

Reflective Practice for Educators

*Improving Schooling
Through Professional
Development*

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Rethinking Professional Development

In Chapter 1, we examined reflective practice through a wide-angle lens. The subject was a conceptual framework for understanding individual and organizational stability and change and the promise of reflective practice as a means of facilitating significant change.

In this chapter, we narrow the lens angle to focus more directly on reflective practice as a process of professional development. The subject is formal professional development because, while reflective practice may take place in any situation, it is almost always learned in a formal learning setting of one kind or another—and our purpose in writing is to encourage the development and nurture of such learning opportunities. The first part of this chapter describes reflective practice as a professional development process: What does it look like? How does it begin? The second part of the chapter contrasts this mode of professional development with more traditional approaches focusing on differences in assumptions, content, and processes.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Defining Reflective Practice

Reflective practice, while often confused with reflection, is neither a solitary nor a relaxed meditative process. To the contrary, reflective practice is a challenging, demanding, and often trying process that is most successful as a collaborative effort.

Although the term *reflective practice* is interpreted and understood in different ways,¹ within our discussion, reflective practice is viewed as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development.

As explained in Chapter 1, awareness is essential for behavioral change. To gain a new level of insight into personal behavior, the reflective practitioner assumes a dual stance, being, on one hand, the actor in a drama and, on the other hand, the critic who sits in the audience watching and analyzing the entire performance. To achieve this perspective, individuals must come to an understanding of their own behavior; they must develop a conscious awareness of their own actions and effects and the ideas or theories-in-use that shape their action strategies.

Achieving this level of conscious awareness, however, is not an easy task. Theories-in-use, as we have seen, are not easily articulated. Schon (1983) has described this process in the context of professional practice. As he explained, professional knowledge is grounded in professional experience: “Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit” (p. viii). Consequently, when asked, master teachers or master administrators are often unable to identify the components of their work that lead to successful outcomes.² Similarly, practitioners who want to improve their performance are often unclear about how their own actions prevent them from being more successful. So, if the purpose of reflective practice is to enhance awareness of our own thoughts and action, as a means of professional growth, how do we begin this process of reflection? How do we begin to develop a critical awareness about our own professional practice? Where do we start?

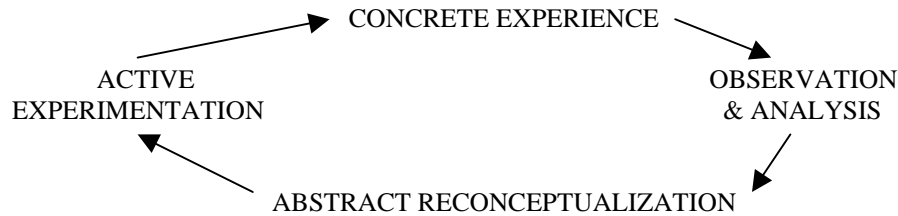
Reflective Practice as Experiential Learning

Reflective practice is located within the older tradition of experiential learning and also the more recently defined perspective of situated cognition. Experiential learning theorists, including Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, maintain that learning is most effective, most likely to lead to behavioral change, when it begins with experience, and specifically problematic experience. From experience and research, we know that learning is most effective when people become personally engaged in the learning process, and engagement is most likely to

take place when there is a need to learn. In professional programs, for example, fruitful learning often doesn't begin until the person is on the job. Situated cognition focuses on both the process and the context of learning. In a view popularized by the recent attention to problem-based learning (Bridges, 1992), situated cognition proponents maintain that learning is best accomplished through an active, social, and authentic learning process. Learning, they argue, is most effective when the learner is actively involved in the learning process, when it takes place as a collaborative rather than an isolated activity, and when it takes place in a context relevant to the learner (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989a, 1989b; Prestine & LeGrand, 1991).

Experiential learning theory maintains further that learning is a dialectic and cyclical process consisting of four stages: experience, observation and reflection, abstract reconceptualization, and experimentation (Koib, 1984). While experience is the basis for learning, learning cannot take place without reflection. Conversely, while reflection is essential to the process, reflection must be integrally linked with action (Figure 2.1). Reflective practice, then, integrating theory and practice, thought and action, is, as Schon described, a “dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful” (1987, p. 31).

