
Reflective Practice for Renewing Schools

Life must be understood backwards. But it must be lived forwards.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 1843

Each school has its own unique culture, its own vibe. Just listen and observe the interactions among students, administrators, teachers, and the rich variety of additional staff who serve young people in schools. In schools that are moving forward, you can see, hear, and feel the hum of student learning. You see in action the foundational beliefs that all students are learners, that established rituals and routines provide the structure that lead to enhanced student engagement, and that strong relationships among adults and students are the bridge for access to learning for all. When the desired outcomes are not evident, staff members dig into their data to collaboratively determine what is working well; what is showing promise, but needs more time to grow; and what needs to be changed. Blaming is not useful. In fact, it's destructive, often creating divisions among staff. Reflecting together on what happened and why is the foundation for continuously improving teaching and learning. Educators have no illusions that everything always works out or that there are not issues to be unpacked and addressed. The culture of the school (i.e., how we do things around here) sends the message that learning is important for both students and adults and that we, collectively, commit to supporting

and learning together to do our best on behalf of students. In these schools, the renewal process is continually internally driven.

In other schools, a culture of learning for staff and students is absent or waning. The traditional norm of school culture, isolation, is visible and tangible in how teachers work and how they talk with one another. Collective commitment around the “what” and “how” a school will achieve its mission is absent. Such schools are not necessarily “broken.” In fact, many have a history of being successful schools. Often structures, processes, and relationships that previously served to support reflective learning conversations have gradually dissipated. Staff and administrative changes, along with an increasing array of new initiatives with inadequate support for reflection, learning, and implementation, result in staff members managing as best they can on their own. Whenever key people leave a school, a void can appear because their subject matter knowledge, as well as tacit knowledge about the organization, exits with them. Without a plan for rekindling communal commitments around purpose, shared practice with reflection, learning and collective knowledge is challenging to bolster or rebuild. In other schools, changing student demographics drives the need for staff to revisit their focus and determine changes in practice that will sustain growth in achievement. Establishing structures and processes that create regular opportunities for members to design, reflect, and learn together must be priority within school schedules. It is in the context of conversation that members learn and grow their practice and their community of practice. When the sturdy fabric that once created a sense of interdependence dissipates, it must be intentionally rebuilt.

Much can be learned about the culture of a school by observing and listening in classrooms, hallways, common areas (e.g., libraries, cafeterias, gymnasiums, and outdoor contexts), as well as in both whole staff and smaller team meetings. Sometimes this is done through a formal walk-through process, but it can also be done through casual visits and observation in different school settings. The resource shown in Table 1.1, *Walking, Watching, Listening, Learning*, offers some guiding questions to focus on during casual observations. The insights gained can help create a deeper understanding of current context, culture, and conversation that grounds reflection and provides direction for renewing conversations, teaching and learning practices, as well as the overall school climate and culture of the school. Culture is the subconscious driver of behavior. When what is happening is not what is needed to continuously grow both adults and young people in schools, changes in learning structures and processes are often necessary. Conversations in which staff reflect back on practice to examine what happened and why, and then reflect forward to generate ways to improve practice the next time, are a pathway for creating a culture of continuous learning and improvement for everyone. The central aim of this book is to offer a variety of ways to accomplish this.

Table 1.1 School Culture Observation Tool: Casual Observation of Teaching and Learning in School**Walking, Watching, Listening, Learning: A Menu of Questions to Guide Casual Observations of Teaching and Learning in School**

Before starting your walk, (1) clarify for yourself a particular purpose or focus for your casual observation; and (2) skim questions on this tool, highlighting items aligned with your particular areas of interest.

Observation Focus: I want to learn more about . . .

Guiding Questions . . . some possibilities to consider**In classrooms**

- . . . who is doing most of the talking, adults, or students?
- . . . are all students receiving “first best instruction” in their home class?
- . . . do students seem clear about what and how they are learning? How do you know?
- . . . to what extent are learning rituals and practices in place for student engagement?
- . . . when teachers introduce new material, do they model practices expected of students?
- . . . what do you see and hear that affirms students’ race and cultures, including home languages?
- . . . in what ways do students talk with each other to make sense of their work?
- . . . who receives high levels of attention from the teacher and for what purposes?
- . . . as students work, in what ways are effort and perseverance reinforced?

In meetings

- . . . are meeting purposes pertinent to teaching and learning?
- . . . are meeting purposes clarified and additional priorities invited for consideration?
- . . . is a guiding question used to move participants to the present and to hear each voice?
- . . . in what ways do members reflect on connections between teaching practice and student learning?
- . . . when current instructional routines and practices are not resulting in growth or success for particular students, how do team members think together about ways to improve?
- . . . overall, how reflective and generative is the “conversational space”?
- . . . to what extent do structures and processes support reflection and deliberation?
- . . . is it apparent that members listen well and are respectful of other perspectives?
- . . . when decisions are made, what types of follow-up actions are generated and agreed on?
- . . . in what ways do meetings conclude such that learning is made visible, collective work is affirmed, and follow-up is agreed on?
- . . . overall, was a conversational culture of openness and inquiry about practice present and supported?



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Most schools are somewhere on the continuum between being highly collaborative and interdependent, and being highly autonomous and disconnected. The results for students and staff in the latter schools are fragmentation and a lack of coherence. Learning, and the good energy it unleashes, diminish for everyone. There may be thriving learning cultures in some grades or departments, but in other parts of the organization there is little reflection and learning happening. What was once a thriving learning organization is thriving only in isolated pockets so there is no collective wave of momentum for the good. These circumstances are, in part, why this edition of our book is titled *Reflective Practice for Renewing Schools*. We believe in every school there are seeds, if not roots and a maturing ecosystem, that are poised or on their way toward revitalization. Revitalizing the adult learning cultures that underlie the growth of learning cultures for students is at the core of creating our next generation of young people poised to care and contribute in our rapidly changing global context. What could be more important than that? Hats off to you!

A steady stream of research over the past couple of decades offers evidence for what common sense always told us: student learning is linked with staff learning (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Lambert, 2003). Essentially, if the adults are not learning, neither are the students. Successful schools are communities in which ongoing learning and reflection on learning practices and results are core practices for students and staff. Established learning cultures show evidence of embedded structures and processes for learning in multiple ways: partners, small groups, large groups, groups with “alike” staff members, and groups that have members with different perspectives and roles (Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011). The significance of creating opportunities for staff learning across role types cannot be overstated. Learning together and understanding the varied ways staff members contribute to student learning goes an enormous distance toward creating a cohesive staff. Absent such learning opportunities and perspective taking, factions and hierarchies form and subtly tear at the fabric of a school. Nothing good happens when this occurs.

