities in symptomology. The premise of CFT that underlies the explicit link to hypertext systems is that advanced knowledge acquisition in ill-structured domains is best facilitated by a nonlinear interaction with facts, concepts, and principles and by the consideration of multiple perspectives of a given problem and possible solutions, thereby contributing to the development of a *cognitive flexibility* needed to apply and use the knowledge in the face of across-case inconsistencies. The metaphor employed by Spiro et al. to describe this process is that of the criss-crossed landscape in which the learner performs a "multidimensional traversal of complex subject matter, returning to the same place in the conceptual landscape on different occasions, coming from different directions."<sup>23</sup> What I wish to do here is to apply the concepts of CFT to the work of teachers while abstracting the hypertext referent to the concept of reflective practice. I believe it is possible that the database that would be found in the hypertext system can be equated to a reflective landscape, while the various notions of reflective thinking and deliberation can stand for the way that a hypertext system functions.

There can be no question but that education qualifies as an ill-structured domain in every regard, despite the pervasive attempts to make it otherwise. On a practical level, the work of a committed teacher is every

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 67. See also Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. New York: Macmillan. The metaphor was used by Wittgenstein to describe the difficulty he had in arranging his ideas in any single direction, thereby choosing eventually to present them as traversals across a landscape of philosophical topics.

bit as complex as that of the medical professional or the historian, for the practice of all of these is fraught with what Schön called indeterminate situations, which confound attempts to be understood and effectively dealt with through preexisting mental representations and prepackaged interpretive frameworks. Yet the fact remains that teachers are consistently issued these devices in their training and are systematically conditioned to believe that these sets of skills and a few key concepts will be adequate for the job. Ignored is the “contextually induced variability” that characterizes the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children, the efforts of teachers to guide this development, and the dynamics of the classroom.<sup>24</sup> The failure to address (or even recognize) this variability, along with continual efforts to develop policies and instructional practices of the one-size-fits-all variety (i.e., uniform standards, universal essential learnings, minimum competencies, standard assessments), perpetuates the mistaken notion that education is a well-structured domain. When the activities of schools are defined in these terms, the habit of seeking single explanations for complex phenomena becomes a part of the professional culture, and programs for teacher development reflect this orientation in their propensity for employing one or more of the reductive biases listed above.

Beyond the notion of education and teaching as ill-structured domains of knowledge and professional practice, CFT embodies several key principles which I believe to be useful in considering teacher development and teacher reflection. First is the idea that something akin

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 65.

to “advanced knowledge acquisition” needs to become a part of how we view the professional knowledge base of teachers. This term, with its clinically cognitive connotations, may seem to be disregarding many other essential aspects of teaching, such as the interpersonal and the psychosocial, but we need not interpret it thus. Instead, we should look to what CFT says is the way that advanced knowledge is used, or *functions*, in an ill-structured domain. This is that “one must bring together, from *various knowledge sources*, an appropriate ensemble of information suited to the particular understanding or problem-solving needs of the situation at hand. (italics added)”<sup>25</sup> There is nothing prohibiting us from including in a conception of advanced knowledge such things as pedagogical theory, consideration of moral dilemmas and sociocultural forces (and our own values and ideologies toward them), awareness of organizational structures, and experience with effective methodologies and curriculum resources. However, CFT does not stop with merely identifying elements of advanced knowledge. Like Dewey, Polanyi, and others have maintained, the ultimate value lies in the integration of these elements as they are applied in practical situations, as well as the reintegration and reconstruction of knowledge that occurs *as a consequence of* their application.

Essentially, then, there are two interrelated dynamics here which are relevant to our consideration of reflection: 1) advanced knowledge consists of bringing multiple perspectives to the situations or cases that are the objects of our reflection, and 2) doing so enables us to better identify

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 64.

across-case inconsistencies and contextual differences, and to take actions and develop practices which are more responsive to the salient features of each situation. When a single perspective is used to reflect on a given case or if other forms of oversimplification are employed, "that single perspective will miss important aspects of conceptual understanding, may actually mislead with regard to some of the fuller aspects of understanding, and will account for too little of the variability in the way knowledge must be applied to new cases."<sup>26</sup> The point is that there is a profound qualitative difference between reflection that employs a single perspective and that which draws from a multiplicity of knowledge sources and perspectives.

Herein lies the connection between Schön's largely procedural portrayal of reflective practice and the elements of judgment, justifiability, context, and the content which all must be included in the reflective mix. From Dewey, we get some insight into the motivations and basic workings of reflective thinking and the attitudes that are needed to sustain it (discussed later), and from Polanyi we see that we are always reflecting *from* something — which I have labeled a reflective landscape — as we attend to the problem or situation at hand. CFT provides us with a conceptual vocabulary for asserting the inherently complex nature of teaching and suggests a qualitative link between the knowledge and

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<sup>26</sup> Spiro, R.J., Feltovich, P.J., Coulson, R.L., & Anderson, D.K. (1989). Multiple analogies for complex concepts: Antidotes for analogy induced misconception in advanced knowledge acquisition. In S. Vosniadou & A. Ortony (Eds.), *Similarity and analogical reasoning*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 498–531.

perspectives that are brought to the act of reflection and one's ability to both comprehend the situation and to devise an appropriate response.

If it is not yet evident, my primary interest is less with the process of reflection, which Dewey portrays as a natural function of the human organism (albeit with varying degrees of fluency and depth), and which Schön persuades us is central to professional practice. I find the temporal distinctions between reflection occurring at the moment of practice, looking back upon previous actions, and projecting ahead to influence future action to be compelling as a congeries of concepts representing thoughtful practice, but I don't know that they assure us of anything qualitatively substantive. As I alluded to in the previous chapter, it seems that one can set the parameters of reflection wherever one chooses and to encompass as much or as little as one desires. We can certainly call a teacher reflective who ponders the reasons for chronic misbehavior in her class and arrives at a solution of placing a marble jar on her desk whereby credits toward a party are earned through compliance with the teacher's rules. All the procedural criteria have been met for reflective practice, especially if the solution was developed with colleagues during time set aside for peer collaboration. My primary interest, then, is in promoting a dialectic which deals specifically with how we educators envision reflective practice as a vehicle for improved professional practice which advances the goals and purposes that we hold for a public system of education.

It has been toward this end that I have selected the particular concepts to be included in this chapter. The principles of cognitive

flexibility (to which we can add other components germane to teaching), tacit knowing, and reflective thinking all share a common construct on which the entire foundation of reflective practice depends — the reflective framework. While I will have to delineate the elements of the framework in order to discuss how they function in relation to each other, I envision the framework to resemble a sort of educational landscape. Borrowing from Spiro, who borrowed from Wittgenstein, I see reflective practice as a process of criss-crossing this landscape, with each traversal exposing or revealing another aspect of the situation which causes us to see it in a new light. With repeated passes from different points on the landscape, a more thoroughly developed apprehension of the situation can be formed;

By criss-crossing topical/conceptual landscapes, highly interconnected, web-like knowledge structures are built that permit greater flexibility in the ways that knowledge can potentially be assembled for use in comprehension or problem-solving. . . In other words, the range of differing situations that the knowledge could be transferred to is increased.<sup>27</sup>

It follows from this that a landscape that is dotted with an extensive array of perspectives and navigable paths will provide a richer reflective journey than one sparsely developed or which has but a few paths to follow. Moreover, it is a forever expanding landscape, with new points

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<sup>27</sup> Spiro, R.J. & Jehng, J. (1990). Cognitive flexibility and hypertext: Theory and technology for the nonlinear and multidimensional traversal of complex subject matter. In D. Nix & R.J. Spiro (Eds.), *Cognition, education, and multimedia: Exploring ideas in high technology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

(perspectives) appearing, or receiving our notice, with repeated traversals. Finally, like any well-traveled area, the layout of the landscape becomes increasingly interiorized as we come into continued contact with its layout, features, and topography. We become subsidiarily aware of points that once were foreign and difficult to distinguish but which became familiar with repeated contact, yet it remains possible that these points will reveal new meanings if we come to them from a different direction or with a different purpose.

## Chapter Three — Domains of a Reflective Framework

### A Reflective Landscape

If education is accepted as an “ill-structured” domain of professional activity, then it is necessary to examine the perspectives in which it is considered or, in the terms of this discussion, reflected upon. The point of bringing CFT into the conversation was to lay a groundwork for considering what might constitute, in education, as “advanced knowledge acquisition.” I recognized in the previous chapter that this term does not connote all of the functions that most educators believe are encompassed by the activities of schools, most notably those dealing with affect. The inappropriateness of the label, however, does not negate the value of the concept, particularly as it has been adapted to the notion of teacher reflection. My focus in this section is to propose and defend the idea of a “reflective landscape” as inclusive of not only advanced knowledge, but also of the values, attitudes, and dispositions which figure prominently in the process of educational policy and practice, for “knowledge, whatever the particular method(s) for creating and using it, is always situated in the human context of beliefs, values, and interests.”<sup>1</sup> I see “advanced knowledge” as referring to a substantial degree of awareness of the many dimensions and factors that make up public education, preferably coupled with a continual curiosity and desire to expand and build upon that awareness, leading to understanding and knowledge. At the same time, it is important to pay heed to the motivations, emotions,

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<sup>1</sup> Sirotnik, K.A. (1989). The school as the center of change. In T.J. Sergiovanni & J.H. Moore (Eds.) *Schooling for tomorrow: Directing reforms to issues that count*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 98.

lived experiences, and ideologies which are influential in determining which aspects of a reflective framework command a teacher's attention and function "proximally" as problems are identified, framed, and reframed as the teacher identifies and contemplates emerging suggestions in the formulation of potential solutions.

In this light, I will now propose a four-part framework for reflection, but with a few caveats. The first is that the framework is meant to be considered eventually as an organic whole, so the subdivision into four areas, or domains, is somewhat arbitrary and is used here instrumentally to accommodate the present discussion, but also to indicate some degree of movement among domains of reflective consideration. My premise is that it is — and should be — difficult to take any given educational practice and perceive it as strictly a pedagogical matter, or an ethical dilemma, or whatever. Instead, I maintain that even a seemingly routine practical matter, such as a grading policy, is based on assumptions (if only subsidiarily) and has implications which extend far beyond the explicit task of assigning grades to student work. The four quadrants, then, can be thought of as four interconnected regions on a reflective "landscape" to be criss-crossed by the reflective practitioner.

The second caveat is that my four-part framework — consisting of the *moral/ethical*, the *social/cultural/political*, the *pedagogical*, and the *practical* — is neither radically different nor substantively superior to any of the others which have been put forth in previous literature. Van Manen, for instance, conceived of three levels of reflectivity, each involving different criteria for selecting one course of action over

another.<sup>2</sup> Van Manen's first level is *technical rationality* which, like Schön's concept of the same name, is concerned with efficient application of professional knowledge to attain predetermined ends which are viewed as givens. The second is *interpretive understanding*, in which assumptions underlying professional actions are made explicit. The third level is *critical reflection*, in which, according to Zeichner and Liston, "the central questions ask which educational goals, experiences, and activities lead toward forms of life which are mediated by concerns for justice, equity, and concrete fulfillment . . . [and where] both the teaching (ends and means) and the surrounding contexts are viewed as problematic — that is, as value-governed selections from a larger universe of possibilities."<sup>3</sup> Shulman proposed a knowledge base for teachers with seven distinct strands ranging from content knowledge to pedagogical knowledge to foundational knowledge, though his model deals primarily with how this intellectually held knowledge improves practical competency and less with political and ideological aspects of educational practice or the values and interests of the practitioner. Sirotnik's series of questions to guide a program of critical inquiry (mentioned in Chapter 1) similarly suggests an array of perspectives to which attention should be given in examining school practice.

The general components of my own reflective framework will be rather like the ones found in these models. However, the use of a

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<sup>2</sup> Van Manen, M. (1977). Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 6, 205-228.

<sup>3</sup> Zeichner, K.M. & Liston, D.P. (1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57:1, 25.

landscape metaphor is meant to emphasize the importance of seeking and establishing interrelationships between domains of reflection as they bear on a given problem or educational situation. One's perspective of a situation is influenced by the vantage point offered by one's location on the landscape. By criss-crossing across various regions of the landscape, additional perspectives are revealed which shed new light not only on the problem itself, but also on the perspectives previously obtained from different locations.

The distinctions between the reflective domains are based on the content of perspectives rather than various types of intellectual processing. Given the assumption that reflective practitioners will move fluidly through each of the domains in considering their practice, it becomes impossible to distinguish various levels of thinking as the movement takes place. Rather, this framework stems from an interest in the range of perspectives from which one reflects on a particular problem or concern. It could be argued that the more philosophical nature of the first and second domains requires an intellectual rigor that is less necessary at the fourth, but when they are all considered together as a single reflective landscape, then this type of distinction becomes irrelevant. The framework is premised on the assertion that issues which are seemingly situated in one domain are both influenced by, and have implications for, considerations of the issue in each of the other domains. This interrelatedness is revealed by ongoing traversals across the full breadth of the reflective landscape.

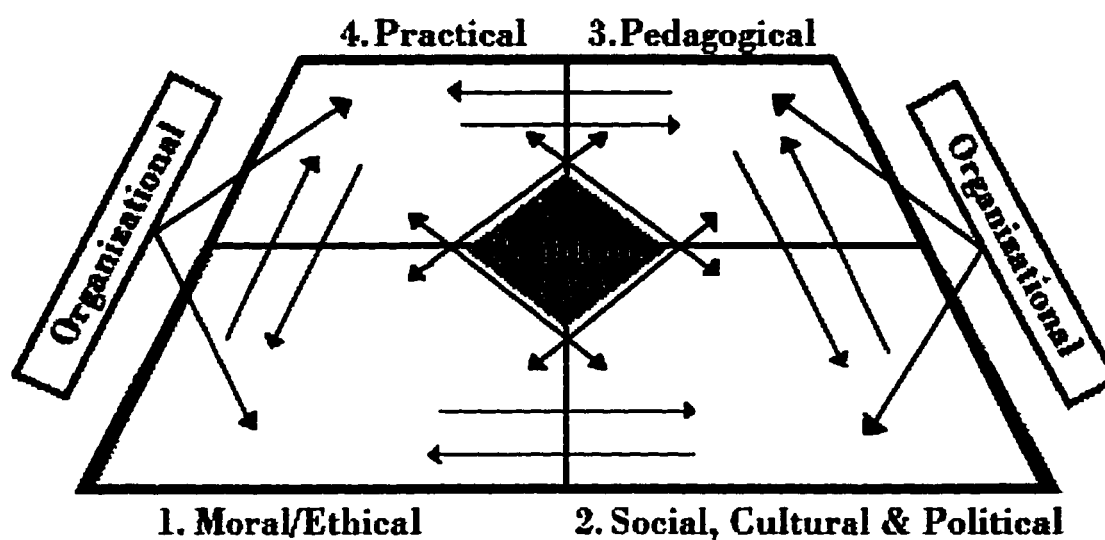


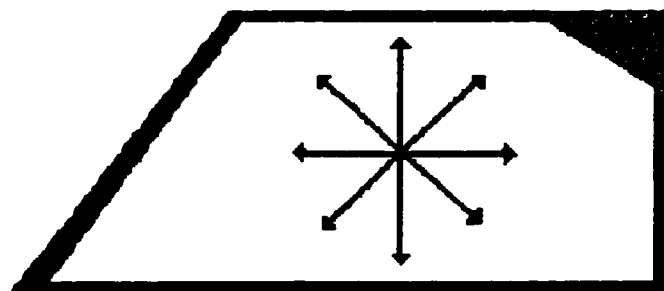
Figure 1: Reflective Landscape

One way to consider this landscape is suggested in Figure 1. The adjacent arrangement of the four regions, along with the array of arrows traversing them, indicates the interactive relationship of the domains. The central location of the problem, or educational situation, in the midst of these regions is meant to illustrate that a situation will appear differently depending on the viewpoint from which it is considered. If the teacher remains fixed at one location on the landscape — say, at a single point in the Practical domain — the range of perspectives and potential solutions is severely restricted to the interpretations and suggestions that are available in that domain. Ideally, teachers will criss-cross the entire landscape and apprehend the situation from a variety of perspectives, each revealing new dimensions to the situation that were not perceivable from previous viewpoints. There is no set starting point for all situations;

problems can arise initially from any of the four domains. However, most educational situations have implications which transcend the original perspective. The issue of equity, for instance, may seem at the outset to be a Moral/Ethical problem, but the perspectives available from that domain will not necessarily account for related problems grounded in social, political, pedagogical, or practical matters. Likewise, the underachievement of a particular student or group of students may, when viewed from a practical perspective, appear to have a promising remedy — say, isolation for remedial treatment. However, the perspectives presented at the other regions of the landscape may reveal problems of social justice and equality that were not apparent from the initial perspective.

The landscape is designed, also, to provide a view of the other regions from whichever region one happens to be positioned. Employing the notion of a flat terrain, the model implies that regardless of where one is positioned, the dominant features contained within the adjacent areas are visible. The importance of criss-crossing is reinforced by the fact that the features of the Practical domain will appear differently from within the Pedagogical domain than from the Moral/Ethical domain, and vice versa. Figure 2 is designed to show that criss-crossing does not occur just between regions but also within each of them, for there are many theories and ideas located within each of the reflective domains. Consequently, where one is standing (so to speak) in one region will determine the view one has of the problem as well as how one sees the features of the neighboring regions. Again, this dynamic underscores the necessity of

traversing the landscape along varied paths, both within and between regions. A single path, even one which passes through all the regions, will eventually become so familiar that it will impede, rather than stimulate, reflectivity.



### **1. Moral/Ethical**

Figure 2: Traversal Within a Single Domain

Finally, the conspicuous absence of a separate region dealing with organizational and institutional concerns is intentional since these are seen to be a feature of all of the regions, and is shown in Figure 1 as an element on the periphery of all four domains. For instance, whether we are considering the function of schools in a democratic society or the merits of a particular grading scheme, there are certain structural realities — be they political, societal, school-based, or any combination thereof — that impose a context for our deliberations. At the same time, our reflections on these issues cause us to conceptualize alternative, more ideal, structures to which our efforts are ultimately aimed. We might imagine these structures as features of the terrain in each region, which in

some cases will be restrictive but in others may afford us certain opportunities or lend a certain coherence to the landscape.

Of course, it is likely that different problems will cause one to “linger” more in some regions than in the others. A reflective orientation, however, implies that this will be done judiciously and as a function of the problem, rather than as a matter of personal preference or familiarity. The value of the model rests on the assumption that traversals of the landscape will be frequent, varied, and inclusive of all the domains. It is to these domains that we now turn.