Figure 2.1. Experiential Learning Cycle



In this cyclical process, learning or the process of inquiry begins with what Dewey (1938b) described as a problematic or an indeterminate situation: a troublesome event or experience, an unsettling situation that cannot be resolved using standard operating procedures. Prompted by a sense of uncertainty or unease, the reflective practitioner steps back to examine this experience: What was the nature of the problem? What were my intentions? What did I do? What happened? In the process of observing and analyzing this experience, problems emerge. The problem—a discrepancy between the real and the ideal, between intention and action, or between action and effects—further stimulates the inquiry and motivates the learner to absorb new information as part of an active search for better answers and more effective strategies. The final stages of the process involve reconceptualization and experimentation. Having examined and analyzed the experience, the learner moves again into the realm of theory. Now motivated by an awareness of a problem, the learner uses new information to develop alternate theories that are more useful in explaining the relationship between actions and outcomes and to begin the search for strategies that are more consistent with espoused theories and more effective in achieving intended outcomes. This changed perspective

becomes a stimulus for experimentation: New theories suggest different strategies that can then be tested through action. In short, raising questions about practice begins a learning process that leads to behavioral change. The section that follows illustrates each of these stages in more detail.

Concrete experience. Consistent with the model outlined above, the first step of the learning process is to identify problematic situations. Because the intent of reflective practice is to improve the quality of professional performance, we begin our inquiry by focusing on problems of practice.

There are many different types of problems (Getzels, 1979).³ In some situations, the problem, with readily available solutions, is presented to the problem solver. In other situations, the problem emerges from one's own experience. In whatever form, problems arise out of a sense of discomfort or a desire to change. There is a discrepancy between what we perceive to be and what we consider desirable; in some way, the situation falls short of the ideal.

These discrepancies come to our attention in different ways. In some cases, information from another source—an individual or group or a report—helps us to see a problem. The space creature described in Chapter 1, for example, observes that, despite attempts at remediation, the pulled-out students continue to fall further behind and leads us to see a problem embedded in the daily schedule. Test scores demonstrating the progress (or its lack) among these students might serve the same purpose.

In other cases, our own experience helps us to identify problems. The new principal, for example, enthusiastically assumes the position only to find that, 6 months later, he or she is treated with mistrust by teachers. In this situation, a perceived discrepancy between intent and accomplishment creates a sense of a problem.

Dilemmas can also lead to problem identification. For example, in the course of making student assignments, an elementary school principal experienced being pulled between assigning each of a pair of twins to different rooms, the standard policy, and assigning them to the same room because of number imbalance and other issues.

Problem identification may also come through a surprise or attention to the unexpected. The same principal, a member of the districtwide administrative reflection group described in Chapter 7, once reported a surprising telephone call at a reflection meeting. She had been berated by a friend for her position on a proposed change in the reading curriculum. This call focused her attention and, when she introduced the issue in the administrative reflection group, led the entire group to a new level of understanding and awareness of a more complex set of problems. Particulars of this case are recounted in Chapter 7.

Regardless of how we develop awareness of the problem, its discovery or recognition motivates us to gather information of the sort the space creature possessed and moves us further into the reflection cycle. Acknowledgment of the twins' placement dilemma began an extended period of reflection about the children, the policy, and its educational and emotional effects on them and others. As a result, the principal altered the policy and assigned the twins together.

Not all problems are of equal dimensions. Problems that educators face, for example, come in all shapes and sizes. Some involve only a few people; others may involve an entire school. What is important, however, is not the scope or dimensions of the problem but the significance of the problem to the individual. In reflective practice, we are seeking deep engagement in learning, and relevance produces engagement: A relevant problem rivets attention and arouses the need to learn.

Identification of problems, however, is not easy. People, and educators in particular, desire to view things positively and to be optimistic. In response to organizational problems, discussion turns quickly to solutions while problem identification and analysis are cut short (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Identification of personal problems is even more difficult. Think of the child who comes to the parent with a problem but cannot bring herself to disclose it. Once the problem is spoken, what seemed overwhelming becomes manageable, but the resistance initially was great. Adults are not very different: Problems are often seen as an indicator of incompetence and failure. As a result, most of us have effective defenses for preventing problem recognition.

With practice in reflection, we learn to take a conscious orientation toward problem finding; but, initially, this step of the process may seem difficult or feel “unnatural.” Although this skill develops quickly, because the learning cycle begins with problematic experience, one of the initial tasks of the facilitator in a formal reflective practice setting is to enable individuals to uncover or discover problematic situations within the context of their practice. Specific techniques are described in Chapters 3 and 4.

Observation and analysis. In the first stage of the process, the inquiry is focused on a particular aspect of practice. Finding the problem motivates the practitioner; there is a genuine need for new information. In the second stage of the process, the practitioner assumes the role of a researcher and begins to gather information. Because reflective practice focuses on personal behavior within the professional context, we begin to gather and analyze rich information about the experience and particularly about our own behavior. We become the critic watching our own actions on stage. We stand back from the experience itself, assume a more detached stance, and step outside the action to observe it critically and to describe it fully.

A full description incorporates cognitive and emotional aspects of behavior. Until now, we’ve focused primarily on cognition: examining espoused theories and theories-in-use. To understand experience, however, requires that we explore feelings that were aroused in the situation. Actions are influenced not only by ideas but by feelings as well; only by understanding the personal reactions of ourselves and others can we come to a full understanding of the problem and develop appropriate solutions. Consequently, when we gather information about experience, we mean the full range of human experience including beliefs, values, intentions, attitudes, feelings, ideas, and action (Osterman, 1990).