High levels of student learning require high levels of staff competence. The dominant culture in many schools is one of doing, with little or no time for reflection and learning. It is not unusual for teachers to put aside carefully constructed lessons due to unanticipated events, circumstances, or responses. It is also not unusual for those same lessons to become fragmented as a result of the comings and goings of students and staff in classrooms. Disruptions rupture the process of learning . . . of going deep and making connections, of growing new insights. Educators routinely juggle multiple tasks, process information on many levels, manage a continual stream of interruptions, and make on-the-spot decisions to meet the changing needs and demands in the teaching environment. Who has enough time or a settled mental space to reflect? Yet, put succinctly, “where there is no reflection, there will be no learning” (Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011, p. 32).

Learning from practice requires reflecting on practice. From an individual perspective, “It can be argued that reflective practice . . . is the process which underlies all forms of high professional competence” (Bright, 1996, p. 166). From an organizational perspective, reflective practice is considered a powerful norm for schools to achieve high levels of student learning (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2012). Reflective practice is also a powerful means for propelling individual and organizational renewal. It plays a central role in supporting learning and growth throughout the development of career educators (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000). It is a critical element for individuals and organizations to learn for and from their actions (Marzano, Boogren, Heflebower, Kanold-McIntyre, & Pickering, 2012). Reflective practice underlies learning from practice in ways that inform and improve on future actions.

This chapter presents a grounding for the *why*, *what*, and *how* of reflective practice that renews schools and that anchors reflective practice in the reality of schools today. It lays the foundation to go deeper with the *what* and *how* of leading reflective practice and also the particularities of individual, partner, small group, schoolwide, and systemwide reflective practice. In this book, there is a chapter dedicated to each of these contexts of practice.

THE POTENTIAL OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TO RENEW SCHOOLS

At its core, reflective practice is about improving teaching and learning, which over time leads to advancing and deepening the culture of learning in schools. Reflective practice is not a new concept. The roots of reflection and reflective practice germinated many centuries ago through both Eastern and Western philosophers, including Buddha, Plato, and Lao Tzu. John Dewey, an influential 20th-century educational philosopher, is frequently recognized for applying the principles and practices of reflection to the field of education. Dewey emphasized not just rigor in practice, but the importance of incorporating scientific knowledge into reflection (Dewey, 1933; Fendler, 2003; Rodgers, 2002). He valued equally external knowledge, such as educational research, and internal knowledge that emerged from practitioners when they mindfully examined the impact of their practice, and what likely accounted for the impact, with the aim of advancing, altering, or exiting a practice that does not yield enhanced outcomes. Focusing only on internal or external knowledge, however, creates an incomplete picture. Donald Schön, a grand elder in the field of organizational learning, clearly associated learning as the foundation of individual and organizational improvement (Schön, 1983, 1987). His work validated the explicit (directly taught) and implicit (learned through experience, observation, modeling) learning that comes from professional practice. As is often the case, the answer is not “either/or” for Dewey and Schön,

but “both/and.” Each of us perform better by tapping both internal and external resources to inform decisions. To summarize this body of work, reflective practice can be viewed as an active thought process aimed at understanding current realities of practice and considering multiple possibilities for improvement. Reflective practice

- occurs in different ways and for different purposes, yielding different results;
- is influenced by both personal and contextual variables;
- considers social, moral, and ethical perspectives;
- impacts community conversation and action; and
- heightens morale and collective efficacy brought about by effective practice.

The key takeaway is that reflective practice leads to informed action, not “mindless following of unexamined practices or principles” (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991, p. 37). Located in the accompanying website (<http://resources.corwin.com/YorkBarrReflective>) is a resource, Significant Contributions to the Thinking About Reflective Practice, that identifies practitioner scholars who have contributed significantly to conceptualizing and operationalizing useful applications of reflective practice in the field of education, including John Dewey, Max van Manen (1977, 2002), Georgea Sparks-Langer and Amy Colton (1991), and Karen Osterman and Robert Kottkamp (2004).

In schools today, the adults are in continuous motion. At times the pace feels frenetic. Anyone who does not know this has not been inside a school recently. Days are packed with plentiful “to dos” that vary from the ground-level work of supporting individual students, to reflecting and planning with colleagues, to refining implementation plans for new practices and the use of technology. Teachers and administrators continually feel the heightened and accelerated demands of their work. In the 1950s, studies conducted by Harvey (1967) revealed that air traffic controllers manage the greatest number of mental tasks and that teachers are number two in this regard. Things have not changed. “Teachers make thousands of decisions a day, and they don’t do it about an abstract idea, they do it about the life of a child. You can’t imagine anything harder” (Jupp, 2012).

Despite all of these “to dos” being completed at a fast pace, we ask, “Are schools and teams realizing the benefits of all that they are doing?” The fast pace of organizations should not mean “random acts of improvement” or action, but rather “aligned acts of improvement” and action (National Education Goals Panel, 2000). In schools where collaboration and reflection have grown to be a cultural norm, the pace does not necessarily feel slower, but actions are more mindful, aligned, and collective, thereby creating a more coherent learning experience for students.

School culture has a significant impact on teacher and student behaviors. Culture can be thought of as the norms and expectations, often unwritten, that individuals implicitly learn and follow in order “to fit” within an organization. Deliberate monitoring and attention to culture helps to identify what to celebrate and continue to grow, as well as what to intentionally work at removing (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). If a robust positive culture of adult and student learning has been created, school members become more adept at accepting and adapting to the challenges, as well as continually reflecting on and improving both practices and outcomes. If school culture is dominated by norms of isolation, not only does the potential for collective learning suffer, but destructive cultures of isolation, competition, and blame often grow. Members feel unsupported, unappreciated, and unable to gain traction for improvement. As we discuss at greater length in Chapter 3, growing *learning-full cultures* is the core work of administrator, team, and teacher leadership.

However, the shift from idiosyncratic to coherent learning and reflective practice is not work that happens in the fast lane. The Chinese proverb “Go slow to go fast” applies here. Starting small increases the likelihood of success because it is easier to design and sufficiently support the learning of new practices. For example, consider a school learning and using cooperative routines to increase student talk. Using common language for teaching the routines and identifying common places within instructional sequences to practice the routines more quickly results in teachers forming the habit of embedding routines and in students learning them, thereby reflecting more on their content area learning. “Talk” is a big part of making sense of new content. After giving initial instructions, teachers can model and then invite students to turn and talk with a partner about what they will be learning and doing. At the end of a lesson, students might be asked to find a new partner and talk about what each learned, and perhaps, to share a question they have. This type of focus and coherence increases the likelihood of successful acquisition. Success creates energy and momentum, for staff and students.

Chapter 3 introduces an example of how one school supported teacher learning and reflection on use of cooperative routines. Developing effective reflective learning practices eventually allows everyone to focus more energy on learning content. Practitioners who learn “how” to learn well can accelerate “what” they learn. Learning content continually evolves and changes. With the aim of continuing to improve practice, learning processes, which typically follow a cycle of reflective practice (i.e., learn–do–reflect–act), inform what’s working well and what is not. Even though the press for teacher learning is often focused on learning content, this is more effectively done among teachers who have become adept at reflective learning processes.