### The Moral/Ethical Domain

It quickly becomes awkward to try to discuss moral and ethical aspects of teaching as being separate from other dimensions, as the lines between them are necessarily blurred. Fenstermacher situates this struggle in the fact that “the teacher’s conduct, at all times and in all ways, is a moral matter,” for the simple reason that “what makes teaching a moral endeavor is that it is, quite centrally, human action undertaken in regard to other human beings.”<sup>4</sup> If we accept this assertion, then we must attend to the moral/ethical implications of all things affecting schools and public education, including those social policies, political ideologies, and cultural phenomena that influence, often indirectly and imperceptibly, the ways that schooling and public education function as well as the taken-for-granted practices that are applied daily to the developing lives of young

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<sup>4</sup> Fenstermacher, G.D. (1990). Some moral considerations on teaching as a profession. In J.I. Goodlad, R. Soder, & K.A. Sirotnik (Eds.), *The moral dimensions of teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 133.

persons. Yet, except for the occasional “forced issues” instigated by controversial events or measures (i.e. privatization, voucher plans), moral/ethical aspects of schooling and teacher practice remain largely unexplored or else are obscured by a cloud of jargon and empty clichés.

The extent of formal teacher engagement at this level of reflection is a rather quick affair, often in the context of composing a mission statement or school philosophy. These documents are conspicuously similar from school to school, and generally are a few sentences in length with various combinations of a stock set of phrases: “lifelong learner”, “all children”, “critical thinkers”, “full potential”, “productive member of society”, and so on. The homogeneity of mission statements would not be so suspect if they were the outcome of serious consideration, dialogue, and consensus as to what these various terms mean and the challenges they pose for school organization and policy as well as teacher practice. However, rather than being a beacon to guide the decisions and activities of schools and teachers, they tend to get little notice once they’ve been posted in the office lobby and featured in school brochures. Indeed, one would need to look neither long nor hard to find practices and policies which flagrantly contradict the basic tenets of these mission statements and school creeds — uniform instruction and assessment, a preponderance of rote learning and compartmentalized curriculum, and behaviorist management techniques appear to be at odds with concepts like potential, lifelong learning, independent thinking, and responsible citizenship.

The point of mentioning the treatment of goal statements is merely to describe an instance of how moral and ethical aspects of education and schooling are marginalized at the most immediate locus of impact on students' lives and where, by even conservative estimates, thousands of decisions are made each day regarding the kind of educational environment that students will inhabit. To extend Fenstermacher's point, a moral imperative exists for those engaged in a moral endeavor to take a moral stance regarding that endeavor. Moreover, the moral stance should be sufficiently internalized so as to have tangible bearing (as a proximal term) upon one's actions when functioning as an agent of the endeavor. It is toward this end that some reflective teacher educators advocate an explicitly conscious definition of teaching as a "moral craft" in which technical concerns are anchored in a process of moral deliberation about the broader purposes of education.<sup>5</sup> Once again, however, the effects of such an approach with prospective teachers — based on the hope that reflective habits acquired in preservice experiences will endure — are severely compromised if the culture of practicing teachers offers no structures for sustaining reflection in this domain. The efforts of teacher education to introduce prospective teachers to the full expanse of the reflective landscape must rest on the assurance that access will not be restricted to just the practical and pedagogical domains once they enter the school culture.

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<sup>5</sup> Tom, A.R. (1984). *Teaching as a moral craft*. New York: Longman; Zeichner, K. (1981-82). Reflective teaching and field-based experience in teacher education. *Interchange*, 12 (4), 1-22.

Reflective practice, as it is considered here, relies on qualities of fluidity, flexibility, and intentionality as teachers seek and scrutinize various perspectives that inform their efforts to improve their practice in meaningful ways. The importance of multiple perspectives when dealing with ill-structured domains of knowledge was discussed in the last chapter in general terms, but may be most significant in the present context of moral/ethical considerations. Simplistic notions of such complex concepts as potential, equality, democracy, and responsibility will detract from one's ability to comprehend the salient issues found within the other domains of the reflective landscape, ultimately leading to misinformed and possibly detrimental school practice. I now turn to examining a few of these concepts to illustrate how the meanings one attaches to them can significantly affect the way they are applied to decisions about educational practice.

A common response to the question of what schools are for involves some notion of preparing young citizens for participation in a democratic society. At face value, this goal is merely suggestive of deeper considerations which must be reflected upon before it can be instrumental to practice. The first point of inquiry requires that we sort out the meanings we attach to the idea of democracy, followed by a determination of what we hold to be participatory ideals in this socio-political order, and finally, only after getting some modicum of a grasp on these issues can we begin to think about what the mission of preparation might consist of and how schooling can be structured to facilitate the mission. Critical pedagogy theorists maintain that traditional approaches to preparing

youth for democratic participation serve, in fact, to perpetuate many of the worst elements of a society which has yet to reach its democratic ideals, and foster a complacent attitude toward institutional injustices and the unequal distribution of social goods.<sup>6</sup> The underlying reason for this, they suggest, is that educators have grounded their orientation to democratic participation in a reproductionist conception of democracy where acceptance of existing realities takes precedence over a more critical appraisal of these realities in terms of the principles upon which democracy is based. Students, consequently, are indoctrinated to adapt their aspirations and developmental paths to conditions as they are rather than to how they might be.

The principle of equality, for instance, has a number of interpretations which would influence how policies and practices eventually unfold. Philip Selznick makes a number of contextual distinctions within the use of the term *equality*, treating separately such things as equal treatment, equal protection under the law, and equal opportunity.<sup>7</sup> The underlying premise of each of these, however, is the difference between what he calls social equality and moral equality. The former is the standard notion which implies an absence of external constraints on civil liberties and individual freedom — what Carol Gould

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Apple, M.W. (1982). *Cultural and economic reproduction in education*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Cookson, Jr., P.W. & Persell, C.H. (1985). *Preparing for power: America's elite boarding schools*. New York: Basic Books; FitzGerald, F. (1979). *America revised*. New York: Random House; Shor, I. (1980). *Critical teaching and everyday life*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press (see especially Chapter 2: Interferences to critical thought); Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Selznick, P. (1992). *The moral commonwealth: Social theory and the promise of community*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

terms “negative freedoms” or freedom *from*.<sup>8</sup> Moral equality, for Selznick, means that

. . . all persons have the same intrinsic worth. They are unequal in talents, in contributions to social life, and in valid claims to rewards and services. But everyone who is a person is presumptively entitled to recognition of that personhood.

. . . no individual’s well-being is worthy of more consideration than any other’s. The criteria of equality — the respects in which people are to be considered equal — derive from our understanding of what they need to sustain their dignity and integrity as persons.<sup>9</sup>

This concept of equality extends beyond the absence of external constraints on personal liberty and demands a special recognition of each individual as being entitled to conditions enabling the autonomous pursuit of self-development. Gould again offers a corollary with her notion of “positive freedoms” or freedom *to*, whereby a range of options is available to support the “freedom to develop oneself through one’s actions [which views] freedom as a capacity [and includes] choice as a basic feature of action.”<sup>10</sup> If the means to act upon one’s choices for self-development are denied through some corrupted exercise of social equality, then the principle of moral equality has been breached.

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<sup>8</sup> Gould, C.C. (1988). *Rethinking democracy: Freedom and social cooperation in politics, economy, and society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Selznick, 483.

<sup>10</sup> Gould, 44-46.

With respect to schooling, these concepts become relevant when considering uniform curricula and standardized measures of achievement as contingencies for the distribution of subsequent opportunities and social goods. In these cases, what masquerades as equal educational opportunity fails the test of moral equality by ignoring the many ways that the inequitable allocation of other social goods (i.e. political agency, economic security) affects the ability of some groups of individuals to fully partake in the availability of, in this case, educational options which are fully compliant with the principle of positive freedoms. This dynamic violates what Michael Walzer has termed “complex equality” which means “that no citizen’s standing in one sphere or with regard to one social good can be undercut by his standing in some other sphere, with regard to some other good.”<sup>11</sup> The systemic failure to address this concept with respect to certain racial and gender populations has exacted a price on the whole of society and imperiled an already fragile democratic structure. The strategy of school reformists to “raise the bar” for recognized achievement will only exacerbate this condition if teachers are not empowered, by virtue of an attitude of critical reflectivity, to make cogent judgmental assessments of how best to support each student’s unique attempts to reach the heights of their own potential.

“Potential” is another construct laden with moral and ethical overtones in that it carries with it an implied appraisal of the limits of one’s abilities. Teachers routinely make judgments about whether or not

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<sup>11</sup> Walzer, M. (1983). *Spheres of justice: A defense of pluralism and equality*. New York: Basic Books.

students are “working to their full potential” but it remains a mystery what teachers are looking at when making such judgments. The phrase connotes a notion of potential as being some fixed entity in each individual, and therefore a misappraisal carries with it profound educational implications. In many cases, perceived *effort* becomes the benchmark for gauging how well students are realizing their potential, but effort is itself a complex matter in that it is so dependent on interest and motivation.<sup>12</sup> Too often, effort is equated with obedient compliance or exertion — or what Dewey calls “mere strained activity” — that is forthcoming even when the required task is uninteresting, unmotivating, or unreasonable.<sup>13</sup> So students are seen as either developing or failing to utilize their ascribed potential based on a fundamentally unrelated indicator. The problem is compounded when conventional intelligence measures are thrown into the equation; students who persevere in the face of repeated failure are commended and receive the message that this is all that can be expected of them, while those who are clearly able but disinclined to meet the expectations that others have for them are labeled as underachievers. In both instances, the notion of potential is used to rationalize an undesirable dynamic between students and the learning environment and, in the process, attributes the source of the problem to something that is widely held to be preordained and for which little can be done.

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<sup>12</sup> Dewey, J. (1913). *Interest and effort in education*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

An alternative and more fertile perspective on potential — one which demands a reflective engagement — is offered by Israel Scheffler, who argues that potential and its realization both vary over time and are subject to various interacting conditions.<sup>14</sup> Scheffler's conceptual framework, briefly summarized here, makes a key distinction between potential as *capacity* and potential as *capability*, which bear some resemblance to Gould's positive and negative freedoms. Capacity refers to the idea that no preventive circumstances are present which would negate the possibility that one could acquire a given skill or attribute *at some point*. Capability, on the other hand, refers to the acquisition of the necessary factors to effectively bring on a designated outcome *if* one chooses to do so. Both capacity and capability can exist, but the performance of the skill or other outcome may be withheld in lieu of a *propensity* to exercise the capability. Moreover, all of these — capacity, capability, and propensity — are subject to contextual factors over time. For instance, salient preventive circumstances may inhibit one's capacity at a particular point in time, but upon the removal of these impediments at some later time, capacity for acquisition becomes again enabled. Likewise, capacity for *X* can be present but will remain dormant if measures are not taken to empower the person with the *capability* to do *X* if and when they choose to do so.

The educational implications of viewing potential in these terms are profound. Scheffler hints at the responsibilities of educators:

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<sup>14</sup> Scheffler, I. (1985). *Of human potential: An essay in the philosophy of education*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

The study of potential . . . involves inquiry into the factors that may *impede* acquisition. [It] is, in effect, the study of conditions that block learning, prevent development, necessitate failure to attain some designated outcome. It is also the study of how preventive circumstances may be instituted or themselves be prevented in particular cases.<sup>15</sup>

From this perspective, potential is as much a project of the teacher as of the child, for Scheffler's fundamental premise is that potential is interactional between the subject and his environment rather than simply intrinsic and fixed; as such, it is open to considerable change over time. Reflective practice would thus necessitate that potential be considered in terms of the conduct of the teacher as much as in the attributes of the student. Fairly elaborate procedures are employed to identify preventative factors connected to the child, such as learning disabilities or physical ailments, but a far less critical eye is cast toward the policies and practices of educators in searching out circumstances that deny students the capacity to develop and/or exercise the capabilities that might otherwise be acquired or employed. Teachers face an additional challenge when they see their role as extending beyond the level of capability and to embrace also the task of nurturing favorable propensities with regard to potential; in part, by realizing that "the beliefs of the attributor affect the potentiality-attribution" of subjects just as "false beliefs about preventive circumstances for a given trait may themselves become preventive for

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 49.

that trait.”<sup>16</sup> Here we encounter yet another context for requiring thoughtful and informed reflection by teachers with respect to their practice. Ill-considered or false beliefs about a child’s potential, or potential in general, will play themselves out in the decisions the teacher makes in regard for that child, with the possible consequence of actually obstructing the child’s acquisition of capacities and capabilities for growth and self-development.

In closing this section, I will raise just one more issue which I hold to be a seminal element of this moral/ethical domain of reflective practice — the nature of the relationship between teacher and student. It is a consideration that is easily obscured by the more socio-politically charged issues of institutional inequality and social injustice. Zeichner, a self-described member of the critical pedagogy orientation, cautions us against letting our ideological passions “limit the domain of moral deliberation” and forgetting that “choice [of moral positions] is essential for moral reflection, and a wider, rather than narrower, range encourages this reflection.”<sup>17</sup> So as our traversals across the reflective landscape present us with plenty of reflective fodder for considering how schools function — or ought to function — in a democratic society, we must be certain to maintain a well-developed awareness that, beneath all the layers of institutional bureaucracy, teaching is a fundamentally interpersonal situation. As such, its healthiness relies upon the degree of mutual trust, respect, and caring that is established between the principal subjects.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Liston, D.P. & Zeichner, K. M.(1987). Reflective teacher education and moral deliberation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, November-December, 3.

One of the most influential works on the topic of caring is provided by Nel Noddings, who adopts a Buberian “I-Thou” approach in describing the fundamentally human foundations of the caring relationship.<sup>18</sup> For Noddings, a caring relationship brings the “one-caring” and the “cared-for” into a form of relatedness that is rooted in receptivity and responsiveness. The one-caring receives the cared-for not as an object of her caring, but as a subject whose well-being and interests become, in a sense, an extension of her own — an “engrossment” that arises from the natural sentiment of caring rather than conscious choice or intent.<sup>19</sup> In receiving the one cared-for, the one-caring experiences an extension of her own reality as she embraces that of the cared-for:

Apprehending the other’s reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring from the view of the one-caring. For if I take on the other’s reality as possibility and begin to feel its reality, I feel, also, that I must act accordingly; that is, I am impelled to act as though on my own behalf, but in behalf of the other.<sup>20</sup>

Noddings notes that caring exacts a price of the one-caring in terms of generating feelings of guilt, obligation, and internal conflict over the implicit commitments that arise as part of the caring relationship. She also acknowledges that there are some formal relationships that are entered into which do not spontaneously trigger the kind of natural caring

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<sup>18</sup> Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkely: University of California Press.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

that occurs between a mother and child, but which still present us with an obligation to respond as one-caring. The relationship between teacher and student is one of these.

The obligation for the teacher to assume the role of one-caring is related to what Noddings refers to as the "ethical ideal — that vision of best self" which responds to the internal moral commitment "I must."<sup>21</sup> In such a situation, we accept the obligation because of our own valuation of caring as an ideal form of relatedness. While the ethical motivation to act as one-caring may lead into a more natural caring, it is not necessary that it do so. To the extent that our relation with another permits their reciprocating with us as a cared-for, "— if, that is, our caring can be completed in the other — then we must meet that other as one-caring. If we do not care naturally, we must call upon our capacity for ethical caring."<sup>22</sup> As we respond to this ethical impulse and receive the other as a cared-for, we begin to approach our ethical ideal — our vision of best self — as we move from feelings of "I must" to feelings of "I ought."

The ethical ideal of caring is a powerful concept in viewing the reflective landscape, which has thus far been limited to more intellectual considerations of professional responsibility. As Noddings states, caring provokes a motivational shift which becomes, in part, attuned to our engrossment with the cared-for. Furthermore, it imbues our reflective activities with a distinctly human context — putting "a face" on the problems and goals we identify and affecting the way we assess alternative

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 86.

actions. Most importantly, however, the ethic of caring, combined with the ethic of professional responsibility, make a moral demand for reflectivity in the “I ought” sense. Noddings notes that the “I must” impulse is vulnerable to our choosing to reject or divert our obligation. The “I ought” impulse, arising from our commitment to an ethical ideal, takes the form of a moral imperative. Ideally, then, we can envision an “ethic of reflective practice” which is driven both by intellectual wholeheartedness toward education as a social good and by a moral commitment to be responsive to the quest for self-development by our cared-fors.

#### Social/Cultural/Political Domain

This domain has both a critical and an uncritical component. The critical component would perhaps be better located in the previous domain of the moral and ethical, since many of our social, cultural, and political dilemmas are rooted in ideological conflicts over equality, fairness, recognition, compassion, and justice. Indeed, poverty and hunger are viewed by some as the natural order of things and by others as a shameful neglect of our most basic human responsibility and moral obligation. And while some advocates of school choice plans portray the present system as an abrogation of their parental rights, a self-preserving monopoly, and an ineffective bureaucracy unwilling to yield to free-market forces, many opponents see school choice as a vehicle for further segregation along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines as well as a debilitating blow to the one institution most vital to our democratic ideals.

The critical component of this domain, then, refers to reflection on social, cultural, and political issues affecting education (and which *can be affected by* education) in terms of their impact on the ideals we have established in the domain above. In a sense, these issues are the indicators by which we gauge how our efforts are proceeding and how else they might be directed.

To be critical in this domain, we must look beyond the existing conditions of how things are and attend to both how they got that way and how we would like them to be. Of course, multiple perspectives are again requisite to making a more informed appraisal of the phenomena we are considering. Reflection of this sort anchors the work of educators in a larger context than within the bounds of the school walls. We can begin to comprehend the impact of these forces on our work, on our students, and on how we define our professional roles and responsibilities (as well as how they are defined for us). At the same time, the values and ideals we've set for ourselves above help us to resist blind acquiescence to these influences and, instead, craft responses aimed at either advancing or remediating them. Jan, for instance, notes that her graduate program has helped her to focus her pedagogical sensors on how prevailing social and cultural norms determine much of the content and processes of schooling, and that these don't always coincide with many children's realities. As a result, she has modified her criteria for her guiding reflective question "Am I doing right by [the kids]?" to include "the multiple pieces of their culture, the 'selves' that they bring here in the class, considerations of their natures and nurtures, and balancing all of that with what my values are for kids." Jan's troubles at her previous school began when the school was

applying for an instructional improvement grant and she lobbied for inclusion of an explicit statement referring to a school-wide commitment to “teach all children regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, gender. . . . I kept saying ‘Why can’t we say this?’ and the objections could not be verbalized — it was just ‘shut up —quit pushing this one.’ But I didn’t. I kept pushing it, and it was the right thing to do.” Jan’s moral commitment to the value of educating each and every child prompted her to directly confront the dominant views of that school’s culture which saw demographic diversity as something to be dismissed rather than embraced.