The means of obtaining observational data are broad and limited only by our own creativity. The purpose of the research inquiry is to further understanding in ways that will improve the craft performance. To meet that objective, we gather information in a wide

variety of ways: self-reports and recollections, observations of our practice or simulated practice by others reported to us in various ways, completely objective data recorded on audio- or videotapes, documents such as memos, journals, minutes of meetings, or supervisory conference reports, feedback from survey research and action research projects, and sometimes information from debriefing of deliberately generated behaviors such as role plays. Much, if not most, of the data we collect in the observational phase will be qualitative rather than quantitative. The basic issues remain—usefulness, richness, and comprehensiveness.

Once information is at hand, we analyze the experience; we reflect upon it. Again, our goal is to achieve the detached perspective of the drama critic or the space creature. In the observational phase, our purpose was simply to describe the experience in a multidimensional and comprehensive way. Through reflection and analysis, we strive to understand the experience. Within the framework of the model presented in Chapter 1, we examine experience—both actions and outcomes—as a means to articulate and understand espoused theories and theories-in-use. Why did events take place as they did? What ideas or feelings prompted my actions? Did my actions correspond with my intentions? Did my actions lead to the outcomes I intended?

The term *reflection* is often thought of as a solitary and meditative process; and, in fact, analysis may be done alone—while listening to a tape recording of a committee meeting, watching ourselves teach on a videotape, or analyzing the contents and attitudes contained in our memos. Nonetheless, because of the deeply ingrained nature of our behavioral patterns, it is sometimes difficult to develop a critical perspective on our own behavior. For that reason alone, analysis occurring in a collaborative and cooperative environment is likely to lead to greater learning. The whole committee might analyze the tape recording; you and a supervisor might probe into the teaching episode together; a colleague who has “shadowed” you all day might help to analyze what he or she saw.

The process of inquiry began with a problematic or indeterminate situation. In the initial stages, understanding of the problem may have been little more than an intuitive sense or a gut feeling that something was wrong or could be better. Through these integrally linked processes of observation and analysis, we come to see clearly the discrepancies, incongruities, and failures to reach intentions. The problem begins to emerge more clearly, and we begin to see our own role in the problem more clearly.

An example from the administrative reflection group illustrates how reflective analysis affects the formulation of the problem and leads to even deeper reflection. The superintendent described his concern about essays a group of high school seniors had written after returning from several weeks as exchange students in Moscow. As he explained, the essays lacked feeling. They followed the essay form but communicated little meaning. Over the next few months, the group analyzed this problem and from their discussion emerged a much broader concern about the orientation of secondary teachers as “dispensers of knowledge.” At this point, the problem had shifted. The issue was no longer the quality of student essays but a pervasive instructional orientation that does not foster the learning outcomes that they envision. This understanding led them to formulate a new problem: How do we as district

leaders work to transform an instructional orientation we believe does not result in the best possible education? This reframing also motivated them to search for their own metaphor for secondary teaching and provided an ongoing focus for group reflection.

Argyris and Schon (1974) made a distinction between single-loop learning and double-loop learning. The “fix-it” model is a form of single-loop learning: A solution is developed to correct the presenting problem, but the underlying causes of the problem are neither recognized nor addressed. Single-loop learning is largely ineffective in contributing to long-term solutions to problems because the underlying assumptions that reinforce the ineffective behaviors are never examined. Double-loop learning, on the other hand, holds the potential for real change because it examines these underlying assumptions, or theories-in-use, as part of the problem-solving process. Analysis within the framework of reflective practice is designed to lead to double-loop learning. At the completion of this phase, the practitioner has come to an understanding—incomplete though it may be—of espoused theories and theories-in-use. With this knowledge in hand, the practitioner begins the next stage of inquiry: reconceptualization.

Abstract reconceptualization. In the third stage of the learning cycle, we consider alternate ways of thinking and acting. We consider new action theories that encompass the relationship between actions and outcomes. At this point in the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1, the practitioner has identified a problem or problem area and, through observation and reflection, has come to understand what was done and why. This theory-in-use, now articulated, has been examined relative to the espoused theory and assessed for effectiveness. With this complete behavioral description in place, the practitioner is now ready to reconsider old ideas and to search for new ones that will lead to a greater alignment between ideas, actions, and outcomes.

This point in the cycle involves an active search for new ideas and new strategies. We are highly motivated to find new information, theories, techniques, or processes to address *our* problem. At this point, we know what we did in the prior situation, and we have an idea of why we did it. We are also well aware of why it didn’t work. The objective now is to develop alternate hypotheses or action research strategies that may address the problem. To do that, we gather information that will help us to develop a more effective conceptual and strategic approach.