Embedding and protecting regular times for teams to meet creates an essential and ongoing space for colleagues to engage in reflective conversations about the ways that students are engaged and respond to

instruction, and also ways to move each student forward. There are other times when conversation is necessary, but has to be done asynchronously. For example, a top-notch co-teaching team in an urban middle school saw steady growth for almost all of their general education, English language, and special education students. This team could not accomplish everything during their common Professional Learning Community (PLC) time that was built into the master schedule. They relied heavily on Google Docs (a free online file development and sharing system that provides for synchronous, real time or asynchronous collaboration) to develop their lesson plans, determine flex groups, and delineate differentiated teacher roles for the upcoming lesson. The co-teachers accessed the Google Doc at different times of the day or evening and left recommendations for ways to differentiate instruction, meet Individual Education Plans (IEP) goals, and enhance understanding of key vocabulary and concepts. The online reflective practice component was extremely successful as an extension to their face-to-face time. It also anchored the on-the-fly conversations that happened during their fast-paced days.

Administrators and teachers learn from “on the fly” conversations and decisions, as well as conversations that occur in more calm, grounded, and mindful periods. Especially in times of turbulence, learning while flying means gaining the knowledge and skills while improvising and shifting to make sense of sometimes seemingly unrelated episodes. Learning while grounded connects people to their roots, clarifies their identity in the work, and seeks a stable knowledge base to draw on in other situations, whether flying or grounded (Fenwick, 2006). Simultaneously learning while flying and grounded seems paradoxical. Educators have described this as “hot action” in schools where they must be adaptive and develop the habits and routines to respond appropriately when there is no stopping the action to consider what happened and to figure out next best steps (Eraut, 1985). In fast-paced environments, adults must make spur-of-the-moment decisions. These moments need to be anticipated because making the best decision for each situation is important. “Workplace learning in these circumstances will need to be contextually sensitive” (Beckett, 2001, p. 75).

Designed well, reflective practice integrates grounding knowledge with contextual knowledge as both inform possible next actions. Here is an example. A school had an incident involving a safety concern that rippled into the community. At that moment, administrators and school staff needed to make immediate decisions based on the known facts, district procedures, and the systems within the school. The morning after the incident, building administrators convened to an after-action review. This practice was different than in the past when the team would handle a situation and then move on to the next situation. The key people involved in the event came together and asked: What were the facts? When did we know them? What did we do? Why did we do this? What can we learn from this incident? What is needed to prevent a similar incident?

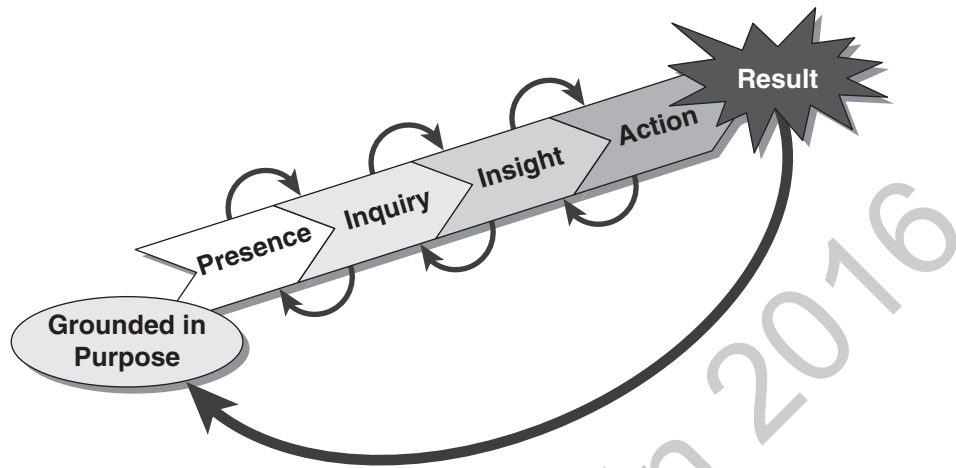
The facts were listed in one column on the whiteboard. The technical decisions made by each person made were listed in another column. The dialogue then shifted to reflecting on what worked, what did not work, and what was confusing or insufficient. Areas in need of refinement were immediately identified, along with roles and responsibilities for next steps. Changes related to safety procedures were addressed immediately. Additional steps that required more time to develop were rolled out over the next few weeks. This process of collective reflection on practice took 45 minutes. In addition to coming up with new procedures and protocols, there were other positive results. The strength of the team and school were enhanced. There was an openness to consider what had been effective and not effective. The staff felt supported. There was recognition that these incidents do not belong to just one person, but to everyone. By allocating just 45 minutes to engage in a reflective process, the team learned and improved their practices for future incidents.

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE CYCLE

There is no universally accepted definition of reflective practice. There is not a recipe for how it is done. No one person, no one team, no one school embeds reflective practice in the exact same ways. Reflective practice is a thought process that both challenges and supports individuals, teams, and school communities to consciously embed opportunities to learn from practice to inform how to improve practice. It is adaptive and nuanced work to figure out what, specifically, will advance practice in particular learning contexts. Reflective practice is an active process that continually seeks to assess, understand, and adjust practices. Growing a reflective practice community means that at each level and point of the system, members listen and observe practice. Reflective practitioners listen well and are open to multiple perspectives, interpretations of events, and possibilities for improvement. From the possibilities generated, they take mindful actions that lead to either continuing the direction, tweaking the direction, or changing direction.

The reflective practice cycle (refer to Figure 1.1) helps to visualize the components of the cycle and how they build on one another, ultimately leading to action. The cycle, as shown here, begins with being *grounded in purpose*, followed by being actively *present* to observe and learn, being *open* and participating in the *inquiry*, gaining insights from the learning and adding to the dialogue so others gain new *insights*, taking informed *action* based on the knowledge that is generated, and ends with routinely asking “Are we seeing the *results* that we want to see?” If yes, then the team asks “Now what?” And, if no, then the team asks “Now what?”

Figure 1.1 Reflective Practice Cycle



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This is not a linear process, but a continual cycling forward and backward to challenge thinking and produce deeper practice knowledge. In between the purpose and results are thought cycles that regularly circle back to previous steps to assess, challenge, and fine-tune the cycle so that however it re-cycles, it remains grounded in the purpose. Core elements of the reflective practice cycle are . . .

Being grounded in purpose: you must be grounded in the “why” to reach results that matter. Simon Sinek (2009) asks if you know the *why* behind what you do. He emphasizes that great organizations and great leaders are grounded, first and foremost, in *why* they do something, not *how* or *what* they do. The all-encompassing *why* speaks to the core beliefs and values we hold about learning for all students. It is the driver of all decisions that are made at every level of the system. Often we jump to *what* and *how* without being clear about *why* we care and *why* we are investing time and energy into the work. When the *why* is clear, people are much less likely to lose their way or their motivation to push forward when things get messy. When the *why* is clear, it is easier to invest oneself fully in work, despite the demands and energy required to teach and lead in schools. In education, the details about the purpose may continually unveil themselves through practice and be reinforced by data, but ultimately they are linked with our deep beliefs and aspirations for all students to learn well and be successful as they transition to post-school life. When educational staff understand and are compelled by the *why* of their journey, the energy

required to figure out what, specifically, matters most for students and how, specifically, to move in that direction is more readily generated and sustained. The *why* anchors the vision that compels continuous learning and improvement on our own and with our colleagues.