The uncritical approach to this domain does allow for recognition and identification of social, cultural, and political circumstances affecting the work of schools and teachers, but it does so in a more narrow-minded way. The emphasis here is to impose simplistic cause-effect linkages rather than entertain the full range of complexly interrelated factors. The results are often ill-conceived and ineffective responses or passive resignation (frequently accompanied by bitterness or resentment) that nothing can be done, as in the case of Jan’s former colleagues. It is troubling that goals dealing with diversity and pluralism continue to be addressed with supplemental curriculum packets and special events like assemblies and international food days, especially when so many of the sources of frustration expressed by teachers fall under the not-so-cryptic heading of “changing demographics.”<sup>23</sup> This is an area of particular concern to Jan:

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<sup>23</sup> Cohn, M.M. (1992). How teachers perceive teaching: Change over two decades, 1964-1984. In A. Lieberman, *The changing contexts of teaching*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 110-137.

In my other school, there was a homeless shelter there, and the attitude was “these kids don't belong here.” But there was a lot of diversity there – the demographics were really different. . . You know, people who do the same thing every year no matter who've they got, treat kids the same way no matter who the kids are. So for me, I think that would that be the piece that is essential, and it seems like it would be essential for teachers to start doing that. You hear so much frustration from teachers – “the job is so hard; it's gotten so difficult, so complex; the kids are so different” – that whole litany of things. There ARE some things that can happen here, if you just take a look. I think we have a real special responsibility in a district like this one to prepare kids for the people they're going to be rubbing shoulders with when they move out of [suburban areas].

Having taken a cue from currents in the general society about the growing ubiquity of technology, billions of dollars of computer hardware and related software have been poured into schools over the past 20 years, mostly on the assumption that exposure to such equipment will ready students for the 21st century world of work. It is rarely mentioned that even technology experts are hard-pressed to define the types of technological skills that will be called for by the time the new millennium arrives, and that several waves of “essential” computer skills have already faded into terminal obsolescence and that several more are sure to follow

suit — and sooner more than later. In the meantime, schools have been slow to provide persuasive indications that computers are as essential to contemporary learning as they are to contemporary work.

There is something amiss when it takes international comparisons and disgruntled employers to instigate an effort for school reform, and then have political and corporate figures assuming a higher profile in the effort than educators as well as setting much of the reform agenda. It is no small coincidence that cooperative learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking became school priorities *after* the private sector announced that these were the skills it was seeking in employees. The disturbing aspect of this is that it took a corporate endorsement to validate these goals, for educators as well as the general public, when the skills themselves should be self-evident and, in this case, have had no lack of credible advocates over the years. It also raises a number of pertinent questions for educators regarding the manner in which these skills will be handled. Are collaborative skills to be treated as a competency needed for future employability and to meet state guidelines, or are they developed for their inherent value as means to better learning? Will critical thinking be defined — for purposes of instruction and assessment — in terms of direct application to the fields of math and science, or in terms of being an essential skill for all aspects of living in a complex society? If the answer to either of these questions is the latter option, then who but teachers should assume (or be given) an active role in developing the curriculum, methods, and knowledge base from which effective practices will emerge?

These examples bring to light just a few of the pitfalls that accompany an inward-looking approach to teaching whereby teachers compound their already isolated existence within the school by failing to recognize the many external forces that penetrate the school walls and dictate what occurs inside of their individual sanctuaries. In the absence of reflection on the sources, motivations, and policy dynamics of these external agents of change, the ideals of a partnership approach to public education, in which schools, parents, students, businesses, government, and community groups merge their interests into a common endeavor, are severely compromised since all legitimate voices are not instructing the conversation, and a "use it or lose it" situation occurs. For teachers, this means that other parties will be the ones to inform them when something warrants attention and what ought to be done about it. Introduced in this fashion, new measures are either clumsily implemented or ignored in the hope that they will eventually pass on into obscurity.<sup>24</sup>

One consequence of an uncritical approach to social, cultural, and political factors is an ongoing series of reactionary measures to idiosyncratic "pressing issues" with little consideration of their educative implications, their consistency with the values and goals of schools, or even if the issues make a valid claim on the schools' attentions. Recently, for instance, there have been a number of incidents dealing with "zero tolerance" policies for sexual harassment, drugs, and weapons which

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<sup>24</sup> Veteran teachers will say with confidence that this "wait and it will go away" approach is less a matter of hope than a good bet. This does not, however, validate the process described as a suitable way to go about school improvement.

achieved considerable notoriety through media coverage. In these cases, seemingly innocuous infractions of the rules resulted in severe penalties for the student violators. All three of the issues — harassment, violence, and substance abuse — are rightfully a concern of schools on any number of grounds. The question that was seldom asked in these cases is “What message are we sending to children about critical thinking, informed judgment, and the importance of the context in understanding events — all of which are, or should be, explicit academic goals of most schools? I maintain that the handling of the incidents exemplified the antithesis of all these values and reinforced the notion that the world exists in black and white, that there are no extenuating circumstances, and that justice and equality mean that all cases receive identical treatment. Students learn from our example that a single perspective is sufficient, especially if it is attached to power and authority. Perhaps worst of all, they learn that it is far easier (and acceptable) to impose simplistic interpretations than to deal with a subject’s complexity. Should we be surprised when, in our classes, students tend to view their society and world in the same manner? Extending this further, if this approach is adopted schoolwide (or beyond), what are the implications for the interactions and relationships between students and teachers?

Another consequence, then, is that relationships within the school setting are imperiled. The common refrain about “kids these days” and a yearning for the halcyon times when students were eager, obedient, and punctual, and when parents were involved, supportive, and deferential reveals a significant obstruction to the forming of genuine caring

relationships. It also suggests a denial of the contextuality of public education. We are apt to have a tough time educating students for the next century if our sights are nostalgically fixed (with more than a little romantic distortion) on an era that is long gone. "Kids these days" are a product of *these days* and it is *these days* that we must try to understand as a starting point for being able to relate to today's students and the lives they are living. Particularly with changing demographics and greater diversity, schools are a convergence point for many different values, world views, and life circumstances. In addition to the challenges of gender, race, and ethnicity, teachers must also recognize that popular culture spawns an additional form of diversity along age lines. While it is unreasonable to expect teachers to meet students on the students' cultural "turf", it can surely be to the teachers advantage to take an occasional peek inside of this world. A friend who recently wrote a book on democratic approaches to school discipline makes the point that, regardless of how offensive and asinine one might find shows like *Beavis and Butthead*, it is worth a teacher's while to try and understand the show's appeal to adolescent boys and how it influences their attitude and behavior.<sup>25</sup> This is not the same as a stamp of approval or a gratuitous attempt to artificially establish a rapport; rather, it is a means by which teachers can widen the reflective landscape, acquire an additional perspective, and deal more effectively with the perplexing situations that occasionally arise when working with school-age children.

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<sup>25</sup> Hoover, R.L. & Kindsvatter, R. (1996). *Democratic discipline: Foundation & practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill: 58-59.

Since a number of political issues affecting teachers were raised in Chapter 1, I will not reiterate them here, except to say that critical reflection in this domain requires, among other things, that one be able to make distinctions between social, cultural and political matters wherever such distinctions are possible. Of course, the converse is also true — that where significant interactions between these three elements exist, they must be considered as such. To force a distinction will be to miss, or obscure, relevant aspects of the situation. For instance, in cases where parent and other civic groups demand the removal of certain books from library shelves, there is often a strong political component at work. True, the political stance of the censors may have roots in cultural and social issues (i.e. Christian values, cultural literacy, presence of offensive epithets or stereotypes), but the effort to have the books officially banned is a political act. The dialogue that ensues between defenders and opponents of the books is likely to be more productive if the issue is framed in these terms.

Conflict is quite probable in any case, but no cause is served if teachers, on the one hand, take the controversy as a personal attack on their pedagogy or integrity as teachers. Nor will resolution be aided if the complainants, on the other hand, are charged with being hypersensitive or ignorant of the educative value that such books may possess. The bottom line of this conflict rests on the issue of what schools should be for. From this grounding, the conversation can better accommodate the various other perspectives — be they political or whatever — that led to a particular book being judged as unsuitable for school use. I am not so

naive to suggest that my little scenario offers a blueprint for resolving conflicts such as this, only that it may be a higher road. Of course, the matter may end up in court or take a similarly unpleasant turn, but there are reflective judgments that have to be made in these contingencies as well. Is the dispute really about a book or is it about power and control? What will be the consequences of taking one course over any of the others that may be available? Is this acceptable? Is there more to be gained by disposing of the problem quickly or by persevering through a long and taxing process? By what criteria will this determination be made?

The considerations made in this and the previous domain have tremendous import for the decisions that will be made in the domains of pedagogy and practice. Failing to traverse these regions of the reflective landscape will deny the practitioner vital perspectives which represent the all-important difference between making decisions based on “what works” and devising courses of action which address what *needs* to work if our goals for a just and enlightened democratic society are to be realized.

### Pedagogical Domain

Pedagogy — “the art and practice of teaching”<sup>26</sup> — represents different constellations of things to different people, and I will be no exception here. My own distinction is one between the directed behaviors of practice and the ideas and principles surrounding teaching and learning which inform the selection of practices. The practical domain to be briefly

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<sup>26</sup> American Heritage Dictionary (1982), Second College Edition, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin

discussed in the following section will be limited to the *explicit acts* of classroom implementation, which I hold to be the embodiment of this domain and the two which I have just presented. It can be effectively argued that there can be no practice without pedagogy, and while I would have to concur, I would also note that this statement says nothing about the kind or quality of either the pedagogy or the practice, nor does it ensure that the practitioner *is aware* of the pedagogy behind his/her practice. I can be taught to perform a certain behavioral sequence under controlled conditions without fully understanding what I am doing or why I am doing it, and yet I may perform the procedure perfectly. But should the original conditions be altered or if the original sequence is interrupted, I am likely to become confused and flustered, for the procedure is no longer the same as the one I've learned. There is a pedagogy at work here, but it rests with whoever designed and taught me the procedure. I will be able to adapt the procedure to new conditions only after I have some sense of the purpose behind it or why the sequence works as it does. This is the distinction between pedagogy and practice that I will be using, and will offer another example to illustrate the difference between these two terms.

In the course of my career as a teacher, I have attended countless staff development sessions where the participants are handed a teaching manual — complete with questions to ask and answers to look for and even redirecting strategies for certain high-frequency wrong answers. Then, without examining the contents or structure, we are walked through the correct way to use it. I have irritated more than a few

facilitators (and many teachers) when I offer the observation that any reasonably literate 7th-grader who is capable of reading the book could teach the material in the manner that is being prescribed. The point beneath the sarcasm is that we are often treated as though we are incapable of pedagogical reasoning, which is not the case at all. What *is* the case is that we are often denied the opportunity to apply pedagogical knowledge and reasoning to our practice. Without a doubt, there is a pedagogy behind the textbooks and the activities and strategies that are in the manuals — and no doubt a highly researched and field-tested pedagogy at that. But whose pedagogy is it? On what principles is it based? What types of learning does it facilitate? How does it account for the substantial variation among learners? Sadly, these questions rarely surface at these sessions and are seldom factors in our selection of teaching materials and practices.

Pedagogy, as used here, refers to the broad range of skills and knowledge *about* teaching and learning which are brought *to* the actual practical implementation in the classroom setting. These include theories of learning and instruction, subject matter knowledge, methodological techniques, educational policy such as reform plans, curriculum design and curriculum resources, teaching technologies, traditional and alternative assessments, child development issues (i.e., learning disabilities), and current developments in schooling and educational research. Reflection in this domain is based on the same premise that I have used throughout — the degree to which these elements of knowledge are internalized (dwelling in them), and the degree to which

they are continually developed through new knowledge and new perspectives (breadth and depth), the greater their functionality in preparing for, or anticipating, instructional practice and the greater the potential that they will be used flexibly and reflexively in response to the indeterminacies of classroom situations.

It is important that reflection in this domain is not solely directed at the details of practical implementation. It is perhaps more important that our extant and emerging knowledge at this level be examined through a wide-angle lens to assess its cohesion with the values, interests, and beliefs which are formed in our contemplation and awareness of the moral/ethical and social/cultural/political concerns which ought to guide the course of our practice. Pedagogical knowledge, in this context, is not simply knowledge of how to teach skillfully or knowledge of “what works.” It is also knowledge of how various pedagogical positions embody assumptions about what an educated person is, the respective roles of teachers and students, the types of environments that are conducive to learning, and what kinds of knowledge and attitudes are required for full participation in democratic society.

Pedagogy, then, serves as the mediating instrumentation between one’s beliefs about what it means to teach and an awareness of the many forces shaping schooling, on the one hand, and the instructional practices one employs, on the other hand. Though guided by the reflection occurring in the first two tiers, a teacher’s pedagogical position is nonetheless shaped by the experience of practical activity. The time-worn rebuke of new ideas that says “that’s fine in theory, but . . .” is partially

valid in the sense that teachers will not adopt as part of their pedagogy something which cannot be translated into practice. This, however, is quite different than saying that one's pedagogy should be constructed according to what one has found to work well in the classroom, for this connotes a disregard for teachers having purpose to their practice. Yet, as we have seen, many conditions affecting teachers' roles and their work have been instituted to leap-frog the need for teachers to assume a pedagogical stance or even to be familiar with various strands of pedagogical thought. On the contrary, I maintain, it is one of the responsibilities of teaching that one be continually in search of cognitive theories, instructional design models, curriculum materials, and anything else that can advance the journey toward one's educational vision. Just as we would expect our physicians, lawyers, and engineers to be informed about current treatments, legislation, and structural materials — for we would be displeased if an inferior course of action (or no course of action) was taken due to ignorance of better options — so the professional educator must also be alert for ideas that *may* be relevant to some present or future situation. Toying with Polanyi's tenet, it is the professional's duty to "know more than we can [use at any given time]" but the more that we know — the more perspectives we bring to a situation and the more suggestions that are generated as a result — increases our ability to respond to the indeterminacy, or ill-structuredness, of educating young people.

This is admittedly no small task, particularly for novices who are in the early stages of forming their reflective landscape. There are many

competing theories of how teaching and learning is best approached, all of which can be compelling if accepted at face value and without being subjected to critical scrutiny. An enormous commercial industry floods the market with pre-packaged “teacher-friendly” resources, curriculums, and other aids which promise to take the pedagogical worry out of teachers’ busy days. Without a committed vision of what education should be working toward, it is easy to be seduced by these “solutions” and to quickly become dependent on them. They then come to define one’s pedagogy, which answers solely to the criteria of practical efficacy while other ramifications for students’ education escape recognition.

Putting a child on a behavior contract, for instance, may be a “proven” and widely endorsed strategy for dealing with disruptive students. If one has selected this strategy after considering why the behavior is occurring and has deliberated on alternative courses of action and their consequences, and has determined that the contract is not only an effective remedy for the short-term problem of disruptive behavior but also promises worthwhile long-term effects for the child, then we cannot fault the teacher for being unreflective even if we contest the grounds for his/her judgment. In a genuinely reflective environment, we can allow that the teacher will be receptive to other ideas and will also critically assess the presently chosen course (more on this in the next chapter).

This is quite different than if one invokes the contract strategy to control behavior without considering a host of other possible factors and options; that is, without criss-crossing the reflective landscape or having a relatively barren landscape that only allows linear traversal. In this case, if

the objective is to terminate the disruptive behavior by any means necessary — “what works” becomes the dominant criteria for selecting a course of action, and any strategy that meets this sparse standard is considered viable. Similarly, if the teacher has only one strategy in his/her repertoire for handling disruptive behavior or has but one pedagogical view for interpreting such behavior, then the response to the situation is easily predicted. The reflective process, as it were, is a rather narrow and direct one.

By contrast, the notion of reflection I am constructing here originates with the moral/ethical foundations of the teacher’s practice. While the behavior of the students may be the *object* of concern, the student remains a *subject* in the teacher’s considerations. The behavior is not viewed immediately as something that needs to be controlled, but is seen as a symptom that the student, for whatever reason, is not willing or able to function within the existing instructional program. The student is first approached as a “one-cared-for” by the “one-caring” teacher. Viewing the student’s feelings, perceptions, and desires as integral parts of her belonging to the community of the classroom and school, she is treated as a participant in the framing of the problem and the search for resolution. The teacher, as a corollary to this dialogue with the student, remains sensitive to possible personal, familial, economic, or cultural factors that may be underlying the behavior. At the pedagogical level, the teacher considers (and inquires into) the possibility that some aspect of the instructional program or learning environment may be creating some conflict for the student. All of these interventions originating from the

fact of the student's behavior require by the teacher an attitude toward teacher-student relationships, an awareness of life circumstances extending beyond the school, and a knowledge of learning processes and how they are affected by different instructional contexts. The reflective teacher will draw from all of these resources to identify the source of the problem and develop an appropriate response to it — not as a matter of routine procedure but in direct response to the particulars of the case at hand. Moreover, the sources of knowledge that the teacher draws from may be modified or expanded as a result of the inquiry process leading up to a course of action as well as the analysis of the action's effectiveness.

The same dynamics are at work in academic situations as well. The pedagogy which underlies textbook manuals and prepackaged curriculum programs remains largely inert with respect to the indeterminate situations of the classroom, and dependency on these materials is encouraged by keeping the pedagogy concealed from the consciousness of those who will use them. This is the charge made by Apple in his description of deskilling and reskilling (see Chapter 2), and it also is the target of many criticisms leveled at traditional workshop-style staff development programs where the emphasis is on how to use the materials rather than on the contents of the materials or the assumptions about learning upon which the materials are based. The objection is not necessarily with the materials themselves, for some are developed with considerable pedagogical sophistication and offer a wide range of

instructional opportunities for both teachers and students.<sup>27</sup> The objection is that many of these opportunities will go unnoticed if the pedagogical foundations are not understood or if teachers are unable to adapt their use of the materials in response to the exigencies of the classroom or in the context of another pedagogical approach. By contrast, if materials are presented *as a function of* a particular pedagogical view, then it is the pedagogy that is at the center of attention — both as it applies to the materials in question but also as it applies to other contexts of instruction. In this way, the pedagogical principles become part of the reflective landscape, accessible to far more situations than the implementation of a particular learning package. It recalls the proverb which roughly goes, “give a man a fish and feed him for a day; teach him to fish and feed him for a lifetime.”