At every stage of the cycle, the nature of the learning has been personal and engaging. The problem is self-defined and relevant, and the process of observation and analysis in focusing on the individual role in the problem context generates a felt need to improve, change, or reinforce effective behaviors. At this stage of reconceptualization, then, the professional is strongly motivated to seek out and consider new ideas.

We are prompted to try things that before we rejected. We see relevance in ideas that formerly seemed irrelevant. We are now able to make connections between theory and practice, to integrate new information and ideas into our practice. We are now beginning to reshape theories-in-use.

Unlike traditional models of professional development, in the reflective practice approach, the practitioner can use information from a wide variety of sources from the worlds of research and practice. The important issue again is not the source but its utility. As Chapter 6 illustrates, practitioners may find relevant information in research studies or other publications and workshops or formal study. Observations or discussions with colleagues may serve a similar purpose. Confronted with the problem and now with a clearer understanding of the problem and our own role in that problem, the search for knowledge becomes more directed and focused, and—an important distinction—the search is self-directed.

There are many ways to approach the reconceptualization stage. We may do it alone through reading or finding already existing “answers.” We may take a more creative self-definitional approach. And we may find great value in working collaboratively with others also attempting to work through solutions to the same or similar problems (Miller, 1990a). In working with colleagues, we greatly increase the pool of available ideas and resources. As one participant in a reflection group said: “I have available to me many lives that I have not lived.”

Active experimentation. The final stage in experiential learning is testing our reconceptualized behavior and assumptions. In the reconceptualization phase, we developed new action theories and framed them as hypotheses. With regard to collaborative decision making, for example, one might focus on the hypothesis that, by giving away control, we gain control. We have articulated an action theory that maintains that, if we act in a particular way, we can expect a particular type of response. In this stage of the cycle, we begin to test this assumption. We make a conscious decision to act in a particular way to test this new conceptualization: We engage in behavioral experiments. These may be trials of our new ideas in actual workplaces or they may be role plays in the relative safety of a reflection group.

This stage completes one cycle and begins another. The experiment produces new concrete experience and the learning process begins anew, but with one important difference. By now, our reflective skills have developed and self-awareness is acute and focused. Although, in the early experiences with reflective practice, it was difficult to distance ourselves from our performance, at this stage of experimentation we go into the action better able to handle the dual role of actor and drama critic. We ourselves are more skilled at gathering information: We are more aware of our own actions, more sensitive to the feelings and reactions of others, and more adept at using a variety of techniques to gather information. At this point, the circular nature of the process is obvious. With the data in hand, we analyze the sequence of events to confirm or disconfirm the new hypothesis. Confirmation reinforces the new theory and provides an incentive for repeating what initially may have been awkward behaviors. Those instances where the experiment doesn’t work as expected lead to a renewed search to refine the theory and/or to develop strategies that are more appropriate tests of the theory. Whether the next cycle focuses in a more detailed way on the same problem or addresses another issue, it builds upon and profits from the earlier cycle: Learning and professional development become a progressive and continuing process.

Experiential Learning in Action

We have described reflective practice as a form of experiential learning and have done so in a linear and segmented fashion. This was done for conceptual clarity but does not adequately describe the process itself, which is far more fluid and holistic. As the narratives in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 illustrate, when we engage in reflective practice, we move back and forth among the stages. For example, some new idea in the reconceptualization stage may momentarily take us back to the analysis phase to check out something we did not think about earlier. Often we will not be aware of particular “stages” in our reflection. In other instances, dialogue might show evidence that several stages were brought into play almost simultaneously. This will occur even more often when we become very adept at reflection, for reflection like other activities becomes habitual. For newcomers to the reflective process, whether as participants or facilitators, however, it is probably good counsel to keep the four stages of the experiential cycle clearly in mind as road signs to guide learning and progress through the process.

CONTRASTING TRADITIONAL AND REFLECTIVE APPROACHES TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development processes share a common goal: improved practice. Nonetheless, there are distinctly different strategies or routes toward that goal. Reflective practice is a professional development process that we believe is highly effective in achieving behavioral change. We also maintain that reflective practice and its underlying assumptions are in sharp contrast with the traditional practice of professional development. So, while our purpose in writing is to encourage the use of reflective practice for professional development, we feel that the arguments about change developed in Chapter 1 are relevant here. Before we can adopt new behaviors, before we can begin to introduce reflective practice as a professional development strategy whether in a university classroom, a school, or a school district, it is necessary (a) that we develop an awareness of our habitual actions and the assumptions that shape those actions and (b) that we consider the effectiveness of actions relative to intentions. As a means of heightening awareness, the following section describes two contrasting routes to professional development and compares their purposes, assumptions, and practices.