Presence is a combination of being present by pausing, being open to listen and learn, and being actively engaged. It means remaining present both in mind and body during conversation. When you watch people in conversation, you can tell much by listening to verbal behavior, and especially by observing nonverbal behavior, such as body language and facial expressions. What are some indicators that people are open? Are they listening? Are they interested? Are they encouraging others to share, to speak their truth? In some respects, nonverbal behavior is more telling of presence and participation (or lack thereof) than verbal, spoken language. Particularly telling of a person's stance is to watch and listen when differences of opinion arise. What happens? In what ways do the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the speaker and others in the group change? Honoring this openness and asking probing questions to fully understand, particularly when you are not sure you understand, or when you view the subject differently, can foster not only clarity, but trust. Authentic inquiry promotes connection and understanding. It makes learning happen.

Inquiry is both a cultural norm in reflective practice communities and a skill that individuals and teams can develop. When people are present and open to learning then the possibility exists for inquiry. Inquiry is a state of mind in which questions and wonderings about practice are invited, embraced, and, at times, compelled. Questions are generated to help clarify, probe for deeper understanding, and make connections among various perspectives and observations . . . all of which expand and challenge thinking, which, in turn, creates new understandings and insight. Designated time and space, along with intentional efforts to deepen the conversational skills of team members, creates the possibility of insight that leads to refined action, deeper connection, and even momentum. John Maxwell (2007), a leader in the area of organizational leadership, is clear that momentum, the act of getting things moving forward, is more important than having every detail determined in advance. In short: *momentum is more important than precision.*

The purpose of inquiry is to learn. Inquiry stems from wondering about and questioning the impact of one's own practice. What did I specifically do and what did I notice in how students responded? As Albert Einstein said, "The important thing is not to stop questioning." Asking questions that prompt inquiry is a skill that develops through practice, and ultimately has the potential to deepen understandings about practice.

From inquiry comes *insight* that can both affirm and call into question particular practices and their impact. This results in deeper understandings about the nuance and "fit" of practices in particular situations. Insights emerge from active, deliberate, and conscious processing of

thoughts for the purposes of examining goals, beliefs, and practices. *Goals* are the aims, outcomes, and intentions for yourself, for students, and collectively for the school. *Beliefs* are the mental models through which we view the world. They encompass people's values, visions, biases, and paradigms that inform possible directions. *Practices* refers to one's dispositions, knowledge, and skills across a wide range of performance domains. In schools, this includes *building* relationships with students, *designing* instruction, *providing* instruction, *discerning* the impact of instruction, *collaborating* with colleagues and administrators, and *connecting* with families.

Action means movement. This element is essential in the reflective practice process. Thought and related learning without subsequent action are mere musings. Reflective practice is not a bystander sport. It is not for the faint of heart. It is for actively committed professionals who intentionally learn and change and create improved outcomes for students. Without application, who cares? Action and then reflecting on the action and its impact is the whole point. What happened and why? The phrase "Ready, Fire, Aim" captures the nature of high performing companies (Peters & Waterman, 1982) and schools (Fullan, 2010). Move to action then mindfully observe and discern what is significant from the results. The action period (i.e., "fire") is also a learning period. Learning informs the fine-tuning of practice such that improvement occurs. *Results* are the outcomes, our impact. Actions lead to results. Both our actions and results are fed back into the cycle of reflective practice to inform future practice. What did we learn from what happened? Is this something to do again? If so, in what situations and with which students? Reflective practice leads to improvement and renewal only when these deeper understandings inform improved actions that are subsequently enacted.

Table 1.2 provides an example of a schoolwide behavior support team and how they engaged in problem solving to address the particular needs of a group of students. The team process encompassed the elements of the reflective practice cycle. They all knew their purpose, came ready and prepared to participate, had current data ready to consider, and expanded on the data by adding the relevant context to individual student situations. They also used data to identify the trends and needs for the school. Based on their analysis, they collaborated to proactively add support for students who were showing signs of escalating behavior. They wanted to intervene early to interrupt this pattern in order to keep students in school. The results showed that working with these students in small groups, building student skills to handle conflict and frustration, and developing positive relationships with a staff member were effective interventions for many students. This prevented further escalation of behaviors and helped improve class attendance. It also provided a more robust "toolbox" for the whole school when other students needed additional supports.

Table 1.2 An Example of the Reflective Practice Cycle in Action

Purpose	The schoolwide behavior intervention team’s goal was for all students to be learning in school. They strongly believed that they could make a difference in educational outcomes for all students, even those with higher needs, if they could match the interventions to a student’s needs.
Presence	The team, consisting of representatives from counseling, social work, special education, behavior specialist, and administration, met weekly. They were engaged and collaboratively sought solutions for all students. Their specific roles or department affiliation was not an issue. They shared their expertise willingly to achieve the overall goal. Their openness to learning for each other was readily visible.
Inquiry	The team considered the office referrals and suspensions and dismissal data. They unpacked the data, looking for patterns, as well as outlying incidents. Team members offered varied perspectives with the aim of better understanding the context and specific variables that might be underlying the referrals.
Insight	To gain further insight, the team used a brief functional behavior assessment process to understand what was being communicated by each behavior. They also looked across multiple data sources to identify needs for the system. The team determined that there was an absence of direct instruction to teach self-awareness and replacement strategies to students whose behaviors regularly escalated.
Action	The team selected a social-emotional curriculum that focused on the strategies they felt were needed by the students, especially when a student was in the “zone” that led to confrontation. They accessed the resources, and met to review the curriculum and how to teach/reinforce the replacement strategies. They developed a schedule for teaching these strategies to small groups of students who had been identified based on the school data.
Result	School personnel felt better equipped to respond to student needs because they had a more complete set of interventions in their “toolbox.” Also, they could intervene earlier to meet the needs of students who were showing signs of escalating behaviors. Staff began using common vocabulary to help students understand their feelings and behaviors. In turn, students learned the language to tell staff which “behavior zone” they were in so that they could verbally process their concerns before the behaviors escalated. As a result of collaboratively analyzing the data and selecting the social-emotional curriculum to teach the replacement strategies to students, there was an overall decrease in office referrals and improved class attendance, as well as suspensions and dismissals.