### Practical Domain

At this point, not much needs to be said about this reflective domain. Having teased it out from the pedagogical, we are left with the basic elements of implementation and the practical dealings with the routine matters of the classroom. As I asserted in the first chapter, the bulk of the professional education and ongoing development of teachers

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<sup>27</sup> For instance, the Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt has developed a series of interactive videodiscs (*The Adventures of Jasper Woodbury*) which engage students in a wide range of mathematics concepts as they attempt to solve the protagonists' problems, which are embedded in a video narrative. The videos provide the foundation for a vast number of potential classroom applications, yet the several training sessions for using “Jasper” which I attended dealt mostly with the use of the videodisc technology and the contents of the accompanying teaching resources. Though intended to aid the teacher in extending the learning and vary the presentation of the problems, the focus was on which resources would assist the teacher in “getting through” the project.

occurs at this level. This I attributed to the prevailing perception of the role of teachers as being confined to the daily maintenance of classroom activities which are to a large extent conceived, designed, and prescribed by other educational agents. As such, I argue, any notion of a reflective practitioner in this narrow context doesn't stand much chance to play a pivotal role in any campaign of educational improvement, despite current rhetoric to the contrary. I have attempted, then, to offer a more robust framework for joining the concepts of reflection and practice by expanding the notion of what teachers' work might entail and how reflection on a deep and wide "landscape" of educational issues is vital to that work.

Within this framework, we recognize that the practical activities in this last domain, as well as one's reflection on them, have their antecedents in the reflecting that has occurred in the other quadrants. Specific educational practices are derived from the full range of considerations that take place in and around their conception and execution. So while the practitioner may reflect on *whether* or not something works or *why* it did or didn't work, we can assume that this reflection is based on at least a tacit awareness of all the antecedent considerations. This is especially true of the reflection-in-action that Schön describes and which is most likely to be employed within this domain, where a teacher is not reflecting on what has already transpired (reflection-on-action), but is in a position to make spontaneous and reflexive decisions in response to emerging conditions or as a result of newly recognized opportunities. It is the ideal in these situations that the decisions thus made are not made in a momentary vacuum, but remain

consistent with the knowledge, values, and principles that constitute the reflective landscape as it has been presented in this chapter.

## Chapter Four — Toward a Reflective Culture of Teaching

### Introduction

In previous chapters, I have tried to establish the grounds for the present task of envisioning a reflective culture of teaching, which I see as a key to both the genuine empowerment of teachers and to a notion of reflective practice that is essential to ongoing educational improvement by virtue of its expansion into areas of educational consideration not typically associated with the work of classroom practitioners. My criticism of many contemporary treatments of teacher reflection, which focus solely on the mechanics of implementation, has been that these treatments separate the practice of teaching from the project of education. Even worthwhile concepts such as Schön's reflection-in-action are of limited value if they are not inclusive of some normative framework for considering the many dimensions of teaching which converge on the actual practical activities of teachers.<sup>1</sup> Drawing from the principles of tacit knowing and Cognitive Flexibility Theory to illustrate why an endeavor as complex, or ill-structured, as teaching requires a knowledge base that is built on the consideration of many perspectives to a given situation, I then proposed the idea of a reflective landscape consisting of several domains, or regions, of reflective discourse. The metaphor of the landscape-of-many-perspectives underscores the importance of approaching the practical situations of teaching from as many viewpoints as possible so as to be

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<sup>1</sup> Schön does address this dynamic in his own descriptions of reflective practice, but his contexts (design, music, psychoanalysis) do not accommodate an easy transferal to the unique and, I would argue, more complex circumstances which encompass public education.

more responsive to the myriad implications of decisions that are made in these situations.

In this chapter, I will first examine aspects of the existing culture of teachers which tend to inhibit or impede reflection as an integral part of teaching. Next I will attempt to construct a conceptual bridge between what has, admittedly, been largely an individualistic treatment of reflection and the additional interactive modes of dialectic, dialogue, and interdependency through which cultural life is shaped. This will lead to a discussion of some qualities that we might envision for a reflective culture of teaching which encourages optimal utilization of the full reflective landscape. Then, in the following chapter, I will make a modest attempt to suggest how some of these qualities might actually be infused into a reflective culture of teaching.

### The Conundrum of Substantive Change

Much of the literature dealing with educational improvement and school restructuring speaks of the need for “systemic” change, whereby changes must occur in many interrelated components of schooling before change in any one of them can be effectively realized. This is an important conversation for both the present and future state of public education in that it encourages us to imagine *what might be* while we grapple with the challenges of *what is*. It causes us to think of possibilities where we might only see obstructions. At the same time, the concept of systemic change can paralyze the change process by demanding that all necessary conditions be in place before action is taken on any one of them.

The result is a befuddling network of circular equations which, in their own way, both validate and encourage an ongoing preservation of the status quo. Teachers request more time for planning and collaboration, but money is withheld (or limited) until the results of more time and collaboration are assured. Results cannot be assured until the time and collaboration can be productively utilized. On a trial basis, minuscule amounts of time are allocated for collaborative opportunities, with minuscule results, leading to a curtailment of funding for this activity, leading to more directed activities for teachers, leading to less creative initiative by teachers, leading to a diminution of the importance of time for teachers to collaborate. The combined realities of organizational stasis and limited resources do not hold much promise for a comprehensive systemic change which embraces university-school partnerships, rigorous and meaningful staff development and professional development centers, reduced class sizes, expansion of services for "special needs" students, modern state-of-the-art facilities, increases in non-contact time for teachers to collaborate and plan cross-disciplinary activities, provision of more and better curriculum resources/ instructional technologies, and remuneration packages which attract, and then retain, the best and brightest individuals to a career in teaching — and this is the short list of what comprises systemic change. The eternal conundrum of school reform is that a little change is not enough and a lot of change is at best unlikely for a host of reasons which are out of the direct control of educators.

As attractive a notion as systemic change is, it rarely occurs systemically. For reasons of organizational coherence, if nothing else, change is often undertaken as a series of piecemeal measures, each of which alters some small aspect of school life in isolation from other, perhaps more entrenched, aspects. For instance, let us imagine that we were to depart from the idea of systemic change and narrow our focus to addressing the single issue of supporting teacher reflection. The mere mention of the word "reflection" to teachers triggers an immediate response of another word, "time." All four interviewees mentioned time in their responses to my first question, "What immediately springs to mind when you hear the term 'reflection'?" Time, of course, requires scheduling adjustments to release teachers while supervision of students is sustained, which not only involves expenditure shifts from some other programs which have their own protective constituencies, but also requires a procedural mechanism by which such plans and decisions will be made; if inclusive of all interested parties, this will necessitate more time, which affects scheduling and budget, and so on it goes. This does not even take into account the deterrents which are built into institutional hierarchies, some of which I summarized in Chapter 1, and which are well-captured in McLaughlin and Yee's distinction between "investment centered" or "payoff centered" organizations.<sup>2</sup> In the latter, which characterizes many school organizations, very few new programs will be undertaken which do not promise immediate and demonstrable

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<sup>2</sup> McLaughlin, M.W. & Yee, S.M. (1988). School as a place to have a career. In A. Lieberman (Ed.) *Building a professional culture in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, 37.

outcomes for the sponsor. In the notion of reflective practice I have sketched, teaching practice (and schooling) as a whole benefits from immersing teachers in a fuller context of their roles as educators of young citizens in a democratic society. This function of reflective practice is not immediately translatable into higher test scores, or public satisfaction, or cost-benefits to taxpayers, though it remains conceivable that such benefits might be anticipated. It is a long-term proposition requiring an "investment centered" outlook, making it an unlikely component in reform plans which seek a rapid quantitative verification of "payoff."

Another example is the concept of teacher empowerment, which has typically referred to institutional adjustments in the line of decision-making authority at the school level, such as we find in site-based management schemes. The thinking behind this manner of restructuring is that by giving teachers a greater voice in (some of) the daily decisions of school operation, they will experience an increased sense of ownership, investment, and commitment in their work in general. Sears and Marshall have called this *empowerment-by-authorization*, in which people are empowered within a limited framework which is determined by those who do the empowering.<sup>3</sup> All too often, the new "power" of teachers places them in additional meetings and committees making decisions on issues that are not exactly at the forefront of educational urgency, such as choosing colors for new carpeting or managing the budget for school assemblies.

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<sup>3</sup> Sears, J. & Marshall, D. (1990). An evolutionary and metaphorical journey into teaching and thinking about curriculum. In J. Sears & D. Marshall (Eds.), *Teaching and thinking about curriculum*. New York: Teachers College Press, 10-17.

This type of empowerment, along with other common restructuring measures, may contribute something to changing the *conditions* of teachers' work (for better or for worse), but the *nature* of that work is generally unaffected and any sense of empowerment felt by teachers does not apply to their work with children in the classroom.<sup>4</sup> If changes are to occur in the roles and responsibilities of teaching, a different notion of empowerment is required, an *empowerment-as-enablement*, whereby "the intent of empowering people is to enable them to recognize, create, and channel their own power" with respect to those issues, interests, and beliefs which define for them what it means to teach.<sup>5</sup> Improving the various conditions under which teachers work can certainly support the effort toward educational improvement, but I have argued that none of these in and of themselves will transfer into improvements in teaching until the level of discourse regarding teaching is raised. And the proper place for this discourse to be centered is with teachers and within the culture they shape for themselves.

The notion of reflective practice that I am promoting here cannot simply be "adopted" or overlaid onto a restructuring plan which clings to traditional assumptions about teachers' practice. Nor can it be treated as an annexation to staff development programs, where quasi-reflective "activities" are intermittently tossed into the mix of the regular skill-

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<sup>4</sup> Lichtenstein, G., McLaughlin, M.W., & Krudsen, J. (1992). Teacher empowerment and professional knowledge. In A. Lieberman (Ed.) *The changing contexts of teaching*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 37-58.

<sup>5</sup> Ceroni, K.M. & Garman, N.B. (1994). The empowerment movement: Genuine collegiality or yet another hierarchy? In Grimmett, P.P. & Neufeld, J. *Teacher development and the struggle for authenticity*. New York: Teachers College Press, 247.

training sessions. Nor can we rest the case for increased reflection on the mantle of time; this case needs to be based on an articulation of the kinds of uses to which we want additional time to be directed. It is worth noting that when the interviewees cited time in their initial reactions to the notion of reflection, most proceeded to indicate what the value of that time would be — “to think about teaching on a lot of levels (Eileen),” “to question your own practice and the impacts of that practice on you and the kids (Jan),” “to develop a point of view with respect to one’s practice (Matt),” and “to take stock of what it is we’re trying to do (Kate).” Practice that is based on habits of critical reflection and continual inquiry will not result from the occasional Reflection Day, but only when these habits become, as Sirotnik says, “a way of professional life . . . [which] . . . has to be worked at with rigor and continuity.”<sup>6</sup> These habits need to become internalized — or interiorized, or *dwelled in* — by individual teachers and absorbed into the collective culture that they inhabit, affecting not only their own approach to practice but also the patterns of interaction and communication among one another. By placing the foundations of reflective practice squarely on teachers themselves, empowerment-as-enablement becomes more realistically attainable than if reflection is treated as something that can only take place if it is defined, authorized, expedited, and guided by traditional sources of authority. The premise for this is a belief that, until the fundamental perceptions *by teachers* about their work is expanded to include all of the regions of the reflective

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<sup>6</sup> Sirotnik, K.A. (1991). Critical inquiry: A paradigm for praxis. In E.C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of curriculum inquiry*. New York: State University of New York Press, 247.

landscape, the notion of reflective practice will have limited impact on the efforts toward educational improvement.

### Professional Culture of Teaching — Background and Dominant Forces

Given the grim portrayals contained in most accounts of the working conditions of teachers, it is a marvel that the field has been able to attract entrants of any kind, even if not consistently from the ranks of the best and the brightest. Overcrowded classrooms, isolation from peers, increasingly unmotivated and unruly students, inadequate resources and materials, rigidly structured workdays, bureaucratic administrative structures, and conflicting public expectations are among the malaises that are commonly cited as hindering the effective performance and professional satisfaction of teachers. While these conditions doubtlessly discourage some would-be teachers from entering the field, and eventually lead others to abandon teaching careers, it appears that the strongest motivations for entering and staying in teaching are fairly unrelated to these factors. The predominant considerations for one's becoming a teacher seem to center on either working with children or on qualities of teaching itself and a majority of teachers report fulfillment of their career expectations.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that teachers are by and large content with the nature of their work, and frustrations with existing conditions stem from the constraints these conditions pose in the

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Goodlad, J.I. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future*. New York: McGraw-Hill; Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Johnson, S.M. (1990). *Teachers at work: Achieving success in our schools*. New York: Basic Books.

performance of these tasks. Common complaints of “too much material to cover” and “not enough time to plan and evaluate” and “too many interruptions” seem to bear this out. Even the relatively low salary of teachers is often cited somewhat regretfully as a reason for leaving teaching in favor of administration or a different career altogether.<sup>8</sup> The conclusion that could be reached, according to this interpretation, is that the school reform architects are on the right track. And it is precisely this conclusion — embraced by teachers and policy planners alike — that I see as presenting the most significant malaise facing the teaching profession, and which a reflective culture of teaching would help to alleviate. Eileen, for instance, mentioned that her staff meets for about an hour per week to work on issues related to school improvement. When I asked about the kinds of topics that are raised in these meetings, she noted that “people feel under the gun right now to align their own teaching with the state essential learnings. And I think that people have reserved judgment about whether any of this will come to anything.” So, while they discuss ways to integrate curriculum, lengthen class periods, and set learning standards compatible with those of the state, this staff has yet to discuss the relative merits of what they are actively devising. That these teachers are devoting so much time and energy to measures for which they have not made a judgment of worth is highly disturbing. It confirms a willingness to passively subscribe to changes and ideas which they have yet to consider at any length. While the conditions of their work may change via longer class periods and new curriculum matrices, we have little indication that

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, 43.

the nature of their work has been transformed in any significant ways. Eileen conceded that there have been no discussions about why the teachers are reserving judgment about the prospects of reform — they see it as just something that needs to be done. She characterized the prevailing sentiment among teachers — with which she partially agrees — as “That’s all nice to talk about how schools ought to be and how kids ought to be and all this ‘ought to be.’ but here’s my new math program and I don’t know how to do it. . . . You have to feel pretty confident with how you teach what you’re teaching before you can reflect on its role in society and change.”

This orientation, I maintain, represents a major reason why so many teachers are firmly planted in the practical quadrant of the reflective landscape; and why change is so often gauged by factors related to the means rather than the ends of education. There is little question that richer funding, smaller class sizes, and more access to equipment and resources would yield some positive results, but the impact will always be limited unless obsolete notions of what teachers do and how they do it are revised and subjected to a more rigorous process of determination. The seeds of this process are few and scattered, and the surrounding soil is largely fallow.

If we are to entertain the notion of a transformed teaching culture, it is important to examine the existing culture of teaching in the historical, political, and environmental context in which it has evolved. The ways that teachers perceive their roles is heavily influenced by their own history as students, which has in turn been heavily influenced by the

social and economic influences on schooling's purpose and structure. A personal positive experience with school or the lasting impression of an especially caring and/or skillful teacher has led some to select teaching as their chosen career at a very early age.<sup>9</sup> Others see teaching as a means to continue indulging their passions for particular subject areas.<sup>10</sup> And others turn to teaching as a familiar and reasonably accommodating occupation while pursuing other aspirations or attending to other responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of the particular motivation, however, what all candidates for teaching share in common is an existing mental structure of what schooling is and how it is conducted. Approached from this perspective, it is not surprising that prospective teachers are primarily interested in "being able to do it" and view theoretical and foundational studies as irrelevant and an unnecessary distraction from the important business of learning "what works."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Goodlad found that almost half of the preservice teachers he interviewed reported no change in their basic educational beliefs and values throughout the length of their programs.<sup>13</sup> If this is the case for teacher education programs, which one would hope provide a constant stream of challenges to preconceived notions of education, it can only be more profoundly true among practicing teachers who, as Lortie found, "do not, apparently, acquire new

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<sup>9</sup> Lortie, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Goodlad, 171.

<sup>11</sup> Lortie on gender aspects of teaching.

<sup>12</sup> Goodlad, J.I. (1990). *Teachers for our nation's schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 214-215.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

standards [once becoming teachers] to correct and reverse earlier impressions, ideas, and orientations.”<sup>14</sup> Given this decidedly unreflective engagement with the concept of teaching, combined with a predisposition to cling to existing beliefs of what teaching is, it is understandable that the career expectations of many teachers are generally fulfilled. Jan disagrees that teachers are reluctant to discuss their beliefs about teaching. She argues that they *can't* discuss them “because most of us haven't done the reflection part. . . . a lot of folks run through their day and do things the way they've always done it without ever questioning why they still do it that way.” Thus, the potentially perplexing situations involving the nature of teaching, particularly those revealed by the first two reflective domains, fail to stimulate critical reflection because they are simply not acknowledged, or even considered.

Public education's early 1900s shift toward a factory model, guided by the principles of scientific management, has left a legacy of a bureaucratized organizational structure, which current moves toward “decentralization” are designed to (partially) dismantle. An equally important part of the legacy, though, is that the values and beliefs underlying the factory approach have been absorbed into the culture of teachers to a degree that is unlikely to be mitigated by a layer of site-based management or feel-good rhetoric about the changing role of teachers. There is little question that most contemporary educators would be offended by remarks such as Cubberly's claim that schools are like

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<sup>14</sup> Lortie, 81.

factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of twentieth-century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to specifications laid down.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, we find these same educators working long and hard to enact reform measures which are essentially quite loyal to this statement, but with a 21st century spin. The role of teachers, as defined by the organization and subliminally accepted by the teachers, is to produce a good product according to the specifications that are laid down in the reform blueprints. In the present incarnation, this entails performance standards and essential learnings designed according to the perceived demands of a postmodern civilization, with a strong emphasis on economic competitiveness. Among the ranks of teachers, all attention is now on how these specifications will be met and how they will learn the “new approaches to teaching and learning” which are said to be required. In other words, the factory is being retooled and the workers queue up to receive the training needed to produce the new model of student. Consequently, whatever degree of reflection occurs — including that which is augmented with additional time and collaboration, as in the case of Eileen’s school — will be focused on the successful use of the new production techniques and not on the value of the products or the

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<sup>15</sup> Callahan, R.E. (1962). *Education and the cult of efficiency*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 97.

relevancy of the design specifications. In the same vein, when teachers refer among themselves to being “in the trenches” the metaphor implies more than that teachers work on the front lines of education. It also suggests a detachment from the process of strategizing the campaign, deploying resources, and selecting targets. As any front line soldier will tell, the platoon’s job is simply to “take the hill” without having to know why or how the particular hill fits into the overall plan.