Traditional Professional Development: A Portrait

If we observed a typical professional development session in a university classroom, a school district, a principal or teacher center, or a corporate headquarters, we would likely see this scene: The instructor, often an outside expert, is clearly identifiable. He or she usually occupies a central position at the front of the room and is accompanied by handouts and visual aids. The presentation usually focuses on a single concept, program, or model that, if implemented, will lead to positive change. Although some presentations provide a longer period of time (perhaps a week), the majority of professional development sessions range from a few hours to a day. For the session, the instructor has a carefully outlined plan intended to convey information to the learners. Although the learners may have an opportunity to ask questions and experiment with the new skills, for the most part, they sit facing the instructor and listen. Questions tend to be infrequent, and presentations are seldom interrupted. Although ostensibly geared to “success” in the professional context, professional education consists primarily of transmission of knowledge. In this process, knowledge is the province of experts, and learners have access to it through the instructor. The instructor’s role is to convey that information in a clear and concise manner; the learner’s role is to absorb it.

Reflective Professional Development: A Portrait

If we walk into a reflectively based professional development session in a university classroom, a school district, or a principal development center, we are, by contrast, less likely to be able to predict the scene. We might see pairs of individuals, or groups of four to six or more, engaged in discussion. We might observe a role play in action or a number of them going on simultaneously. We might find someone providing information while others in the room listen. We might find everyone writing for periods of up to 5 to 7 minutes. Most likely, we will find participants seated in circles or around tables—but not in rows facing a single point. In many cases, we would not be able to recognize the instructor instantly and, when we do, we will notice that he or she plays a very different role. He or she might be at the front of the room providing information, but it is just as likely that he or she will be seated with others participating in a discussion doing more listening than talking. She or he might even be out of the room while participants engage in cooperative learning activities and carry on animated, focused interaction with each other.

While the particular activity occurring in a reflectively based development session is more difficult to predict than in a traditionally based session, there are expected behavioral regularities. Students are active participants in the learning process, helping to establish the agenda and shaping the learning process to meet their own needs. The nature of the discussion is as likely to focus on emotions as on ideas and the ideas discussed are those gathered from personal experience as well as from reading and research. Information is provided by all participants. Multiple centers of activity often occur simultaneously. Many questions are placed by different individuals and answers are as likely to come from other participants as from the instructor.

From these brief descriptions, it's possible to see that, while the two approaches may have the same goal, their immediate objectives or purpose are different. It is also apparent that very different assumptions about the nature of learning operate in each setting and that these theories-in-use influence both content and process.

Purpose. The ultimate purpose in the traditional model may be improved performance, but the directly observable purpose—and the purpose embedded in the theory-in-use guiding the behaviors of both instructor and participants—clearly is knowledge acquisition. The instructor spends most of the available time in these sessions transferring information to generally passive recipients and testing the acquisition of that information.

The immediate as well as ultimate purpose of reflective professional development is not knowledge acquisition per se but behavioral change and improved performance. This is readily observable in development sessions. Attention is focused directly on behavior, either behavior enacted before the session and recollected and analyzed during the meeting or behavior generated during the session itself. While at various times the facilitator may provide information or theories, such presentations are focused directly on behavior change and improvement of performance.

Assumptions. From these observations, we infer that the two models differ greatly in their assumptions about behavioral change. In the traditional model, most of the time is consumed in giving and receiving public knowledge, knowledge that is available to all and that is not personal or based on individual experience. The primary assumption is that acquisition of shared knowledge will lead to behavioral change. Theory, thoroughly understood and carefully applied, means good practice. The traditional approach to professional development, then, reflects an underlying assumption that information is a stimulus for behavioral change, that individuals receiving knowledge will use it to improve performance. Knowing a better way to behave, individuals will simply act on the knowledge. This approach places total faith in rational processes as the source of behavior. In the terms of Chapter 1, it focuses exclusively on changing espoused theory with the belief that, when intentions change, behavior will also change. This is a very simple theory of behavioral change. It is tenaciously held both in general education and in professional development—but the results typically do not match the faith put in it.

In reality, there is little evidence that this approach works well and more reason to believe that it seldom leads to noticeable improvement or change in professional practice. In-service programs in schools and school districts, for example, typically employ research, development, and diffusion (RD&D) models or what House (1981) termed a *technological perspective* and Bennis, Benne, and Chin (1961) called a *rational-empirical approach*. In this orientation, “experts” come into a district for a day or longer and present a program that is designed to bring a successful change: improved instruction, higher self-esteem, more effective problem solving, better student discipline. Despite the quality of the presentation and the validity of the model being presented, the evidence is not strong that this method leads to significant, long-lasting, or widespread change in practice (Firestone & Corbett, 1988; Sarason, 1971, 1990). Teachers often return to classrooms enthused and excited about

the possibility of reaching their students in more meaningful ways, but, despite the best intentions, fall back into the same patterns. Similarly, the administrator introduced to more effective methods of supervision and evaluation finds that day-to-day pressures and demands make it impossible to try the suggested alternatives. The status quo maintains itself. The more things change, the more they stay the same. The new information or program doesn't produce the desired results. But, next year, another attempt at change is made. The assumption remains the same: New information will lead to change. If the change doesn't occur, the fault is with the specific idea or with the professional to whom the idea has been presented.