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As we focus our actions and link them to our learning, the intent is to see improvements in student learning. Learning is broadly defined to include students' capacities to think, their motivations to learn, their effectiveness utilizing these capacities constructively with others, and their contribution to the world around them, along with more traditional measures of student learning (e.g., formative assessments about ongoing learning and annual testing around state-determined student learning practices). Further, the results must be considered through an *equity lens* to determine if all, or only some, students are learning. Enhanced student learning must be equitable. The education system in the United States is more inclusive, but is it equitable? Do students of all races and ethnicities see themselves in the curriculum? Can they identify with the texts they read? Are they engaged by the instruction? If yes, what can we learn that can be shared more broadly? If no, then how do we challenge our beliefs and practices to interrupt or put aside some of what we do to create new practices that lead to improved outcomes for each learner?

These six elements of the reflective practice cycle are important regardless of the level or place in the system at which they are implemented—in a classroom, a team, the school, or the district. There is a logical flow to the elements. If one is missing or weakened, then the impact of the cycle is diminished or even absent (refer to Table 1.3). If the process is not grounded in purpose, then the *why* is not sufficiently powerful to compel commitment to engage and sustain the work. If participants are not present and open, then dialogue is stifled and multiple perspectives are not heard. If there is no inquiry, then possibilities for improvement do not emerge. Without possibilities to try, then nothing will change. If the process does not generate new insights by considering both internal and external knowledge, then challenging thinking patterns that leads to new action does not occur. If no action is taken that leads to different results, then participants question why their time is being spent reflecting in an attempt to address problems by making changes in practice. Ultimately, they will opt out of the process even if they are present at the table. If the results are unknown because they are not measured or they are stagnant for all or some groups of students because the known data are not used, then schools will not reach their goals of achieving a high level of learning for all students.




The reflective practice spiral (Figure 1.2) presents one way to think about initiating and expanding efforts to embed reflective practices as a cultural norm throughout schools and districts. It reflects an assumption that the place to begin is with oneself and that learning occurs from the inside out. The reflective practice cycle is the core learning process within each of the nested layers within the system. Beginning with the innermost level of individual reflective practice, reflection with partners, in small groups and teams, throughout a school, and extending across a school district, reflective practice can have an

Table 1.3 The Impact of Missing Elements of the Reflective Practice Cycle

Reflective Practice Cycle Elements	What Happens When the Element Is Present?	What Happens When the Element Is <u>Not</u> Present?
Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity about the <i>why</i> • The <i>why</i> anchors the work and leads to greater commitment 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are present in mind and body • They actively participate in the process • Their actions foster greater trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of understanding about the work and the direction • Minimal personal investment. Staff go through the steps of the process because they are required to participate • A lack of commitment to achieving different results
Presence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions are made by a few members • There is a lack of trust, so the openness needed for dialogue never develops • There is less buy-in by various parties about the decisions that are made • Staff who are committed to the work opt out of the group to avoid superficial commitments
Inquiry	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an openness to multiple perspectives • Multiple perspectives are invited and respected • Space is created to promote inquiry • The sharing of ideas leads to coherence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information that is being considered is narrow and limited • There is an inability to explore data through multiple perspectives • Dialogue is closed down. Teams do not have the norm or the skills to question ideas and open up new possibilities • Actions are based on narrow and shallow interpretations of the issues and data

(Continued)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

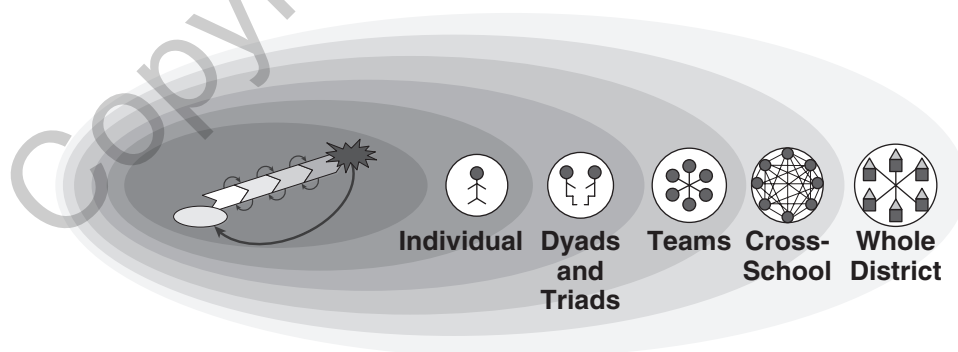
Reflective Practice Cycle Elements	What Happens When the Element Is Present?	What Happens When the Element Is <u>Not</u> Present?
Insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and deeper understandings of data emerge • New perspectives are used to challenge beliefs and existing paradigms • The new insights provide opportunities for meaningful action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beliefs about students and effective instruction are not unpacked and challenged • Teams continue to implement current practices even when the desired outcomes are not evident • Teams jump between strategies without understanding why they are making these decisions, hoping that “something will work” • Progress monitoring the results does not happen, so data are not available to gain new insights
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement forward to change outcomes is evident • There is a joint commitment for action across a team or school • Individuals and teams “walk their talk” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no change in the results that lead to beliefs being challenged • Opting out by group members because the process does not lead to meaningful action • Individuals pull away from the group and take action on their own regardless if it is aligned or not aligned with the work of the group
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The data that were collected are used to enhance student learning • The impact on adult and student learning is evident • When the data are disaggregated, the impact on learning is equitable across all students • Reflective practice becomes a larger part of the culture of the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is little to no change in student learning • Individuals wonder if what they are doing is making a difference and if their time is well spent • Sustaining reflective practice is challenging because change is not evident or measured

entire systemwide impact. The spiral reinforces the interconnectedness among levels and layers in the system.

Each of us has a scope of influence within our system. It starts with colleagues with whom we work directly and influence indirectly. It expands outward through the professional relationships that we have through our horizontal connections among teams and vertical connections across the levels of the system. As the scope of influence increases, the power of alignment increases across the levels of the system. Reflective practice is at the center of this alignment.

Lived experience is perhaps the most powerful influence on the formation of beliefs, which are the driving forces behind actions. The learning and positive growth that an individual experiences from engaging in reflective practices provides an informed, experiential foundation from which to advocate and commit to expanding the practice of reflection beyond themselves. As we develop our individual reflection capacities, we can better influence the reflection that occurs with partners, in small groups, or in teams where we are members. As more groups become reflective in their work, the influence and potential of reflective practice spreads throughout the school. A critical mass of individuals who have experienced positive outcomes from their own reflective practice and from reflection within groups and teams can better support widespread adoption. Each level in the reflective practice cycle is described below, along with the respective potential benefits. Specific considerations and examples for reflective practices at each level are addressed in Chapters 4 through 7.

Figure 1.2 Nested Levels of the Reflective Practice Spiral



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Individual Reflective Practice

This is the level where, as educators, each of us has full responsibility and control. We can choose to be reflective in our work and life. Reflection on our own provides each of us with a renewable resource that we totally control. Committing to growing as reflective practitioners creates an opportunity to realize the following benefits:

- Improvements in our professional practices, given greater awareness of personal performance, practice dilemmas, possibilities that emerge from divergent and creative thought, and effects of our practices;
- Enhanced student learning and learning capacities, given improvements in our practices;
- Increased personal capacities for learning and improvement, as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for reflective practice become embedded in our way of thinking and doing;
- Restored balance and perspective, given the space created for reflection and learning; and
- Renewed clarity of personal and professional purpose and competence, given a sense of empowerment to align our practices with desired intents.