I do not wish to overextend the military metaphor, but it does afford one last comparison with respect to reflective practice. Like the teacher who relies upon her practical knowledge to adjust to indeterminacies in classroom situations, the foot soldier calls upon his previous combat experience, knowledge of the terrain, and any other “need-to-know” intelligence handed down by superiors to expedite the taking of the hill with a minimum of casualties. It is also true that the practical field experience of the soldier may prove more valuable than the military theory and technical rationality employed by desk-bound commanders in determining what is necessary to execute the mission successfully. However, the reason the military metaphors in teaching need to be abandoned is that the education of a child is enormously different than capturing a hill. In the latter case, we can argue that the soldier’s comprehension of the entire campaign is irrelevant to the taking of the hill. This logic is wholly inadequate when discussing the role of the teacher, and is therefore a very unfortunate metaphor to the extent that it has penetrated the collective psyche of teachers. The culture of the military encourages blind compliance with decisions, regardless of any

moral or ethical issues that may accompany those decisions. The soldier is relieved from judging the strategic importance of a hill, the efficacy of the plan, or the justifiability of the military action in the first place. The position I have maintained throughout this project is that it is absolutely essential that teachers understand — and have a voice in determining — the full program, including the assumptions, beliefs, and values that influence its design. Moreover, there is a moral obligation to actively seek and analyze alternatives which might be superior to the chosen course, and to raise these alternatives in a dialogue with others. This cannot be accomplished solely from a knowledge of what works in the classroom. It demands as well a distinctly intellectual approach to the foundations of the practices that are being employed in schools as a means of stimulating and informing inquiry in the multiple dimensions of reflective practice. While it is altogether proper that teacher educators are striving to develop ways to initiate this reflective disposition in their preservice programs, the disposition is unlikely to endure unless the culture that prospective teachers will be entering is able to sustain and nurture its continual development.

Much has been made of the fact that teachers are largely isolated from just about everyone but the children they teach. Schedules inhibit collegial interaction, supervisor visits are infrequent and businesslike, communications with parents are logistically difficult, and opportunities to converse with peers often occur at times when energy levels can accommodate only the most superficial engagement. The recent resurgence of team teaching can be seen, at least in part, as a response to

the desire by some teachers to work in a collaborative environment. A more widely felt sentiment among teachers is that they yearn for opportunities to “pick each other’s brains” and to exchange ideas and strategies (as well as frustrations and aggravations, we can assume). Still, the isolation factor continues to weigh heavily on the culture of teachers. Goodlad found that a significant number of teachers at all levels reported a high degree of autonomy within their classroom walls, having “a lot of control over setting goals and objectives; use of classroom space; scheduling time and instructional materials; selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught; and grouping students for instruction.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, teachers are apt to feel some misgivings about relinquishing the autonomy that isolation affords, but these could be lessened if we were to examine the kind of autonomy that is being described here. There is a degree of truth in the old adage that once the classroom door is closed the teacher makes the final decisions about what will be taught and how it will be taught, but this overstates the nature of teachers’ authority in these areas. What should have been added to the previous accounting of teachers’ autonomy is that the control that teachers felt was over areas that are already highly regulated and predetermined. Seemingly suppressed in the teachers’ perceptions is that they had control over the goals, materials, schedules, and topics *from which they were permitted to choose*. One is reminded of Henry Ford declaring that his customers could have any color of car they wanted, so long as the color was black. We might conclude, then, that if teachers can feel autonomous

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<sup>16</sup> Goodlad, *A place called school*, 109–110.

by selecting from a limited menu of options, they are also comfortable with — or worse, indifferent to — the grounds upon which the menu was constructed. An alternative explanation, and the one I prefer, is that, for any number of reasons, teachers have had neither the inclination nor the license to make the non-practical matters of education part of their professional domain.

In a later section, I will talk about the angst that teachers experience over their tenuous status as professionals, and this angst deeply affects the culture of teaching.<sup>17</sup> Most teachers believe that their work educating children is one of the most vital tasks in the society, yet they receive very little external corroboration that society shares this belief except in the context of dissatisfaction with the way the task is being handled. Many teachers look to the status, financial rewards, and autonomy of the so-called “major” professions, such as medicine, and see how their own occupational equivalents pale by comparison. They see friends and relatives climb up the promotional ladder in other occupations, while for themselves moving *up* means moving *out* of the classroom and forsaking the intrinsic rewards that teaching offers. Teachers know better than anyone the toll that teaching a group of children for six hours each day takes on one’s mental, physical, and emotional reserves, yet the public perception continues to be that teaching demands patience, but not a lot of intellectual acumen. Teachers themselves are ambivalent about their preparation for teaching, often judging it to be neither very relevant nor

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<sup>17</sup> Louis, K.S. & Smith, B. (1990). Teacher working conditions. In P. Reyes (Ed.), *Teachers and their workplace*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 23–47; Johnson, S.M. (1990). *Teachers at work: Achieving success in our schools*. New York: Harper Collins, 29–57.

very rigorous.<sup>18</sup> All of this is compounded by the pervasive uncertainty that accompanies most aspects of teaching.<sup>19</sup> And where complexity and adapting to uncertain conditions generally elevate the status of an occupation, in teaching these qualities have become a deterrent to teachers' claims of professional status and a source of substantial anxiety among teachers. I have already noted the pervasive efforts to simplify and proceduralize many aspects of teaching, but there are other responses that work in more surreptitious ways. Lortie and Goodlad both reported a distinctive orientation by teachers toward the conventional and traditional, which Lortie refers to as "reflexive conservatism."<sup>20</sup> Even teachers who perceive a high level of autonomy appear disinclined to experiment with new teaching methods or other innovative ideas. This conservatism not only deters advancement in pedagogy, but also has a profound effect on how teachers interact with each other professionally. The fact that tangible assessments of a teacher's effectiveness are few and ambiguous fosters an egalitarian attitude where conformity and keeping a low profile become unspoken norms. Outspokenness of one's views or impassioned advocacy of special causes (i.e. multiculturalism, alternative teaching methods) can be seen as arrogance and an attempt to call attention to one's self. The chronic uncertainty that teachers face in their work is partially alleviated if everyone is pretty much doing the same thing. Challenges to these conventions or the introduction of new ideas

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<sup>18</sup> Lortie, 160; Goodlad, *Teachers for our nation's schools*, 214.

<sup>19</sup> Lortie's Chapter 6, "Endemic Uncertainties," explains these in great detail and discusses how they affect the culture of teachers.

<sup>20</sup> Lortie, Chapter 6; Goodlad, *A place called school*, 249.

that are not fully understood increase the sense of anxiety and insecurity that is already present. Consequently, collegial norms serve to mediate the kinds of exchanges that occur between teachers, minimizing confrontation and conflict but also inhibiting open dialogue and debate. The cultural “glue” of teachers is more one of shared circumstances than of shared beliefs and purposes. Exchanging “tricks of the trade” and being empathetic toward each others’ common frustrations (i.e. troublesome children, paperwork, interruptions) promote a climate of civility and reassurance while steering clear of those topics and issues from which the uncertainty and insecurity stem. This level of discourse runs counter to the thesis presented here, which takes the position that reflective practice originates and develops precisely from those aspects of teaching that are problematic and perplexing. For a reflective culture of teaching to emerge and thrive, the conversation must penetrate beyond the familiar and probe into the dark recesses where values and beliefs have traditionally been tucked away (and left unexamined).

### Reflective Individuals Within a Reflective Culture

The notion of the “reflective practitioner” has an individualistic connotation which does not explicitly embrace the communitarian theme present in much of the current literature regarding educational and social reform.<sup>21</sup> While Schön’s concept of reflective coaching is compatible with

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<sup>21</sup> Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W.M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Little, J.W. (1990). Opening the black box of professional community. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *The changing contexts of teaching*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 157–178; MacKinnon, A.M. & Grunau, H. (1994). Teacher development

the idea of socially constructed knowledge, its one-on-one relationship between mentor and pupil fails to capture the full democratic dynamics that one finds in many accounts of the way things ought to be. The egalitarian norms in the present teaching culture dictate that one may not *impose* one's views on the group but should certainly be willing to share them if solicited to do so. The communitarian position has promoted a preemptive approach to individually held knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes by suggesting that these are better constructed communally and in the context of ongoing dialogue, thereby ensuring that all perspectives and views have been represented. With respect to teachers as reflective practitioners, Sirotnik states that proponents of critical inquiry should be concerned "less with a collection of individual 'reflective practitioners' and more with a reflective *collective* of practitioners."<sup>22</sup> The position taken here is that both are necessary for reflective practice to become a reality. I would revise Sirotnik's statement to read that we should be *as concerned* with individual reflective practitioners as we are with a reflective community of practitioners. More precisely, I suggest that we view a reflective community of practitioners, or a reflective culture of teaching, as dependent upon the interactions that occur among reflective individuals.

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through reflection, community, and discourse. In P.P. Grimmett & J. Neufeld (Eds.), *Teacher development and the struggle for authenticity: Professional growth and restructuring in the context of change*. New York: Teachers College Press, 166–192; Taylor, C. (1992). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Sirotnik, K.A. (1991). Critical inquiry: A paradigm for praxis, 247.

One can detect, in many treatments of reflection as a communal activity, an undervaluing of the intellectual aspects of reflective thought in favor of establishing dialogical structures (i.e. consensus building) within organizations such as schools and colleges of education.<sup>23</sup> To the extent that one views reflective practice as dealing with strictly practical matters (what works), this preference for form over substance does not present much of a problem. If, however, we embrace a fuller notion of what reflection should entail, then merely placing teachers in a dialogical setting is not a sure path to reflective practice. To invoke the terminology I've been developing, if we fix a group of individuals at the same location on the reflective landscape, a multiplicity of perspectives is not as likely as when individuals converge from many different locations, and by many different paths, along the landscape. In this way, each individual is enlightened by the perspectives brought by the others; perspectives which, in turn, will enlighten the further individual reflections that are brought to future dialogic encounters. For this process to be maximized, however, it is necessary that each individual actively traverse the landscape in the context of his/her own practice, applying the same standards for justification and warrantability — sort of a personal dialectic conversation — that govern the dialogical exchanges and interactive reflections of the group.

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<sup>23</sup> Recall discussion in Chapter 1 and elsewhere regarding reform and staff development literature portraying collaborative reflection as sharing of classroom ideas and strategies. See also, Cinnamond, J.H. & Zimpher, N.L. (1990). Reflectivity as a function of community. In R.T. Clift, W.R. Houston, & M.C. Pugach (Eds.), *Encouraging reflective practice in education: An analysis of issues and programs*. New York: Teachers College Press, 57–72.

A reflective culture of teaching, then, consists of individuals who bring the full range of their individual reflections to an ongoing dialectic which encompasses all four reflective domains. Both the individual reflection and the convergent dialogue are guided by certain attitudes as suggested by Dewey's trio of *open-mindedness*, *whole-heartedness*, and *responsibility*. Open-mindedness directly addresses the issue of basing reflection (individual and collective) on multiple perspectives by including:

an active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to facts from whatever source they come; to give full attention to alternative possibilities; to recognize the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us.<sup>24</sup>

This attitude can serve as an antidote to the conservatism that arises from the uncertainties and ambiguities which are so much a part of teaching. It is also an attitude that is vital to the progression of effective dialogue among teachers, and needs to be supported and nurtured in this context.<sup>25</sup> Open-mindedness can be ineffectual and even distracting, however, if not approached with the corresponding attitudes of whole-heartedness and responsibility. The former suggests a consuming and enthusiastic curiosity which serves as a self-perpetuating impetus for inquiry and

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<sup>24</sup> Dewey, *How we think*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> For a cogent discussion on teacher dialogue as a means of dealing with uncertainty, see Floden, R.E. & Buchmann, M. (1993). Between routines and anarchy: Preparing teachers for uncertainty. In M. Buchmann & R.E. Floden, *Detachment and concern: Conversations in the philosophy of teaching and teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 211-221.

reflection. We might say that whole-heartedness is what sustains continual movement along the reflective landscape, while open-mindedness makes us receptive to the traversals (reflections) of others and the possibility that things can appear differently if approached from different directions (perspectives). Still, openness and curiosity can lead to aimless meandering or moral and pedagogical relativism without responsibility to action; that is, a rigorous process of judging our own and others' perspectives for their meaning with respect to the consequences of putting them into practice. This judgment is based upon an individual and shared commitment and responsibility to the values and beliefs regarding the purposes of education for both society and the individual; as such, responsibility functions as the foundation of a reflective culture of teaching, while open-mindedness and whole-heartedness are qualities which determine how thoroughly such a culture proceeds towards its desired ends (which continue to evolve as a function of inquiry and reflective discourse). Putting it another way, open-mindedness and whole-heartedness provide for the breadth of reflection, while responsibility forces the issue of depth by demanding that reflection be critical.

A reflective culture of teaching, then, can be conceived as the shared professional environment in which a collection of reflective practitioners is transformed into a reflective community of practitioners.<sup>26</sup> It provides the structures, norms, and coherency of vision which the community

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<sup>26</sup> "Community," as used here, refers to any number of collegial arrangements, from school faculties to a professional associations to geographically independent networks of educators such as discussion groups which "meet" on the Internet.

requires to sustain and improve itself, and enculturates new entrants into the values and habits of reflective practice. Aspiring to a reflective culture, however, should not be equated with a linear shift from individual reflection to collaborative discursive reflection. The reflective individual and the reflective community are mutually dependent and a reflective culture helps both of them to flourish and to nurture each other's continued development.

Returning to the metaphor of the jazz group again, we are of course interested in the musicians being able to play well together, whether they are improvising or interpreting popular standards. At the same time, we recognize that the quality of their music is made possible by the musical skill and knowledge that has been acquired through countless hours of individual practice and study. Indeed, we fully expect them to be talented and competent musicians in their own rights, able to perform solo as well as with different assemblages of musicians. Their abilities as musicians would become suspect if each was only able to perform in the context of the group and with an inflexible repertoire of compositions. Their professional identity is derived from their own level of musicianship as well as their membership in a particular group as well as their being a part of the jazz community. The jazz culture, with its particular musical orientation, vocabulary and stylistic elements, historical traditions, and loose organizational patterns, influences a musician's way of thinking and acting about each of these three identity roles. In the final analysis, jazz groups become expressive vehicles for those who are already musicians inclined to the jazz style and familiar with its elements. Participation in

the group may very well enhance the musician's artistic development, but this is a function of the confluence of the members' individual talents.

In summary, we must be careful not to leapfrog the concept of individual reflection in our desire to create reflective communities of practitioners, for the viability of the latter is dependent on the integrity of the former. Of course, a vibrant reflective community can certainly nourish and promote individual reflection, but only once the disposition to be reflective has been established. Otherwise, the community is vulnerable to "contrived collegiality"<sup>27</sup> as well as a more hollow variant consisting of collaboration with *no* discernible agenda.

### Building and Sustaining a Reflective Culture of Teaching

At the outset of this chapter, I expressed my reluctance to engage in a "how to create a reflective culture" discussion. The mere suggestion of a blueprint or organizational plan for a reflective culture of teaching contradicts all that has been said about how reflective thinking and reflective practice can contribute to educational improvement. Yet given the vast range of constraining factors on teacher practice and school culture — only a fraction of which have been mentioned here — there is no point in talking about a reflective culture of teaching without at least considering how such a thing might materialize and what conditions might help to sustain it. Therefore, in this section I will present some

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<sup>27</sup> Hargreaves, A. (1990). *Contrived collegiality: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studied in Education.

elements which I feel are essential for the practice of teachers and the culture they share to become more reflective.

Addressing Complexity: The first of these involves the complexity  $\longleftrightarrow$  simplicity spectrum. Until educators embrace the fact that teaching is a complex endeavor, through their actions as well as their rhetoric, there is little reason to expect any major changes in the ways that schools operate. So long as there is a stubborn inclination to simplify that which is complicated — be it curriculum, instructional methods, assessment of student learning, or even what it means to be a citizen in democratic society — even the most ambitious reform programs are unlikely to make a major impact on the activities and outcomes of public education. There is evidence that teaching has begun to advance beyond the textbook–lecture–test routine of years ago, but we know little about the pedagogical grounds on which teachers are basing these new practices, or how deeply they are comprehended, although Eileen’s anecdote about “reserving judgment” provides a hint. The tendency to isolate foundational theory from the procedural details of practice leaves teachers in the precarious situation of implementing pedagogical ideas of which they may or may not have a clear grasp.

Making the claim that teaching is complex is drastically different than saying that it is “hard work.” Keeping thirty students occupied and under control for several hours each day is demanding and tiring, as is trying to keep interest and motivation at a high level. Yet, these challenges are routinely addressed with simplistic solutions, such as behaviorist management schemes, extrinsic rewards, and irrelevant

(though possibly fun) busy work. It is hard work to deal with many different ability levels and learning styles; but to understand these and to effectively accommodate them is complicated. Executing several curriculums simultaneously is hard work, and curriculum guides and other support materials are designed to alleviate this taxation on the teacher. Too often, though, these materials are arranged in such ways that attention is drawn to following the procedures (simplicity) and drawn away from critically examining the curriculum itself — its scope, biases, thoroughness of treatment, and connection to other disciplines (complexity).

An important step toward a reflective culture of teaching would be for teachers to shift their collective self-identity from one of being “in the trenches,” thanklessly trying to keep pace with the many demands being placed on them, to one of being in the best position to appreciate the full complexity of both the means and ends of education and united in a common effort to develop sophisticated approaches to these. Sirotnik’s generic questions for prompting critical inquiry offer one promising approach to establishing a cultural “tone” which encourages this shift from *teachers in a common predicament* to *teachers with common purposes*, even while these purposes are continually being negotiated and refined. In addressing his questions, teachers are compelled to look at the origins of certain practices, the effects of their current use, and opportunities for modification and revision — all of which are considered in light of ongoing reflection and dialogue about the purposes of education and schooling. Yet while these questions clearly imply a multi-

faceted character to schooling issues, their usefulness will always rely on the ability of those doing the inquiry to recognize and analyze the many interrelated facets of teaching.