The assumptions made about behavioral change in the reflective practice model are more complex than in the traditional model of professional development. They include the propositions about change described in Chapter 1. Behavioral change comes through self-awareness of formerly unrecognized assumptions lying in the theory-in-use, unrecognized habitual behaviors, and unrecognized negative outcomes of these behaviors. Change is a process begun not by learning a new idea from an expert but by recognition that something is not exactly "right" in one's own professional practice. It is initiated not through a standard set of information received in a large group but through careful attention to individual practice. The motivating force behind change is not the goodness or usefulness of an idea from an external source but the desire to function well in a professional capacity coupled with the awareness that current behavior is not fully reaching this goal.

In reflective practice, change includes an emotional as well as a rational dimension. Because behavioral change is personal change, it entails emotions. Emotions attach to the ways we view ourselves, our actions, and their results. When we inquire into our own unrecognized assumptions and behaviors and find them wanting, there is an emotional load associated with self-confrontation and with personal wrestling about how to respond to the awareness. On the other hand, when we inquire into our own unrecognized assumptions and find them to be positive and effective, there is a strong positive emotional response. Reflective practice assumes the centrality of emotion along with cognition. It strives to recognize, work with, and support the emotional aspect of behavioral change.

That personal behavioral change always intersects with culture is another assumption undergirding reflective practice. Unrecognized, habitual behaviors result from deep acculturation. Behavioral change, then, entails changing the relationship between culture and behavior. Often, behavioral changes resulting from successful reflection are at odds with the ongoing larger and organizational culture. This means that individuals undergoing personal change will likely be somewhat more at odds with the norms and assumptions of the culture than before. Thus reflective practice assumes that achieving and maintaining desired personal changes also means working for cultural changes, ones that will then buttress the new behaviors. Understanding the cultural dimension of change helps us see why the "fix-it" approach of the traditional model so frequently fails. The "fix-it" orientation replaces a part or piece assumed to be broken, but it pays no heed to the culture in which the part is embedded or to the relationship between the cultural values and assumptions and those residing in the part. When the "fix" is not supported by the surrounding culture, it is quickly rejected. This is especially true when the relationship between behavior and culture remains unrecognized.

In the way that action theories shape behavior, these assumptions about learning, and specifically professional development, directly shape the method of instruction that is adopted: both content and process.

Content. The knowledge bases for traditional and reflective practice approaches to professional development also differ. As already noted, the traditional approach emphasizes knowledge transmission as the means toward improved practice. This knowledge may be described as public knowledge, knowledge as given, and knowledge as content. Public knowledge is “information, skills, perspectives, facts, ways of knowing . . . valued because it is accepted within the traditions of knowledge . . . it has received some degree of acceptance using ‘public principles that stand as impersonal standards’ . . . traditions of knowledge that have stood the test of time” (Berlak & Berlak, 1981, p. 145). Knowledge is given when it is assumed to be “a truth ‘out there’ “ (p. 148), knowledge that has been discovered and verified. It can then be “given” or transmitted to others. Knowledge as content is a form of public knowledge that has been organized as “bodies of information, codified facts, theories, [and] generalizations” (p. 147).

The kind of knowledge transmitted in traditional approaches, especially graduate courses, is often called “theory,” or what Schon described as a knowledge that is “specialized, firmly bounded, scientific, and standardized” (1983, p. 23). Those who assume such knowledge will improve practice also assume that what is “wrong” with practice or “needs improvement” is relatively generalized or standard across individuals and that it is best assessed and prescribed from an external, objective position by experts possessing theoretical knowledge.

In the traditional model, practice assumes a secondary, subordinate relationship to public, given, or theoretical knowledge. The link between theory and practice is implicit, and the learning process begins and ends with theory or public knowledge. The central question is this: “What do others—experts, researchers, developers of theoretical knowledge—‘know’ that they think others *should* know?” Theory and practice remain separate, distinct, and unequal. “Theory” courses are taught by academicians and workshops are delivered by experts. Both can be described as a struggle to penetrate the meaning of abstractions about organizational realities framed in abstract terms that make connections to concrete realities implausible. Even so-called practice courses, taught by practitioners—often retired administrators—containing mostly “war stories,” are really based on many of the same assumptions as “theory” courses. In these cases, an individual takes his or her own experience and “elevates” it to the status of given, public knowledge and generalizes it to the needs of others without the support of the verifying mechanisms used in developing theoretical knowledge. What remains the same in both “theory” and “practice” traditional approaches is an external agent who decides what the participants need and transmits it to them. In either case, the knowledge possessed by the instructor is more important than that possessed by the learner and in neither case is direct attention paid to the individual practice of the learner.