As we learn about reflective practice and its potential through personal experience, we begin to increase our capacity to effectively support others in developing their reflective capacities. Some ways to reflect alone include journaling, reviewing a case, reading literature, developing a teaching portfolio, exercising our bodies to free our minds, taking a personal retreat, and observing or listening to one's own practice through use of videotapes or webinars. Chapter 4 offers additional considerations and specific examples of reflective practice with oneself.

Reflective Practice With Partners

Joining with another person in the process of reflection can result in greater insight about one's practice, especially when trust is high and the right combination of support and challenge is present. When reflecting with others, we realize the truth in the adage, "What goes around comes around." Partner reflection can also introduce an element of fun. Humor, when appropriately interjected, reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously and that mistakes are an inevitable dimension of the learning process. In addition to the gains realized at the individual level of reflection, adding one or two partners to the reflection process can result in

- Expanded learning about our own practice, given the different perspectives of another person and, when coached through the process of reflective inquiry, our learning can be even deeper when we

reflect with individuals who are of different cultures and backgrounds than our own;

- Increased professional and social support, decreased feelings of isolation at work and increased competence and confidence given the presence of a strengthened collegial relationship;
- Increased sense of who we are and how things work in our school, given the connection and exchange with another person who practices in our place of work; and
- Greater commitment to our work and our work environment, given an increased sense of competence, confidence, and connection to another person in our place of work.

Some ways that two or three people can reflect together include interactive journaling, cognitive coaching, conversing about instructional design possibilities, talking through steps of an inquiry cycle related to specific events or dilemmas, peer observations, reading and talking about articles or case studies, examining student work, and planning with your co-teacher and online dialogue. Chapter 5 contains additional considerations and specific examples of reflective practice with partners. The increased sense of competence, support, and connection that can emerge from reflection with a partner positions us on more solid ground to extend the practice of reflection to teams.

Reflective Practice in Small Groups and Teams

There is a big shift from reflecting alone or in a small partnership to reflecting in a small group. While the potential impact of reflection increases as the number of people who are involved increases, so too does the personal risk. Because more people are in a group, the sense of safety and connection between individuals is different than with partner reflection; it is often more variable and diffuse. Groups and teams also are frequently appointed or mandated, whereas partner reflection is often voluntary and self-organized. In appointed or mandated groups, there is frequently less control over who joins the group and their desire to participate. Composition and commitment affect interactions and outcomes.

Despite the risks involved in expanding reflective practice to such groups, good reasons exist to venture forth into this domain. When reflection becomes part of educational practice within small groups or teams, its members can realize the following gains:

- Enhanced learning and resources for learning about practice, given more people, each of whom brings varied experiences and expertise in life, learning, and education;
- Increased professional and social support (including fun), given the expanded and more varied network of collegial relationships;

- More effective interventions for individual students or groups of identified students, given shared purpose, responsibility, and expertise among members of a group;
- An emerging sense of hope and encouragement that meaningful and sustained improvements in practice can occur, given group members committed to working and learning together; and
- Improved climate and collegiality, given greater understanding of our own and others' experiences and perspectives about our shared place of work.

Some ways to reflect in small groups include action research, study groups, regular grade-level or content area meetings to review and design instruction and assessment procedures, examining student data and work, and case-study reviews and problem-solving sessions. Reflective practices can also enhance committee work by intentionally reflecting about past practices and future possibilities and by soliciting multiple perspectives of people representing broad interests in the work. Refer to Chapter 6 for more considerations and specific examples of reflective practice in groups or teams.

At the small group level of reflective practice, the potential to influence educational practices throughout the school gains momentum. Small ripples of change frequently become the impetus for much broader changes, even when that was not an original intent (Garmston & Wellman, 2013; Wheatley, 1992). The potential to improve educational practices significantly increases when greater numbers of groups and teams embed reflective practices in their work. A culture of inquiry and learning begins to take hold on a grander, schoolwide basis.

Schoolwide Reflective Practice

The greatest potential for reflective practice to improve schools lies within the collective inquiry, thinking, learning, understanding, and acting that result from schoolwide engagement. Isolated efforts (e.g., initiatives taken on by individual teachers, grade levels, or content areas) typically result in only isolated improvements, with few cumulative gains realized once students or teachers move on from those experiences. Furthermore, effects do not spread to other groups of students without intentional efforts to design and implement new practices with those students. When reflection becomes part of educational practice on a schoolwide basis, the following gains are possible:

- Significantly expanded learning opportunities and resources for achieving schoolwide advances in practice aimed at student achievement;
- Enhanced sense of common purpose and shared responsibility for all students;

- Greater shared knowledge, planning, and communication about students among teachers throughout the school, resulting in greater instructional coherence;
- Increased professional support realized from the expanded network of relationships and the extensive expertise revealed within the network;
- Enhanced understanding of school culture, specifically what influences policy and practice and how schoolwide improvement efforts can be successful;
- Increased hope and possibility for meaningful and sustained improvements in practice given an expanded awareness of the commitments and talents of staff throughout the building and given the strengthened network among staff members; and
- Lessened sense of vulnerability to external pressures, and paradoxically, more reasoned consideration of opportunities that might result from external partnerships.

Reflective practices at the schoolwide level can take many forms. An entire school staff may be involved in study groups on a common topic, such as reading in the content areas, instructional strategies, or performance assessment. There might also be groups or teams across the school with varied purposes. For example, interdisciplinary groups could form to share disciplinary expertise and to create a set of integrated student outcomes that would be addressed within each of the content areas. Cross grade-level teams might explore the best practices for effective student transitions between grades or schools. Some issues require schoolwide attention and participation, so group composition should be intentionally designed to connect people across grade levels or curricular areas to bring forth different perspectives and relationships between individuals who may not typically cross paths during a school day. It is neither possible nor essential to include every staff member in every learning or shared work initiative. What matters is that staff members are involved in some type of collaborative learning that coheres and contributes to overall educational goals and experiences for students. Chapter 7 describes additional considerations and specific examples of schoolwide reflective practices, along with examples of reflective practice among participants from multiple schools.