*Widening the contextual lens for viewing teaching practice:* The primary function of the reflective landscape is to provide a framework for recognizing and critically examining the multiple layers of meaning that are embodied in the act of teaching — both teachers' own personal meanings and those which are collectively constructed. Answers to generic questions such as "Whose interests are being served?" or "Is this the way we want it to be?" or "What are we going to do about it?" will be determined by the breadth and depth of the perspectives that are brought to them as well as the level of responsibility that is accepted for the decisions that are made. Dialogue which is fixated at the practical tier of reflection will generate responses aimed to satisfy the criteria which prevail at this level; this may serve to simplify the process but is likely to lead to further complications that could not have been anticipated — and may not be recognizable — from a purely practical vantage point. It is likely that many sources of frustration for teachers can be traced to these attempts to address deeply rooted issues with topical solutions. By expanding the conversation into all the reflective domains, shortsighted and ineffectual solutions are more likely to be identified as such, and what would have been misguided efforts can be redirected towards more thoroughly considered courses of action.

Responsibility which is conceived from reflective engagement of all four domains preempts the inclination to randomly reach into one's accumulated bag of tricks and hope that it contains something that might mask the symptoms of a problem for short-term purposes. Instead, the reflective teacher seeks to devise a response that is uniquely suited to the full context of a situation with the objective of making a morally proper and enduring practical impact. The criteria for this are derived from reflective consideration of as many facets of the situation as can be apprehended, and the reflective landscape is offered as one way of acquiring a multi-faceted perspective. As previously discussed, this process is heightened by participation in numbers, and when a community of teachers is united in its orientation to arrive at not just *a* solution but *an optimum* solution, then substantive changes can begin to occur which can affect the entire organization.

*Civility with "an edge":* The recent shift towards site-based decision-making has forced teachers to step outside the immediate security of their classrooms and to engage in interactions to which they are unaccustomed. Decentralization of school management, such as it is, is meant to bring parents, teachers, and other invested parties (including students) into dialogue and debate about the directions that schools should take and the ways they should operate. There is an inevitable dimension of conflict to these interactions, based at least in part on the need for participants in the dialogue to be willing and able to articulate their positions and, if necessary, defend them in the face of opposing viewpoints. This is a

largely unprecedented role for teachers who have traditionally had decision-making power over only the micro decisions of classroom practice, though even these are significantly limited in range by administrative preferences and prescribed curriculums. Unfortunately, attempts to establish a structure for this process have been oriented more to ensuring congeniality and diminishing conflict than with facilitating a vibrant and rigorous approach to inquiry about pressing educational issues. The disproportional attention to matters of style over substance has curtailed both the degree of dialogue that occurs as well as the scope of concerns that are acceptable subjects for reflective discourse.

Whether due to the egalitarian norms to which teachers are enculturated, or to a desire to preserve the thin margin of autonomy that isolation affords, or to conscious efforts by organizational officials to restrict the bounds of reflective inquiry, or to any of a host of other factors, there are clearly dominant values that shape the protocols for dialogue and decision-making in schools which run counter to the values underlying critical reflection and dialectical interaction among teachers. In general, an emphasis on reaching consensus quickly and painlessly takes precedence over thorough deliberation of problems (and solutions) and their implications. Everyone is welcome to offer ideas, but to challenge them or to question their underlying beliefs or attitudes is seen as a violation of civility and collegial cohesion. Matt, in discussing his TDC sessions, says that one of his biggest challenges is to “keep a degree of tension alive” and he consistently must assume a provocative posture: “Look, it’s time to stop being nice here and to be assertive about what you

believe and what you think needs to get done.” Instead of critically examining ideas to ascertain their appropriateness or viability, the more common procedure is to put all suggestions up for a vote. If everyone can at least “live with” the selected suggestion, the issue becomes officially resolved with no further discussion. Dissident voices, regardless of the sincerity or validity of their motives, are often interpreted as maliciously confrontational and are effectively silenced through a variety of formal and informal sanctions, the latter being especially insidious to the health of the organization as factions are formed to reinforce the validity of members’ common opinions and assertions. Jan, in the ordeal at her previous school, was treated to both overt and covert sanctions; overtly rebuked by the “old guard” for pressing an issue that was unwelcome, and covertly isolated by the aggressive socialization process which let new teachers know that the school had its own long-standing way of doing things. The pervasive reluctance to air one’s views in a full assembly of peers and colleagues serves, in fact, to impede any serious movement toward a culture of reflection and inquiry. Consequently, the dialogue that teachers engage in is too often restricted to the benign and superficial aspects of schooling where there is no risk of being contested on issues which “cut close to the professional bone,” as Kate calls it — where one’s deepest (and perhaps unexamined) attitudes and beliefs might be held up for scrutiny in a public forum.

Among the qualities that must be considered crucial for any professional culture, or community, are trust among the members and a common purpose built from shared beliefs, interests, and values. Neither

of these is attainable when the discourse within the culture is constricted to protect individuals from having to disclose their own beliefs, interests, and values to those with whom they seek a relationship characterized by genuine trust. The inherent insecurity and need for reassurance that seems to dictate the interactions among teachers can only be broken down by confronting it directly and carefully replacing it with the attitudes of open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility in a dialogical context as well as an individual one. Therefore, when I say that a reflective culture of teaching includes the element of civility “with an edge,” I am suggesting that some degree of conflict and confrontation must be seen as an inevitable part of constructive dialogue on important matters. For teacher collaboration to be reflective and instrumental in expanding the professional knowledge base, it must transcend the mere sharing of “tricks of the trade” or venting common frustrations and move toward embracing critical judgment, contradictory perspectives, argument, and negotiation as natural to the process. Collegial trust is indicated by the willingness to reveal one’s views to the scrutiny of others and to defend, clarify, or revise them in the course of an ongoing dialectic. Discomfort and dissonance are seen as necessary conditions for reconciling incongruous perspectives and arriving at what Habermas termed “justified consensus”<sup>28</sup> through which the articulation of and commitment to a common (moral) purpose is refined and strengthened. Of course, civility should characterize the tone of the dialogue, but if a preoccupation with civility suppresses disagreement and debate, it is

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in Sirotnik, *Critical inquiry: A paradigm for praxis*, 248.

ultimately detrimental to the development of a reflective culture of teaching. As Matt struggles with the task of infusing a healthy tension into his sessions with teachers, he confronts what he calls a “societal hypocrisy — on the one hand, ‘I’m OK, you’re OK’ is a widely held value for teachers, but it’s just not true. . . . we get less done as a result of that mindset. If people just took a stand and got it on the table . . . we’d be more effective as a working cadre.”

In summary, then, dialogue is treated here as a means of illuminating the perplexing situations of teaching and reaching consensus via the collective traversals across all four quadrants of the reflective landscape. The attitudes of open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility provide the foundation for the mutual trust that allows rigorous dialogue to take place and to promote reflective practice. Granted, this type of dialogue is impeded by numerous institutional circumstances affecting the development of teachers attitudes and the operational norms of school environments, and these must become a focus of reflective dialogue as well. The fact remains, however, that genuine empowerment and professional autonomy within a reflective culture of teaching is not something that can, or should, be bestowed upon teachers. It must be actively sought and embraced as vital to the well-being of the culture and approached as a moral imperative of the profession.

*Establishing an Authentic Professional Identity:* The issue of teacher professionalization is far more complicated than what can be dealt with

here, and others have done a far more capable job of analyzing it from many diverse perspectives than I could ever provide.<sup>29</sup> The purpose of this section is to probe into the aspects of this issue which are most directly affected by the attitudes, assumptions, and perspectives of teachers themselves. In so doing, I suspect that I will overlook much of the actual significance of the political, cultural, organizational, and sociological factors which also touch — often forcefully — on this very complex matter. Still, as the focus of this chapter is on the ways that a reflective culture of teachers can exert its influence on change from the inside out, I will assume the risks of this approach.

Teachers, as a group, have struggled for decades with what might be called a professionalization angst — an ambivalence over the legitimacy of their claims that teaching is a profession rather than a vocation or occupation. Unfortunately, the crisis of identity is largely self-constructed and rooted in something similar to what Nussbaum describes as “empty desires that are generated by false beliefs.”<sup>30</sup> For teachers, this refers to the self-defeating habit of comparing their own level of status and compensation with that of other professionals, particularly physicians, and allowing the comparison to fan the flames of discontent and demoralization. Moreover, the disparity is often applied as a rationalization against charges of ineffectiveness and general inability to

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<sup>29</sup> For instance Biklen, S.K. (1995). *School work*. New York: Teachers College Press, 23–31; Bull, B.L. (1990). The limits of teacher professionalization. In J.I. Goodlad, R. Soder, & K.A. Sirotnik (Eds.), *The moral dimensions of teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 87–129; Popkewitz, T.S. (1991). *A political sociology of educational reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.

<sup>30</sup> Nussbaum, M.C. (1994). *The therapy of desire: Theory and practice in Hellenistic ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 105.

evolve in response to emerging social, cultural, and economic conditions, frequently in the form of a litany of "if only" scenarios which basically boil down to "If only we had the same amenities and affordances enjoyed by other professions . . . [X, Y, or Z would be different]." While not disputing the validity of certain aspects of this stance (many of which have already been acknowledged), it is not at all certain that its proponents are willing and/or able to make assurances as to how X, Y, and Z would change if such amenities were granted. Significantly, the equation is silent as to how the nature of teaching and the education of children would change as a result of improved conditions, concentrating instead on how the lives (and self-image) of teachers would be enhanced.

It is generally accepted that increased compensation and prestige would attract more qualified entrants to the field and slow the exodus of talented and ambitious individuals from teaching. At the same time, a number of proposed measures to warrant increased status and remuneration have been swiftly rejected by teachers' unions and a majority of teachers. Granted, these measures (i.e. merit pay, professional certification of master teachers) have tended to be flawed in some operational respects, but the degree of resounding and immediate opposition to them suggests that the main objection was one of principle. The notion that one's teaching can be appraised as more or less effective may be irritating to some teachers, but it is generally accepted that some teachers are more skillful in certain areas of practice. On the other hand, the idea that one's approach to teaching is more valid, or derived from a more enlightened perspective, violates the egalitarian thread of the

culture of teaching and represents an intrusion into teachers' sense of professional autonomy within the classroom. The cultural assumption that improvements in schooling rely more on the administration of broadly applied enhancements, such as class-size reduction and per pupil expenditure, and less on the pedagogical and personal dynamics between teachers and students, and the active reflective engagement of teachers in setting the course for change, hints at an abdication of responsibility for the elevation of the profession to the level that teachers say they desire.

The preoccupation by teachers with the elusive reward structure enjoyed by other professions has been extensively analyzed by Roger Soder, who essentially has concluded that the kinds of prestige, autonomy, and compensation that teachers covet is more than elusive — it is out of reach.<sup>31</sup> Providing a detailed account of medicine's transformation from craft to major profession, and extrapolating the salient factors of this transformation to the field of teaching, Soder asserts that "teachers' rhetoric of professionalization is flawed because of the line of argument on which they have chosen to rely . . . [and that] . . . once teachers (and their leaders) cease attempts to define themselves as professionals in terms of the ideal of the medical model, they will begin to free themselves from *the tyranny of their own dreams* (emphasis added).<sup>32</sup> Soder suggests that teachers would serve themselves better by establishing their claims to professional status on the moral obligations and the moral worthiness of

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<sup>31</sup> Soder, R. (1990). The rhetoric of teacher professionalization. In J.I. Goodlad, R. Soder, & K.A. Sirotnik (Eds.), *The moral dimensions of teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 35–86.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–72.

educating children, a strategy which he acknowledges may or may not secure the necessary public response to achieve professional recognition. In any case, Soder argues, this type of rhetoric by definition will fare better than the futile rhetoric of forcing dubious comparisons between teaching and medicine. I like the strategy, but disagree with Soder as to the objective.

Attempting to persuade the public that teachers deserve professional status because of the moral nature of their work seems premature, for there is scant indication that teachers themselves are genuinely cognizant of this dimension of their role. Until teachers see themselves as being fundamentally engaged in a moral endeavor and personify this belief in their approach to their practice, espousing moralistic rhetoric to manipulate public opinion is itself immoral. Instead, we might utilize Soder's advice to help teachers internalize the fundamental moral implications of their work with children and thereby refocus their own views regarding the professionalism of teaching. The moral grounding, of course, is just the beginning of the transformation toward a professional and reflective culture. Once teachers have attained some degree of self-validation of the professional nature of their work, then there is no recourse but to address the new definition of what teaching entails by expanding the spheres of engagement beyond the merely practical matters of implementation. Responding to the moral gravity of being so intimately involved in the lives of young people naturally entails an attitude of inquiry into all those aspects that affect this endeavor, which I have tried to represent via the four domains of

reflective consideration. When the education of children is approached as being something considerably more than job readiness and arbitrary achievement standards, then one can begin to attend to the social, cultural, and political factors that affect children's lives and start to consider — individually and dialogically — the pedagogical responses that address these concerns without compromising the more pragmatic goals of schooling; perhaps, in fact, achieving a higher level of the latter.

The key element of this brand of professionalism is that it originates *within* the membership as a function of their collective identity rather than being at the mercy of fluctuations in external perceptions and valuations. As such, it becomes an irrevocable and unwavering authentic descriptor of the way members of the profession see themselves and go about their work. Instead of emulating another profession, it builds a sense of professional identity from the characteristics which make it unique, and treats these as being of the utmost importance — that which *separates* teaching from other professions. It sets standards that exceed what the public holds as the bottom line because it has defined itself as more than a vehicle for perpetuating social and economic stability. It proactively generates knowledge and develops methods that go beyond what is prescribed as minimally essential because it values children's lives as more than instruments for national prosperity, and instead sees the flourishing of these lives as the definition of prosperity.

Like Soder, I see this approach as the best avenue for teachers to attain professional recognition; however, I do not hold this to be its sole intent but see it as an attractive and feasible by-product of a necessary

course to elevate teaching to its proper level in the scheme of societal endeavors.<sup>33</sup> The primary benefit will be to change the nature of teachers' work as determined by the intentional efforts of a reflective culture of teaching rather than being dictated by outside agencies. Teachers can begin to reveal themselves as architects and catalysts of ongoing school improvement, and not merely pawns of a bureaucratic monolith. When dialogue and personal reflection, characterized by the attitudes of wholeheartedness and responsibility, take into account the multiple perspectives generated by the interplay of the four domains as well as the inherent complexity and indeterminacy of the context in which teaching occurs, then a professional dynamic of self-direction and self-monitoring — that is to say, autonomy and empowerment — can begin to evolve. Greater public esteem may be forthcoming, but this would simply complement the intrinsic value of being emancipated from the debilitating effects of professionalization angst.

*The "Whimsy" Factor:* Repeatedly, the language of teachers reveals their sensation of being in a state of constantly swimming upstream. While most teachers believe in the worthiness of their chosen occupation, we consistently hear the work described in combat jargon (i.e. in the trenches, survival, winning/losing the battle, fending off administrators and parents) or in terms which conjure images of frenzy and chaos (i.e.

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<sup>33</sup> Nor can I say that this was all that Soder had in mind. Clearly, he is interested in how teachers' professional status might be elevated, but I suspect that he would agree with the argument I'm making here — that such a perspective is worthy in its own right, even if rewards are not immediately forthcoming.

keeping up, the rat race, catch my breath). There is little question that this metaphorical usage is sincere and has considerable influence as a bonding device among teachers — a shared identification with a perspective of what teaching entails. In large measure, however, the notion of a reflective culture of teaching is intended to eradicate these phrases from the lexicon of teachers by supplanting their perceptions of oppressive situationality with ones that cast teaching as an endeavor that is fundamentally stimulating, challenging, purposeful, and intriguing. To this point, even my own prose in describing this culture is heavily mired in the language of gravity, urgency, and weightiness. Of course, the education of children for democratic life is a weighty matter, especially as one confronts issues of race and gender bias, social injustice, and other “savage inequalities.”<sup>34</sup> Yet our reflection on what we actually know about educating children reveals its complexity and the fact that much of what we’d like to know remains a mystery. Teachers have typically viewed this condition as one of the many burdens they must endure, especially when under the lens of public examination. Not “knowing” has, sadly, led to an attitude of conservatism and conventionality rather than one of curiosity and exploration. The indeterminacies of teaching have come to be viewed as an enemy to be vanquished rather than a source of excitement and opportunity. This tentativeness in the face of mystery and uncertainty robs teachers of what should be one of the most joyful aspects of their work — the playfulness of learning.

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<sup>34</sup> Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York: Crown.

Dewey depicts playfulness as “an attitude of mind” and as being different than play, which simply “has interest in the activity for its own sake”;<sup>35</sup> similarly, my choice of the word “whimsy” to describe an important aspect of teaching is not the same as an endorsement of teachers acting arbitrarily on the impulse of randomly occurring whims. When I say that teachers should exercise a degree of whimsy in their practice, I mean looking at the learning process and the dynamics of classroom environments with a certain creative curiosity toward the possibilities that lie beyond the normal routinized patterns of teaching and schooling. The attitude of whimsy is partially driven by an interest in “What might happen if . . . ?” but is guided by a strong presence of reflection-in-action and a thoughtful anticipation of potential consequences both desirable and undesirable. It requires intensive observation, the ability to comprehend emerging developments as they are unfolding and to intervene in the direction of one outcome over another, and a heightened sensitivity to the interaction of particulars and how each affects the whole.

The notion of whimsy in teaching is heavily reliant on the four tiers of the reflective landscape, for the teacher must be familiar with the variables contained at each tier (as well as their interactive effects) before attempting to view or manipulate them in a whimsical fashion. This is to say that there is a degree of intentionality in whimsy, even though a part of the intention is to explore the mysterious and the unknown. Put another way, whimsy is bounded by the best intentions of the practitioner, and is mediated at all times by the ability of the practitioner to employ a

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<sup>35</sup> Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. Boston: D.C. Heath, 100–103.

multifaceted reflective lens to the object(s) of attention and to respond competently to relevant aspects of the process that was initiated. Whimsy is somewhat related to Schön's notion of artistry (see Chapter 1), in that it ventures into zones of practice which technical rationality cannot accommodate; but it is different in that, instead of reacting to indeterminate situations as they arise, it generates them intentionally. Reaching far beyond the mentality that dwells on knowing and preserving "what works," the whimsical attitude is more oriented to matters of "what might work better?" or "how would it work if X or Y were changed in Z manner?" Implicit in this approach is a pervasive sense of wonder and curiosity springing from a fascination with the intricacies of teaching and learning.