The knowledge bases employed in the reflective practice approach to professional development are more varied and complex than those in the traditional approach. Whereas in the traditional model of professional development, public, content, and given knowledge are both the beginning and the end of the process, in the reflective model, this kind of knowledge

is used in more limited ways. Transmission of such knowledge is useful in consciousness- or awareness-raising as a stimulus to thinking about discrepancies between intentions and actions or espoused theories and theories-in-use. It is also useful as a source of possibilities for new ways of behaving *after* discrepancies are acknowledged and the individual is motivated to change.

In reflective practice, other varieties of knowledge are central. These are described as personal knowledge, knowledge as problematic, and knowledge as process. A personal knowledge perspective assumes that “worthwhileness . . . cannot be judged apart from its relationship to the knower. Knowledge is useful only in so far [*sic*] as it enables persons to make sense of experience. [It] is gained from the ‘inside.’ [It] has the connotation of *Verstehen* or holistic understanding” (Berlak & Berlak, 1981, p. 145). As opposed to given know 1-edge, assuming knowledge is problematic treats it as “constructed, provisional, tentative” (p. 148). This means taking a creative, critical, and analytical orientation. Whereas treating knowledge as content emphasizes a codified body, treating knowledge as process emphasizes the “thinking, reasoning, and testing used to establish the truth or adequacy of a body of content” (p. 147).

While these are technical descriptors of the knowledge used in reflective practice, the central issue is that in reflection the predominant, but not sole, emphasis is on knowledge about personal professional practice. Underlying the reflective process is the assumption that useful knowledge addresses specific needs of the individual or constituency; it is experiential knowledge, practitioner knowledge, knowledge of craft, knowledge of personal action theories, and what Schon (1983) called knowing-in-action. Professional growth is envisioned as an odyssey whose purpose is not knowledge in an abstract sense but knowledge of a very personal and purposeful nature. Because the primary purpose in reflective practice is improved performance, the learning process begins with examining practice, and formal education becomes a laboratory for developing improved practice. In this laboratory, the typical relationship between theory and practice is inverted. In the traditional model, theory or public knowledge is the means to improve practice; in the reflective model, attention to practice is the means toward the development and refinement of theory—specifically, personal action theory. Within the reflective process, study of formal theory functions as an important resource in the developmental process, but it is not an end in itself.

.In the reflective practice model, the link between theory and practice is explicit—not implicit as in the traditional approach—and the developmental process begins with practice. If we wish to develop new and better methods of practice, we begin by examining the behavior we want to improve. The central knowledge questions are much broader than in the traditional approach: “What do we do, and why do we do it?” “How do our knowledge, our understanding, our personal theoretical framework affect our own behavior?” “Given new knowledge, what will we do differently?” In the reflective approach, several kinds of knowledge are integrated. Theory *and* practice are integral and central considerations, and theory includes ideas derived both from formal research and from personal experience. Attention to public knowledge and formal theory is not lost or diminished, but practice—specifically, personal practice—assumes a far greater importance.

Process. Instructional strategies also differ between the two modes of professional development. Because of the central (but we believe faulty) assumption that knowledge transmission leads to behavioral change and the corresponding belief that knowledge is developed and interpreted by researchers or academicians rather than by practitioners, didacticism is the central and legitimate means in the traditional model. Although various strategies may be used—lecture, discussion, case study analysis—the central purpose remains to convey knowledge and to develop cognitive skills. Reflective practice, in contrast, relies to a greater extent on dialectic learning and, as we have seen, is rooted in the experience—and particularly the problematic experience—of the learners.

Given the emphasis on public, given, and content knowledge, the instructor assumes the dominant role in the process while the learner functions in a subordinate, largely passive role. In reflective practice, the shift in focus and purpose of learning alters the nature of the learner-instructor relationship and shifts the balance of power and control. In the traditional model, power—to define problems, develop knowledge, prescribe answers, determine processes—and hence control over the nature, direction, and outcomes, rests with organizational superiors: university professors, consultants, or other external experts. Participants in professional development are essentially controlled by others. In juxtaposition, power and control in the reflective process are shared.

In the traditional model, the practitioner adopts a passive role as a consumer of knowledge. In the reflective practice model, the learner's role is far more active: "The practitioner becomes a researcher. . . and engages in a continuing process of self-education" (Schon, 1983, p. 299). In doing so, the learner assumes a central position, and the model of instructor as expert gives way to that of the instructor as facilitator. The role of the leader is no longer to deliver but to guide—to provide information and resources to facilitate the individual's personal inquiry and professional growth. The facilitator enters into what Schon (1983) called a *reflective conversation*. In this relationship, the instructor is not an expert responsible for conveying standardized and scientifically determined knowledge to guide the actions of the practitioner but a communication specialist engaged in a discussion of personal meaning. In Dewey's words, the educator can no longer "start with knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in doses" (1938a, p. 82).