District-Level Reflective Practice

Moving districtwide is extremely challenging because of the complexity and particularity of the work in different school settings. It is challenging given the lack of proximity and easy access between school and district-based personnel, particularly in urban districts. District administration sets annual priorities for its schools based on aggregated data and coordinates its leadership and resources to support schools in implementing

these priorities. The priorities are determined based on the multiple demands placed on a district, including external mandates, such as aligning instruction with state standards and addressing equitable outcomes for subgroups of students. District administrators determine the tight and loose aspects for implementing their priorities, and aligning professional development with these priorities. It is challenging for staff who are “singletons” in their work environments, such as a principal or a district coach, to remain focused on these priorities when there are so many demands on their time. Staff in these situations benefit from constructive opportunities to reflect with others in similar roles to consider and learn as they work through complex issues. When reflection becomes part of educational practice on a districtwide basis, the following gains are possible:

- Enhanced sense of common purpose and shared responsibility for all students across the whole system;
- Greater coherence for students across their PreK–12 experience;
- Focused communication with the district and community regarding what influences policy and practice decisions to positively affect districtwide improvement;
- Alignment of resources for achieving districtwide advances in practice aimed at equitable student achievement;
- Shared knowledge and planning through cross level groups so issues are deeply understood and the insights gained guide the next steps;
- Coordination and collaboration across departments to align their work and professional development; and
- Increased professional support realized from the expanded network of relationships and sharing of expertise within the network.

Moving districtwide is the most complex. To achieve it takes a concerted effort by district-level administrators to work collaboratively across departments to integrate at the district level what we ask schools and teams to integrate at their respective levels. Reflective practices at the districtwide level can take many forms. District level departments are linked by the common commitment to support graduation for all students and for students to learn their state content and grade-level standards. Engaging district leaders to work across departments to create a coherent approach for supporting school-level practitioners to reach these goals could go a long way toward achieving more connection and coherence, not to mention better coordination of resources, for both district-based and school-based practitioners. For example, the Curriculum and Instruction department could co-design and co-present professional development with the English Language Learner and Special Education departments to support schools in integrating these disciplines to align instruction. And, the special education department could support its subspecialty staff (e.g., speech language pathologist, psychologists, coaches) at all levels of the system to work together to eliminate racial disparities in referrals to special education.

Moving Outward

There is greater potential to achieve schoolwide and districtwide improvement in practice as reflective practices take root and grow across all levels of the system, from the individual level through the district level. The potential realized at the outer levels is based on the premise that individuals continue to enhance their individual reflection and learning. Resources, information, perspectives, ownership, commitment, relationships, along with shared responsibility and leadership increase substantially at each progressive level given greater numbers of staff members learning together. For most teachers, the greatest opportunity for impact will be within their school. For principals, the greatest opportunities for impact also will be within their schools. In both groups, some will have opportunities to influence through reflective practice at the district level, as well, depending on the size of the district. For district administrators, the opportunity comes from supporting the capacity for reflective practice at each level of the system by facilitating cross-level teams and developing the capacity of its district staff to move practices to each level of the system.

One of the greatest influences is success. Schools in which members are reflecting on their practices to align and bolster their efforts and, as a result, see progress in student achievement learn that what they do matters. Seeing positive outcomes from our individual and collective practices increases our individual and collective efficacy. Efficacy is the *belief* that what we do matters. It fuels the energy to keep on figuring out how best to serve each student. The strongest beliefs we hold are the ones grounded in our experience. Being successful in our work builds our sense of confidence that we can figure out ways to support students well in their schooling.

As reflective practices extend outward from the individual level to being more inclusive of others, as partners in teams and schoolwide, the design challenges of implementation are greater. Complexity is dramatically increased due to the greater number and, often, variety of people involved along with the corresponding variation in work and scope of the work. Because the load and variety of work is significant for each person in the system, it is easy for participants to conclude that their work has little or nothing to do with the work of others. Logistics, such as scheduling time for reflection, become more difficult. Individual risk is greater because an individual's perspectives are exposed to a greater number of people with whom there may be varying degrees of trust, respect, and commitment. The context and climate of a school also have a greater effect as practices expand to include more people. There are long-standing structures that reinforce isolation among participants, which exacerbates the sense that work is differentiated or specialized and not shared. The history and established cultures within and across groups create invisible barriers to interaction. Multiple and often competing priorities for time and professional development can fragment focus, effort, and people. In short, as the individual moves out in the spiral, there is more potential for success, but also more complexity and less control.

Recognizing the presence of significant, complicating variables at the school level can raise serious doubts about the feasibility of reflective practice. The inherently complex nature of schoolwide change can easily feel overwhelming. This is one of the reasons for proposing the reflective practice spiral as a guiding framework. Each of us can choose to remain committed to our own professional learning and improvement by embedding reflective practices in our own work. We can at least engage in reflective practices at the individual level. Choosing to assume a responsible, proactive stance toward our own development adds positive energy to our lives and to the environments in which we work. As individuals, we reap the benefits of continuous learning and we increase our professional competence. Learning also renews our spirit. Our human needs to learn and grow can be met, in part, through reflective thinking. A commitment to individual reflective practices benefits us as individuals and also has an indirect effect on others.

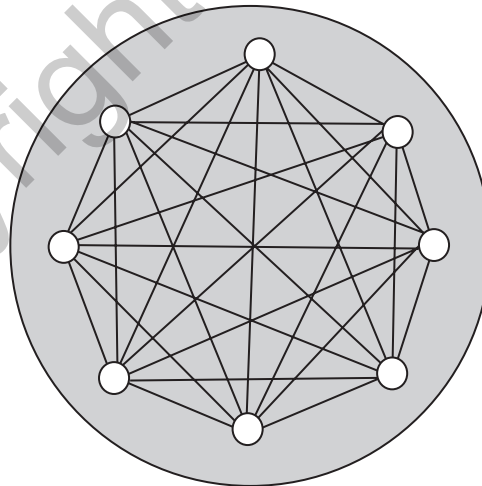
Beyond the individual, the potential for improvement in schools increases with each additional person who chooses to make a commitment to professional learning and improvement. "Those who work in schools know that influence happens at every level of the system, with collegial influence being perhaps, the most powerful means of aligning and accelerating effort for the good of children" (Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011, p. 23). Understandings about how organizations or systems evolve suggest that significant positive changes can happen when members learn more about ways the work of others can inform, complement, and support their own work, resulting in more nuanced support and better outcomes for students. Each person and her or his arena of practice exists because it is intended to contribute to the greater good of the organizational purpose. Mining and sharing the learning and insights of each participant turns the aspiration of doing good for young people into reality. It is the web of relationships among organizational members that enhances the collective knowledge and bolsters the energy to sustain effort around the work (Garmston & Wellman, 2013; Wheatley, 1992). Another significant understanding is to know that change happens in ways we cannot always predict or control. As each of us continues to learn, and as we reach out to connect and learn with others, relationships form and strengthen, thereby increasing the potential for larger scale improvement. Gradually, we come to understand that we are part of a much larger whole that has the power and momentum to positively affect the lives of students. Schoolwide engagement helps keep energy high and hope alive.