The search for a tangible context in which to explore the idea of whimsy in teaching led me back to an artist and musician whose approach to his craft has intrigued me for more than twenty years. Brian Eno, a self-described "non-musician", began as a rock musician in the early 1970s and acquired a reputation for his innovative "treatments" of other musicians' instruments as they were being played, resulting in sounds that were unanticipated by the musicians themselves and thereby resulting in outcomes that were not originally intended. He later attracted attention for his pioneering efforts in developing the genre of "ambient music" which was conceived to provide listeners with options for attending to the music directly or allowing it to drift out of focal awareness to simply create an "ambience" that complements and alters one's environment. But it is not Eno's output that is germane to this discussion of whimsy —

it is the manner in which he intentionally and systematically sets up conditions to force indeterminacy and uncertainty. As I describe some of Eno's strategies for working within the realm of the unexpected, it will be largely up to the reader to make the transfer from the musical context to the consideration of whimsy in education.

Eric Tamm, who conducted an extensive analysis of Eno's music and methodology, summarizes the general approach used by Eno as:

. . . inventing systems and setting them in motion;  
sustaining an open mind and childlike curiosity about  
the infinite range of musical possibility; taking command  
of technology's array of music-making equipment, from  
tape recorders to synthesizers to mixing consoles;  
generally working within a relatively narrow range of  
expressive possibilities for any given piece; and accepting  
happy accidents at any stage of the creative process.<sup>36</sup>

Underlying this approach is an attitude that "It's always time to question what has become standard and established" as well as "an attraction towards the thrill of the mysterious" which is kept alive by "deliberately dismantling or shifting the stylistic concepts of the materials" one works with.<sup>37</sup> In education, the general operative attitude is to suppress elements of uncertainty at the outset of instruction — to control all variable conditions in advance. As was noted in Chapters 1 and 2, this is a misguided neglect of the inherent indeterminacy and complexity of

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<sup>36</sup> Tamm, E. (1988). *Brian Eno: His music and the vertical color of sound*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Tamm, directly quoting Eno, 56–58.

teaching and learning, resulting in many significant aspects of these processes to go unnoticed and, therefore, untapped. We look for a specific result of our efforts with such singular focus that we are blinded to many other results which might have been as, if not more, worthwhile than the one we were looking for.

Eno contrasts his style of composition with that of more traditional approaches where the written score stipulates a specific result rather than a range of possible results. His preference is to set up a process and see where it leads, "Instead of trying to specify it in full detail, you specify it only somewhat. You then ride on the dynamics of the system in the direction you want to go . . . and [in a way that] accommodates the instincts and respects the choices of performers of all levels [of training]."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, in some of his collaborative ventures, Eno assembled musicians from different genres and orientations just to exploit the tension of everyone being in an unfamiliar circumstance, and where Eno saw his task as one of optimizing this dynamic. Jan describes her own similar process of keeping options open by not trying to anticipate and plan for every possible occurrence or change of circumstance, "I always feel like I'm surfing on things — on my curriculum or on my community within the classroom." Matt reflected on his own teaching style as consisting of a fair amount of moving off to the side and "focusing on words kids use, expressions on their faces, the dialect between paper and child, and child and tasks — and to try and make sense of that and figure out the dynamics."

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<sup>38</sup> Tamm, quoting Eno, 59.

Teachers' time and energy is often driven by demands made upon them by outside agencies rather than by the creative opportunities presented by the nature of their work, work that has the enviable qualities of a virtually limitless supply of content and the vibrancy of ever-changing emotional and intellectual developments. The professional lives of teachers are highly scripted by "composers" who demand that the conductors and the players yield a predictable and uniform product, with virtually no regard for the "beautiful noise" that is methodically silenced or the many "happy accidents" which are lost in narrow-minded perspectives of what constitutes meaningful learning. Commenting on the creative processes he tries to put into motion, Eno says, "Nearly all the things I do that are of any merit at all start off as just being good fun."<sup>39</sup> Finally, and in a characterization that would ideally resonate with teachers, Tamm writes of Eno's composition techniques, "The sensation of being engaged in an interesting process, and the attitude of expectant attention as to where it might lead, [are central]."<sup>40</sup>

Of course, children are not records and failed experiments in music have considerably smaller consequences than failed experiments in teaching. It is worth repeating that the notion of whimsy as used here does not refer to capriciousness or a supplanting of worthwhile ends with amusing means. The purpose of including Eno in the discussion is to demonstrate that playfulness (in teaching) can, and should, be both disciplined and reflective. There is little doubt that this particular concept

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<sup>39</sup> Bangs, L. (1978). Eno sings with the fishes. *Village Voice*: 23: April, 43.

<sup>40</sup> Tamm, 75.

will be disturbing to many educators and others who will immediately visualize a worse-case scenario of “anything goes”, and they will, unfortunately, be able to cite precedents. Whimsy does not mean that one vacates the reflective landscape, only that it can be invigorating and beneficial to allow oneself to stray from the well-worn paths and forge new ones, even when not entirely certain where they might lead. It is essential to remember that this notion of whimsy is being presented in the context of the bigger picture of a reflective culture of teaching and which assumes that such a culture will have self-regulating mechanisms in place to ensure responsibility and thoughtfulness while still protecting the delight and adventure of whimsical reflective practice.

## Chapter Five — From Here to There

### Some Foundations of a Reflective Culture

In Chapter 1, I expressed a concern that common usage of the term reflective practice was overly casual with regard to the knowledge base upon which reflection should occur — the “stuff” that one reflects with. While acknowledging the wealth of practical knowledge that teachers acquire through classroom experience, I suggested that relying on “wisdom of practice” as the sole basis of teacher reflection may certainly help to refine existing practices but does not set the stage for increasing teacher autonomy and empowerment as agents of educational change. The idea of the reflective landscape was presented in Chapter 3 to hint at both the style and substance of a more robust notion of reflective practice that is at once critical and conducive to ongoing improvement. The premise is that as teachers, individually and collaboratively, encounter the interaction of multiple perspectives obtained from the four domains, the actual practice of teaching is enveloped in the broader contexts of education. Although I offered some examples of the types of perspectives that might surface within each of the domains, I have said nothing as to *how* teachers might shed some of the baggage that has left them fairly entrenched in the practical realm of “what works” and begin to examine their role from the points of view of the other domains. And while I am apprehensive about appearing to propose a blueprint for a reflective culture of teaching, it seems appropriate that I at least comment on some elements which I feel can be instrumental in developing such a culture — a sort of blending the vision of what a reflective culture might look like

with how it might get to be that way. In doing so, I will limit my discussion to those areas which are not already prominent in teacher education literature and which I have previously acknowledged.

My criticism of the existing preoccupation with the practical aspects of teaching is closely joined to a long-standing frustration with the anti-intellectual orientation of teachers toward not just their practice but education in general. Remember that we are looking at a type of reflection in which teachers shift some of their attention from "Am I doing it right?" to the more fundamental prerequisite concern with "What is the right thing to do?" Each of the people I interviewed indicated that their reflective thought about their practice centers on questions that extend beyond the mechanics of practice to what the practice stands for. Kate is dedicated to finding teaching practices that serve those students who do not fit traditional student profiles. One of Jan's barometers is the kind of communitarian interactions that occur among her students. Matt tries to instill in his TDC participants the sense that reflection is not a one-week-a-year event, but "something that they can do all the time". Eileen is highly sensitive to how the prevailing structure of schools fails to address the needs — learning and personal — of an increasing proportion of students. As we have seen, the am-I-doing-it-right approach requires only a certain amount of procedural knowledge with perhaps a degree of trial-and-error. The what-is-the-right-thing-to-do approach, however, is much more demanding and cannot be answered from the vantage of accumulated practical expertise. It requires a different level of engagement — a distinctly intellectual and critical approach to the various perspectives

on a given issue. There are few provisions in the existing culture of schools for such engagement; however, my preference for speaking of a reflective culture of teaching lies at least in part on the belief that the level of discourse can be raised substantially even within the existing structure of schooling, and in the process lead to a gradual alteration of this structure from within. This is a crucial departure from much of the conventional thinking which contends that a more thoughtful approach to teaching cannot occur until drastic “systemic” changes are in place.

A common objection to the type of concept being presented here is that there is neither the time nor the incentive to layer reflectivity on top of the existing load of teacher activities. My response is that additional time is not the primary issue — it is the use of available time that needs to be reallocated to more intensive deliberation of the principles on which present practices are based. Much of our potentially collaborative time — when substantive issues can be laid out on the table — is occupied with items which could easily be handled through memos but, through their inclusion in meeting agendas, come to represent the scope of school decision-making. On the off-chance that a certain issue should prompt some level of debate or dialogue, the agenda dictates that it be dispensed with quickly in accordance with the adopted consensus formula or else perhaps relegated to an ad hoc committee for further consideration. What if debate and dialogue came to be the focus of staff meetings and inservice offerings? What if a principal (or other staff member) were to pose a question like “What is our obligation to the students who are not currently succeeding in our program?” Would there be discomfort?

Dissonance? Withdrawal? Resignation? Jan's experience suggests that it would be all of these and perhaps more. What if the instigator of such a conversation were to persist and force the discussion to proceed, to preserve — as Matt strives to do in his sessions — a tension that lets no one off the hook without an accounting of his or her position? What if each teacher in the room were made to confront the moral and ethical implications of his or her chosen modes of practice and to publicly evaluate and disclose these? What if the ethic of professionalism were invoked in a way that denied the option of hiding behind excuses of paperwork and preparation as reasons why there was no opportunity to think of such things? What if the proliferation of social ills was framed in the form of a professional challenge — a perplexing situation commanding our reflective attentions — instead of an insurmountable obstacle?

Given the present culture of teaching, the answer to most of these questions might be summed up in two words — resistance and denial. Resistance to dealing with them in the first place, and denial that they are part of the job description to which teachers signed on and under which they have operated thus far in their careers.<sup>1</sup> Jan connects both of these to fear — “fear of change, fear of new ideas and the work involved, fear of losing control.” Kate cites a lack of emotional liberation to have the courage to confront these fears. Eileen acknowledges both resistance and denial among teachers, but sees it as a function of limited time and energy more than a conscious predilection for stasis. But if the issues were to be

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<sup>1</sup> There may be some validity to the latter claim; see Chapter 1.

tenaciously pursued and kept at the forefront of the conversational agenda, then it becomes reasonable to begin looking for ways to nurture the conversation. What follows, then, is a brief listing of some components which are consistent with the idea of a reflective culture of teaching and are at least conceivably feasible within the existing framework of teacher education and professional development, though none, admittedly, are likely to be eminently popular or warmly received initially.

#### 1) Increased Academic Orientation to Teaching

In *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools*, Goodlad lays out a number of "postulates" for changing teacher education. One of them states that "Programs for the education of educators must be conducted in such a way that future teachers inquire into the nature of teaching and schooling and assume that they will do so as a natural aspect of their careers."<sup>2</sup> Earlier in the same book, however, Goodlad notes that future teachers assume nothing of the sort, but instead expect their preservice education to primarily equip them with an arsenal of strategies and techniques for running a classroom. There is an explicit sentiment among preservice and inservice teachers that the essential qualities for teaching are those dealing with how to deliver curriculum and manage a classroom.<sup>3</sup> Educational foundations and pedagogical theories are viewed as unnecessary distractions from this more pressing need. Spending time in classrooms observing "how it's done" is far more highly valued than

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<sup>2</sup> Goodlad, *Teachers for our nation's schools*, 290.

<sup>3</sup> Rigden, D.W. (1996). How teachers would change teacher education. *Education Week*, 16(15), 64.

thinking about the contextual issues of why something is done a certain way. Attracting more disdain than even pedagogy are the much-maligned foundations of education, which rank lowest (by a wide margin) among all the components of teacher education programs — by faculty as well as students!<sup>4</sup> Granted, the treatment of educational foundations in some teacher education programs has been less than stellar; the traditional lecture courses in philosophy and history of education have — where foundations courses are still offered — increasingly been collapsed into courses which overview “contemporary issues” and are conducted in virtual isolation from the rest of the teaching program. It would be wrong, however, to conclude from any of this that teacher education would do well to dispense with the intellectual dimensions of education in favor of, as one teacher so delicately put it, “the nuts and bolts knowledge to *carry into battle* (emphasis added).”<sup>5</sup>

On the contrary, I would argue that foundational study is crucial to Goodlad’s above postulate ever being realized, and agree with Sirotnik that “this pursuit . . . is something that should be integrated throughout preservice instruction and practice teaching,”<sup>6</sup> but would add that it must carry into one’s professional life as well. If intellectual engagement of educational issues, to which foundations can contribute a great deal, is devalued within the culture that prospective teachers will eventually inhabit, then we can understand why such study is perceived as irrelevant

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<sup>4</sup> Sirotnik, K.A. (1990). On the eroding foundations of teacher education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 71 (May), 710–716.

<sup>5</sup> Rigden, 48.

<sup>6</sup> Sirotnik, 716.

for “survival in the trenches.” At the same time, teacher education is positioned to infiltrate the culture of teaching with critical and reflective entrants to the field; entrants who, if sufficiently confident in their reflective stance, can begin to pose some of the tough questions that demand thoughtful deliberation and that stimulate dialogue. Obviously, as was the case with Jan, there is the risk of backlash and repercussion, but this risk can be largely diminished by like-minded principals or, preferably, other reflective teachers. Going one step farther, and in the spirit of school–university partnerships, we might see a way to include practicing teachers in a reflective dialogue whereby existing policies and practices are viewed against the backdrop of foundational studies.

## 2) Model the Intellectual Traits We Profess to Value

It is sadly ironic that in the field of teaching, where we are the executors of such goals for students as critical thinking, lifelong and independent learning, accessing and interpreting information, and so on, our own professional culture reflects none of these to any notable degree. In addition to teacher preparation programs which are generally less than rigorous, there has been a recent proliferation of graduate programs which reinforce a nonacademic orientation to teaching by offering advanced degrees via a series of weekend seminars and independent projects (i.e. design a learning unit). College credit is often available for what are routine inservice workshops and for which outside work is rarely required. Jan remarks that her colleagues thought she was crazy for spending four years on her graduate program when they were acquiring the same degree in less than 18 months and with a fraction of the reading

and writing — “nobody could understand why I was taking four years in graduate school, and *liking it!* That was perverse. So what’s the goal? The goal there is to bump up on the pay scale, not to gain any expertise, and not really have a reflective practice, or a reflective experience.” Jan laments that there is little indication that advanced learning is perceived as valuable in its own right. She describes the prevailing attitude thus:

I just think that a lot of teachers don't see themselves operating on that level professionally. It's like "Just give me my curriculum, give me my manuals, just let me run through that stuff, and I don't want to think, I don't want to take any more classes" – you know the type. And when you consider that other professions are constantly going to classes, and constantly updating – it's not even a question. And not just for ticket punching either. You know, I think that programs that basically let people go through master's degrees – like the ones that look like they should be on the back of a matchbook cover – I mean I don't think those are doing teachers any big service. It really cheapens scholarliness in teachers. It really sells teachers short.

Perhaps the most discouraging symptom of the anti-intellectualism among teachers is the virtual absence of professional reading. While I have no hard evidence regarding teachers’ reading habits outside of the school setting, it has been a long while since a teacher has referred to a book or article involving an educational issue. As Jan described her

principal's efforts to create a reflective atmosphere in the school, she made special mention that "... she actually gives you stuff to read – articles and things – and I love that. Good articles and good literature . . . This is new to me – pretty phenomenal. I've never seen that at any other school I've been at [in over 20 years]." Similarly, when I asked Yarrow what might change if generous amounts of time were given for teachers to be more reflective, she cited more group planning and "I think people would be willing to read and discuss. You know, read an article – something we rarely have a chance to do." Even if we over-generously appraise the workload of teachers, it is hard to imagine that they "rarely have a chance" to read an article unless the time is provided for them. Something seems terribly amiss when educators, who so aspire to professional recognition, are disinclined to keep abreast of current issues in their field or to expand their knowledge of teaching and learning *as a matter of professional obligation*, if not intellectual curiosity, toward their work. There is an ethical dilemma here in the apparent hypocrisy between the educational goals we have for students and the seeming devaluation of these values in our professional behavior. Incredibly, there appears to be a collective failure to recognize the hypocrisy or to perceive a dilemma.

In order for a reflective culture of teaching to develop and thrive, there needs to be a continual flow of new input into the lifeworld of teachers and a concerted effort to nurture cognitive stimulation. It is hard to envision how new ideas and concepts are to become part of a conversation when the existing culture is, in effect, insulated from the sources of these ideas. As valuable as swapping strategies and techniques

might be, the process more closely resembles the trading of cooking recipes than intellectual inquiry. It is generally uncritical and uncontentious, it centers on the trafficking of familiar items, and is geared to solve problems at a superficial level. It is indeed curious how such a culture can be entrusted with encouraging the rigorous intellectual habits that we find so prominently in educational goal statements.

Maxine Greene argues that the qualities of “interrogation and critique” must become a fundamental objective of education if young people are to be empowered to recognize and influence the many ways that reality is socially and culturally constructed. A pervasive attitude of taken-for-grantedness, she maintains, impedes what should be a basic function of education — to enable people to see linkages and totalities, to allow them to enter into conversations where crucial questions are asked with the explicit purpose of sense-making about their lived worlds, “thinking together about how they live, about the deficiencies in their lived situations, and about how they might be repaired.”<sup>7</sup> Greene is careful to add that this cannot just be an expressed goal for students that can be addressed with a new curriculum or instructional design, but demands that teachers set the tone for the life-project of making sense and transcending the taken-for-granted:

They need to be the kinds of teachers equipped to make practical judgments on the grounds of what they have learned in the realms of theory, what they have discovered from empirical research, what they understand about

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<sup>7</sup> Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning*. New York: Teachers College Press, 84.

children and youth, and what they understand about themselves. . . . to submit their own judgments to the critical scrutiny of those they teach, to open perspectives, to open worlds.

. . . this kind of pedagogy only becomes meaningful when those who engage in it *choose themselves as responsive to norms that go beyond purely professional standards* (emphasis added).<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere, she reinforces the connection between having goals for students' development and the necessity that teachers be willing to exemplify those values in their own lives: "To come to reflect, to come to see is to learn. To be caught up in learning is to have something to say about the *point* of learning and what education ought to achieve."<sup>9</sup> Until we begin to start thinking critically ourselves about the purposes of education, about the kinds of learning that cultivate human lives, and about what we really believe to be essential skills in the lives of young people, it is disingenuous to hold students to intellectual standards which we are not prepared to validate through our example.