In the traditional model, the learner clearly is a subordinate. The instructor establishes expectations and provides the expertise; the learner complies with these expectations and comprehends what is offered. In the reflective practice model, this instructor-learner relationship changes. Responsibility for the success of the learning endeavor belongs no longer to either the learner or the facilitator but is shared by both. The learner is active and directive in the learning process, and the facilitator and learner—each of whom brings knowledge and expertise to the situation—become collaborators working on a shared task.

There are three other aspects of the learning process that contrast with the development modes. In the traditional approach, learning is molecular, while, in the reflective approach, it is holistic. The "fix-it" orientation of traditional development often focuses on discrete skills or segments of behavior and organizational life. Reflective practice assumes a holistic approach to learning. Beginning with individual behavior, anything related to it becomes part of the process. At the very least, this includes the individual's background and cultural

context. In the traditional situation, with its emphasis on knowledge transmission, the primary emphasis is on cognition, but only in a very narrowly defined sense. The learner, as a student, is expected to gather and retain information that can be applied to problems of practice; in that sense, there is little need to involve the individual as a person. In reflective practice, however, the intent is to enable the individual to develop competence. Accordingly, the focus expands to incorporate the individual as person. Individuals are assumed to have cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. Learning to behave in different ways involves all of these. The concept of cognition also expands from a narrow emphasis on information gathering or recall to the development of analytic and conceptual skills that enable the individual to create knowledge needed to respond to the diverse demands of practice. Finally, in the reflective mode, learning is a social process, whereas, in the traditional mode, it is individual. In the usual process, learners are addressed as isolated individuals learning in parallel but not interrelated ways. In reflective practice, learning is cooperatively based. Collaboration extends beyond the learner-facilitator relationship to include all of the individuals in an interdependent learning process.

Table 2.1 presents a condensed summary of the various contrasting assumptional and belief differences for the traditional and reflective practice models of professional development.

SUMMARY

At this point, we have completed the conceptual framework to prepare us to engage in reflective practice. Chapter 1 provided the broad explanation of behavioral and organizational stability and change. In this chapter, we detailed a four-stage experiential learning cycle that is the heart of the reflective process. We also looked more specifically at the assumptions underlying reflective practice as a mode of professional development (and contrasted these with the familiar traditional mode). With this conceptual framework in place, the next two chapters are much more “how-to” oriented. The first details the assumptions and skills needed to facilitate reflective professional development. The second details various means we have found useful for moving individuals and groups through various stages of the experiential learning cycle.

NOTES

1. Grimmett and Erickson (1988), for example, identify three different ways of describing reflection: (a) as thoughtfulness about action, (b) as deliberation and choice among competing versions of good practice, and (c) as reconstructing experience, the end of which is the identification of a new possibility for action.

2. Preparation programs always have student teaching or administrative internships fulfilling the practice component of learning. As we argue, however, some very masterful professionals are unable to explain the underlying principles or theories-in-use that guide their practice. If this is the case, the student must either extrapolate the underlying principles for him- or herself or else treat the masterful performance as discrete actions to be copied without consideration of contextual factors. Reflective practice may be powerfully applied to internship experiences as a learning vehicle for both the novice and more experienced practitioners. We do not provide a specific “story” of such use of reflection, though, at Hofstra, our curriculum, including internship activities, is being organized around reflective principles. Barnett (1990) has described reflection in internship situations in detail.

3. Technically, a *problem* is conceptually different than the *problematic situation* in terms of clarity and specificity; however, the terms are used synonymously here with the understanding that, through the process of reflection, the nature and understanding of the problem may change dramatically.

TABLE 2.1

Contrasting Approaches to Professional Development

	<i>Traditional Model</i>	<i>Reflective Practice Model</i>
PURPOSE	Knowledge acquisition	Behavioral change
ASSUMPTIONS	Change via standardized knowledge Change: Rational	Change via self-awareness Change: Rational, emotional, social, cultural
CONTENT	Knowledge: Public Given Content Theory: Espoused theory Theory/practice: Implicit/discrete	Knowledge: Public & personal Given & problematic Content & process Theory <i>and</i> practice Behavior: Espoused & theories-in-use, actions & outcomes Theory/practice: Explicit/integral
PROCESS	Didactic/abstract Individual, molecular, cognitive Instructor as expert Learner as subordinate Practitioner as passive consumer	Dialectic/Experimental Collaborative, holistic, personal Instructor as facilitator Learner as agent Practitioner as action researcher