### 3) Abandon the Notion of a "Gentle" Reflective Culture

I have described a troubling circumstance but not yet offered any suggestions for remediation. Indeed, practically every aspect of the reflective culture I've been proposing becomes problematic in the context of the antithetical conditions which currently prevail in teaching. How to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 84.

get teachers to question assumptions, to keep abreast of professional literature, to pursue scholarly and rigorous educational opportunities in their own development, and to become proactive in the project of improving public education become daunting notions when the existing culture conveys the consistent message that these are not only unnecessary, but threatening to the stability of the culture itself.

The conventional approach to virtually all change in education is based on the belief that change must be both gradual and methodical, particularly when the change originates externally (almost always the case with schools) and initial resistance is anticipated. When envisioning a reflective culture of teaching, the sights are set on having change be a normal function of the internal workings of the culture. The immediate challenge, then, becomes one of infusing the habits and attitudes of reflection into a culture to which these qualities are alien. One approach would be to devise a grand plan for slowly introducing some reflective kinds of activities so that everyone can get comfortably acclimated to the process. Many teacher education programs attempt to become more reflective in this manner by supplementing the traditional offerings with such things as journal writing and reflective study groups. For practicing teachers, as we have seen, this might take the form of an occasional release day to “do reflection.” But as I’ve argued all along, reflective practice is more than the merging of traditional practice with a sprinkling of reflective thought about the practice; instead, the reflection defines the kind of practice that occurs. The concepts are fused rather than combined — a solution rather than a mixture, if you will. To this end, a different,

less gentle, approach is needed — one which compels teachers to confront not only their teaching practice but also the reality of their culture. The reach of what constitutes perplexing situations, which prompt reflective thinking, must be extended to include all domains of the reflective landscape with a transformative intent. Paulo Freire uses the term “conscientization . . . a deepening of the attitude of awareness” to describe how oppressed groups can begin to “problematize” their situation and consider interventions in the processes and structures which are denying them self-empowerment. The question, then, becomes one of the means by which the conscientization of teachers can be initiated.

There are many advocates of the slow and gentle approach to presenting teachers with change, with the slowness and gentleness being directly proportional to the substantiveness of the change. Eileen and Kate are two of these advocates, even though neither is content with the slowness and shallowness of changes in their own professional situations. While saying that teachers, in general, are inclined to be reflective (if given the time), both Kate and Eileen are apprehensive about teachers’ readiness to do so when asked how reflection might be facilitated. Kate, referring to the emotional liberation issue, believes that we must “ease into” a reflective mode, adding “I don’t know that it’s for everybody.” Eileen positions her doubts on the idea that “it [reflection] is not for everyone. . . . some will be drawn to it, others might be interested in the right setting, and some would never go for it — they don’t want to talk about that stuff.” Since both Eileen and Kate are themselves predisposed to both reflection and change, I suspect that their caution is grounded

somewhat in a sensitivity to the unreflective, practice-minded world that teachers have inhabited for so long.

While I believe that Kate's and Eileen's reservations are credible, I do not fully subscribe to the popular method for introducing change whereby the comfort zone of the audience determines the bounds of what can be introduced at gradual stages of the change process. My personal experience is that very little change is accomplished this way — the audience's energies and attentions are directed more toward protecting the comfort zone than to adapting to the incremental paradigmatic shift which someone is attempting to elicit from them, resulting in the eventual compromise or abandonment of the desired end.<sup>10</sup> Instead, I prefer an approach that is more inclined to introduce elements of dissonance, or shock, which "compel people to break through the limits of one province of meaning and shift the accent of reality to another one."<sup>11</sup> This is not accomplished within established zones of comfort, but requires that these zones get shaken up a bit. Again from Greene,

An upsurge of questioning and critique must first occur. . . .  
 [so that] what were once perplexing shapes and fragments  
 on the fringes of the perceptual field are thematized,  
 transmuted into symbolic forms. Naming occurs;  
 interpretations occur; meanings are built up; intersubjective

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<sup>10</sup> In both Jan's former school and my present one, the principals' efforts to incrementally introduce change were thwarted by small but vocal corps of resisters who, with union backing, were successful in instigating a groundswell of discontent before even the "lets take a look" phase progressed very far. In both schools, these episodes set the precedent for how change would subsequently be received.

<sup>11</sup> Greene, 101.

relations entered into; gradually, the embodied consciousness constitutes a world."<sup>12</sup>

It is important to add here that the new consciousness is translated into action — a praxis involving “critical reflection — and action upon — a situation to some degree shared by persons with common interests and common needs.”<sup>13</sup> Freire writes:

Men will be truly critical if they live in the plenitude of the praxis, that is, if their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naive knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the *causes* of reality.<sup>14</sup>

Both Greene and Freire suggest that there *is* a gradualness to the process of conscientization, but in reference to the grappling with the internal dissonance that inquiry and reflection generate — not with the incremental introduction of soft “mini-shocks” which are buffered so as to minimize their felt impacts. In the first instance, we can imagine a dialectical framing and reframing of the situation that brought on the dissonance in an effort to understand and resolve it. In the second instance, there is an explicit effort to lessen the perception of dissonance, thereby containing the context and scope of reflection to what has systematically been reduced to a non-perplexing situation. The counterproductivity of this approach should be readily apparent, for

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>14</sup> Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder, 46.

minuscule perplexity requires minuscule attention since it poses little threat to the stability of the status quo. Without diminishing the effects of organizational deterrents to change, this particular dynamic, I believe, helps to explain the widely embraced truism about the slowness of change.

As I suggested earlier, the norms of civility and conflict-reduction not only dilute the process of reflective inquiry, they work to suppress the very issues which can stimulate reflection and dialogue in the first place. Therefore, I see a crucial condition for the development of a reflective culture of teaching to be an acceptance by teachers that conflicts — both individual and interpersonal — are not only inevitable, but essential to the vitality of the culture as an agent of change and self-renewal. Disagreement and dispute are not signs of breakdown or impending anarchy, they are the lifeblood of an evolving organizational entity. Sirotnik distinguishes “communicative competence” from the more prevalent “I’m OK – you’re OK – we’re all OK” mode of communication by, among other things, the presence of ongoing struggle over “conflicts in values and human interests [which] are the very substance of the discourse.”<sup>15</sup> If teachers are not willing and able to deal with repeated disturbances to their perceptions of what is and might be, if they jealously guard a preference for constancy over growth, and if they are frightened of exposing their ideas and values to critical reflection and scrutiny, then the issue of their professionalism is all but moot. In addressing the very topic of this section, Matt’s observation underscores this point:

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<sup>15</sup> Sirotnik, K.A. (1989). The school as the center of change. In T.J. Sergiovanni & J.H. Moore (Eds.) *Schooling for tomorrow: Directing reforms to issues that count*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 102.

My personal opinion is that we are particularly ineffective as a profession, or at least as a working cadre. I feel, and I don't mean anything personal here, we're not very mature in how we interact as an adult community. I hear a lot from people who come from industry or other commercial endeavors, and it's startling to them to find the kind of adolescence of school-adult communities.

Admittedly, the three proposals in this section require a host of enabling circumstances if they are to be achieved, the complexity of each being far beyond the capacity of this paper to deal with. Yet, I feel that these are three avenues that are essential to a reflective culture of teaching and which are underrepresented in literature dealing with reflective practice and the professional development of teachers. And although the tone of my presentation may give the impression that these are far-fetched idealistic musings given the present state of teachers' culture, I am not prepared to concede that this is so, and both Matt and Jan have reinforced my resolve. Matt described the idea of a critically reflective teaching culture as an "out there" idea, but added that "we're all sunk" if we fail to move in this direction. Late in my interviews with Jan, I asked her if the four reflective domains were a pipedream. After nodding in assent to my concern, she went on:

I don't think it is, because I think we have to have those ideals and we have to keep trying to attain them. Whether we ever attain them or not — kind of like equity — we have to continue striving to attain them. Because if we

don't have or think about the ideals, and we don't strive to attain them, I guarantee we won't even get close. So for me, that's really important — the vision is paramount for me. That's what keeps my little wheels on the track.

### Reflections & Discussion

Faith in the power of intelligence to imagine a future which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization, is our salvation. And it is a faith which must be nurtured and made articulate.<sup>16</sup>

The notion of a reflective culture of teaching — one that continually defines and redefines its practice through the generative process of operating within a multi-dimensional reflective landscape — is of little value as an idealized academic abstraction. Unless it can be conceptualized as being attainable in the context of extant realities, it will be just another “false desire” leading to increased despair and cynicism. My own cynicism has been revealed with respect to the idea that reflective practice is something that can be achieved as a function of an educational reform agenda — just another outcome in a comprehensive and systematic plan to be uniformly applied. I have instead taken the position that a reflective culture of teaching should be viewed not as a by-product of institutional reform, but as a dynamic defining force in shaping the

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<sup>16</sup> Dewey, J. (1917). The need for a recovery of philosophy; reprinted in J. McDermott (Ed.), *The philosophy of John Dewey*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

course of educational change. Moreover, I have assumed what might prove to be an unpopular stance in asserting that reflectivity is not derived from the bestowal of certain conditions by external agents — though it can certainly be supported by these — but instead is a matter of attitude and conduct which is central to the professional role–identity of teachers as reflective practitioners. As the term “reflective practice” implies, the reflection is inseparable from the practice, not an adjunct luxury which is afforded its own time and space.

Reflection has been treated here as the ongoing knowledge construction, conversation, and dialogue of teachers with themselves and with each other. As such, reflection is not a formally planned activity of professional development programs, but must spring forth from the individual and collective efforts of teachers to identify and make sense of the perplexing situations that teaching presents in attempting to realize the ideals they embrace as critical functions of public education. It is, fundamentally, a project of praxis. The concept of praxis is focally concerned with the actions of practitioners, but with the additional demand that the actions emerge from a well-informed and far-reaching process of critical reflection and inquiry. The notion of a reflective landscape with multiple domains is meant to be suggestive of the perspectives which should become part of the consciousness of teachers as they consider their practice, in contrast with the trend noted in Chapter 1 where reflection is constrained to the narrow realm of the implementation of classroom strategies and techniques, but where the grounds (beyond “what works”) for these practical instruments are left

unexamined. The proposition of a reflective culture of teaching, then, must contend not only with this trend as part of a “reform package,” but also with the existing culture of teaching which I’ve characterized as substantially unreflective and unassertive towards the ideas of professional autonomy and empowerment. Ultimately, my proposals are intended both as a negative response to the question “Must it be this way?” and as an assertion that such a project — conceived as a key to a meaningful and sustainable process of educational improvement — is something that must be undertaken *by* teachers rather than being done *to* them. While allowing that precipitating events leading to reflectivity may arise from outside the immediate purview of teachers, the inclination to engage educational issues reflectively can and must eventually become a cultural norm if teaching practice is to transcend the influences of deskilling and official knowledge.

Fortunately, precedents exist for the optimistic view that the culture of teaching can be radically transformed from a state of abject powerlessness to one of empowerment and self-renewal. In one such case, chronicled by Sharon Quint, an urban school serving a sizable population of homeless children saw its reflective landscape rapidly expand as it reframed the problems which beset it for a number of years.<sup>17</sup> The school’s history had been one of second-class status and even lower self-esteem. Regarded as a repository for “throwaway kids,” both teachers and students came to accept failure as a normal condition of their mutual

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<sup>17</sup> Quint, S. (1994). *Schooling homeless children: A working model for America’s public schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

existence. High levels of transience and absenteeism frustrated teachers' well-meaning attempts to conduct a regular academic program for their students. Morale was low and still declining when a new principal arrived and surveyed the situation from an atypical point-of-view. While the signs of a dysfunctional and low-achieving school were readily apparent, the principal was more struck with the tragedy of the lives of its students. That they were achieving below grade-level was, for her, incidental to the fact that these children were sleeping in cars, malnourished, and more preoccupied with where they would spend the next night than with their school assignments. Her immediate task, then, was to refocus the vision and purpose of the school's teachers from the practical concerns of teaching and learning to the more urgent calling of addressing a social and moral dilemma — a conscientization of a larger problem which would become the context for defining the school's educational mission.

Quint provides a detailed account of the principal's tireless efforts to secure community resources on the children's behalf, but the real story — at least as it relates to the discussion of a reflective culture of teaching — lies in the way she introduced her staff to areas of the reflective landscape that they had not previously explored (or been aware of). Significantly, she presented the problem with respect for its enormous complexity — moral, social, political, and educational — and invited the teachers to join her in the quest for solutions for which no clear and well-lit path existed. The effect of this appeal was to empower teachers to take ownership not just of the problem but also the process of inquiry regarding it. Teachers

came to reframe their perplexity in terms of the plight of the children and their well-being rather than on their failure to achieve according to traditional models of schooling. As teachers acquired a perspective of their role as fundamentally a moral imperative to address a social injustice against children, this perspective came to function “proximally” in the design of pedagogy and classroom environments. Their approaches to curriculum and instruction were derived from the process of dwelling in the realities of their students’ lives rather than from a passive compliance with conventional notions of best practice. Collegial interaction — once characterized by bitterness, apathy, and futility — gradually became more reflective, cohesive, and mutually supportive as they now were based on shared purposes and values. The rise in the level of committed engagement was matched by a renewed energy and passion for teaching as a profession. While working longer and harder than ever before, the teachers experienced renewal rather than exhaustion. Perhaps most importantly, both the principal and teachers of the school see their work as continually expanding and developing; the complexity and the situational variety of teaching are seen as a source of challenges to be embraced rather than as problems to be removed or avoided.

The subtitle of Quint’s book is “A Working Model for America’s Public Schools” — surely a reference to many aspects of this school’s experience, including community involvement, parental enfranchisement, and the power of strong leadership. Yet, although not an explicit focus of the book, we might also view her story as a working example of reflective practice which stems as much from a dedication to

moral and ethical principles and a willingness to oppose unjust social and cultural realities as from a desire to address the practical problems of schooling.

If a school as initially downtrodden as the one just discussed can undergo such a dramatic transformative shift, then it is conceivable that a similar process can occur elsewhere and on a wider scale. All of the teachers who contributed comments to this paper expressed a belief that most teachers would tend to be more reflective under the right conditions. Identifying those conditions is, of course, problematic, and I have maintained all along that attempts to package specifications for reflective practice — which we find in reform plans and staff development programs — appear to assume quite a different notion of reflectivity than what has been presented here. Still, we need to begin investigating the circumstances which have influenced the development of educators like Matt and Jan and to explore ways that similar circumstances can become more pervasive in the training and professional growth of teachers in general. Matt referred to what he calls “career-long questions — things we’re really aching to wonder about” which seldom have a forum for in-depth deliberation and dialogue. Jan becomes animated when speaking of the reflective attitude that was refined and stimulated by a graduate program centered on the political and cultural complexities of schooling.

We must also look at factors that can serve as catalysts for reflective activity in existing school cultures. Jan cites a principal who poses questions and is “very tenacious about coming to a common belief about what teaching is at this school . . . she just will not let up.” Matt and

Eileen, on the other hand, are partial to the idea of teacher leaders who initiate and support the movement of reflective dialogue within the school, largely due to the built-in similarity of circumstance, or potential for rapport, between such a person and teachers-at-large. Matt, in leading his week-long seminars, speaks of “keeping the tension [of ideas] there” and notes the “painful, yet growth-inducing” effect of dramatic change in school structures. Schön, as well as a number of teacher educators, promote the idea of reflective coaching between experienced veterans and novices to the field. Sirotnik offers a generalized protocol of critical inquiry for considering the full range of school policies, programs, and practices. All of these approaches, of course, must be considered — and adapted — in terms of the salient circumstances of the subcultures (i.e. schools) which constitute the larger culture of teaching in general. It is equally important to realize that the effects of any of them will vary according to the prevailing conceptions of what reflective practice entails. My own efforts have been directed toward offering a perspective which bears upon this latter concern.

The teaching profession is at a critical juncture. On the one hand, the forces of modernity are rapidly obsolescing traditional approaches to schooling, and there appears to be widespread recognition of this fact along with a sizable amount of anxiety. On the other hand, teachers are largely “out of the loop” with respect to how this predicament will be dealt with and have scant aggregate experience with initiating, or even responding to, change.

At one point in the conception of this project, I had envisioned arriving at a profile of the prototypical reflective teacher. The conversations with Matt, Kate, Jan, and Eileen persuaded me that this was a wrong course. Jan's hard-edged impatience with the "old guard" traditionalists who cling stubbornly to a decades-old model of schooling represents one perspective of the dilemma. Eileen's focus on the bureaucratic and organizational factors which occupy so much of teachers' energies, and which preempt opportunities for reflection, is another perspective. Matt's diplomatic balancing of his personal sense of urgency to raise the level of discourse with a sensitivity for the validity of Eileen's concerns underscores the delicate nature of implementation. Kate's exodus from the ranks of teaching to administration — a result of her own reflection about what it means to be a teacher and her desire to elevate the stature of teachers as educational experts — represents an opposing view to my claim that the culture of teaching needs to be transformed from within; indeed, it is hard to determine whether Kate's opinions about teachers being unready for reflective inquiry, or that their professional development should be exclusively classroom-relevant, are the same opinions she had when she herself was a teacher and was offended by the condescending attitudes of administrators. The point remains, however, that the diversity represented by these educators is an asset to the cause of reflective practice. The promise lies in creating opportunities for voices like these to engage in an ongoing dialogue about their similarities and differences — each to be informed and challenged by the others as previously unexplored portions of the reflective landscape are revealed.

I have no delusions about the enormity of the task of transforming the culture of teaching. By definition, a culture represents how members view their world, their positions and roles in that world, and the symbols and protocols with which they construct and communicate shared meanings and values. At the same time, cultures in crisis — which I believe to be the case with teachers — can either wither in the face of perceived helplessness or seek to expand their range of options in an effort to flourish and thrive. My intent has been to offer a theory toward this latter end. The reflective landscape is presented as a more fertile and robust environment for us to consider the course we wish to take in the effort to improve public education. That we are currently in the throes of a major reform venture — one which has contributed to a renewed interest in the idea of reflective practice — is a fortuitous coincidence which invites us to contemplate what the concept might mean for the practice of teaching *before* it is officially defined in a fully formed bureaucratic program. Finally, the selection of the culture of teaching as the proper locus for reflective practice is meant to underscore the vital point that reflection is not another skill to be acquired and then dusted off from time to time; instead, it should be viewed as a fundamental process of making sense of the goals we have for public education, the means which will best help us achieve these goals, and the problems we are sure to encounter in our collective and individual journeys toward these goals.

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