Combinations of different groups of staff members learning together throughout the school result in expanded and strengthened relationships among all staff members. In effect, a web of relationships forms to facilitate communication and connection throughout the school community (see Figure 1.3). This web of relationships serves several very important functions:

- A *safety net* is created for students who are less likely to feel anonymous and fragmented because staff members are in better communication about students, especially those who are struggling in school;
- A *rich network of resources, people, and information* is formed and any member of the school community can tap it; if someone in our immediate network does not know something, we are likely to be connected to someone in another network who may know; and
- When we are more tightly coupled with others in our work, there is a greater likelihood of more *comprehensive, effective, and rapid response* to schoolwide issues, ranging from safety concerns to adoption of new curricula.

To enhance the web metaphor for school improvement, consider that the threads of weaver spiders are one of the strongest organic materials that nature produces. In laboratories, scientists harvest the threads and weave them into bulletproof vests. Thus, the web is an apt metaphor for the durable and protective community that emerges and spreads from the spinning of many individuals being reflective practitioners.

Figure 1.3 Visual Representation of the Relationship Web Among Staff Members, Strengthened by Reflective Practices



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WHO IS A REFLECTIVE EDUCATOR?

What does a reflective professional look like? We believe that person looks like or can look like any of us, perhaps, all of us. This is important because to be an effective professional is to be a reflective professional. One of the distinguishing characteristics of reflective educators is a high level of commitment to their own professional development (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). They are lifelong learners who have a sustained interest in learning. Inquiry, questioning, and discovery are norms embedded in their ways of thinking and practice. Their inquiry focuses not only on the effectiveness of their instruction or leadership but also, personally, on the underlying assumptions, biases, and values that they bring to the educational process. Reflective educators consider issues of justice, equity, and morality as they design and reflect on their practice. They create ways for students' cultures and voices to enter the classroom (Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2005). Their interest in learning is continually sparked by triggers of curiosity about some aspect of practice. Instead of blindly accepting or rejecting new information or ideas, they carefully examine, analyze, and reframe them in terms of specific context variables, previous experiences, and alignment with desired educational goals. They rely on both external knowledge from research and experts as well as internal knowledge from their own and colleagues' experiences. They are decision makers who develop thoughtful plans to move new understandings into action so that meaningful improvements result for students. These elements of reflective practice provide a lens into colleagues who are reflective.

The relationship of what we do and what we experience leads to the question of "How did each of us contribute to creating our current realities?" (Block, 2009). Our impact in the world and on the world is shaped by our identity (Forde, McMahon, McPhee, & Patrick, 2006). Every person is the creator of their world as well as a product of that world. Personal identity is the fusion of one's beliefs, values, attitudes, and understandings. It is strongly influenced by individual, racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences. Personal identity contributes significantly to the core of one's professional identity. In addition, professional identity develops overtime by our roles, education, experiences, and connections with professional groups.

Reflective educators recognize that much of the knowledge about effective practice is tacit, meaning that it is learned from experience within the practice context. To learn in and from dynamic, unpredictable, and sometimes ambiguous contexts, reflective educators are keenly aware of their surrounding context, are open to and seek feedback, and can effectively distill the information that should be considered in a reflective process (Bright, 1996). We offer the profile of a reflective educator as one who

- stays focused on education's central purpose: student learning and development;
- is committed to continuous improvement of practice;
- assumes responsibility for his or her own learning—now and lifelong;
- demonstrates awareness of self, others, and the surrounding context;
- develops the thinking skills for effective inquiry;
- takes action that aligns with new understandings;
- holds great leadership potential within a school community; and
- seeks to understand different types of knowledge, internally and externally generated.

Given prevailing school and societal norms that fly in the face of slowing down to think, question, and then demonstrate the courage and conviction to act, reflective practitioners represent a countercultural phenomenon. In effect, they can be considered “positive deviants.” Positive deviants are people whose behavior and practices lead to solutions to problems that others in the group who have access to exactly the same resources have not been able to solve. We want to identify these people because they provide demonstrable evidence that a solution for the problem exists within the community (Richardson, 2004). Reflective educators often serve as leaders, formal and informal, who attract others. In doing so, they influence practice beyond their immediate teaching domains. They attract others because they embody the profile characteristics listed above: a focus on student learning; the commitment, responsibility, awareness, thoughtfulness, thirst for inquiry; and finally an action-orientation. Given the importance of formal and informal leadership in schools, Chapter 3 focuses on core leadership practices for growing reflective practice.

Our list of reflective educator qualities also includes a valuing of different forms of knowledge. Distinctions have been made between reflective educators (or reflective practitioners) and experts, in terms of how knowledge is viewed, generated, and valued (Schön, 1987; Webb, 1995). In addition to the historical, political, and sociocultural knowledge bases that surround us and influence how we think and live (Kinchloe, 2004), generally speaking, there are two sources of knowledge that educators bring to bear on practice: externally generated knowledge and internally created knowledge. Externally generated knowledge comes by way of the research community and usually offers generalized findings, directions, and strategies to be considered by practice communities. Internally created knowledge comes by way of educators learning by reflecting on their practice and by customizing application of externally generated knowledge to unique contexts of practice, that is, specific schools, classes, and students. This is sometimes referred to as tacit or experiential knowledge (Schön, 1987).

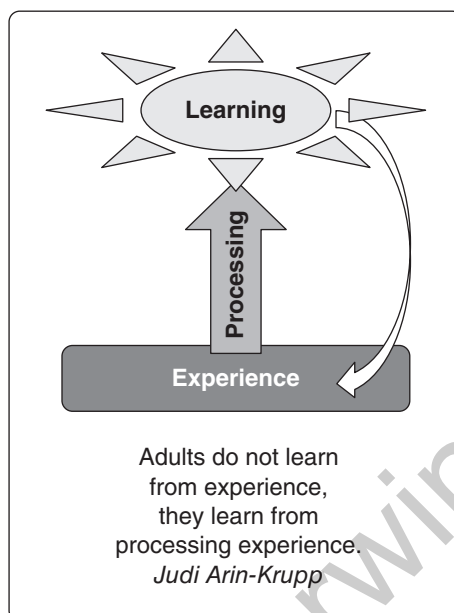
Reflective practitioners draw largely from an experiential or contextual knowledge base in which “it is impossible to disentangle knowing from doing” (Webb, 1995, p. 71). Content experts draw largely from a technical-rational knowledge base (Schön, 1983). They are masters of content, but may not have the practice background that generates tacit knowledge about how to apply, use, or teach content in the classroom. They can share research findings, but cannot necessarily model or demonstrate application in authentic settings. This perspective explains some of the disconnect that educators may sense when learning from experts of content who cannot make the application to the classroom context. It also speaks to the frustration or cynicism that can arise among practicing educators when content experts assume an easy transfer of technical-rational knowledge to contexts of practice.

For some aspects of practice, educators draw on a technical-rational knowledge base, such as disciplinary expertise. However, for many other aspects of daily practice, educators draw on their experientially and contextually derived knowledge from practice. It is unnecessary and perhaps even counterproductive to differentially or exclusively value one type of knowledge over others. It is the job of educators to adopt a reflective stance, to continually learn and expand their understanding and repertoire of practice. In doing so they realize a paradox—both humility and joy—vested in lifelong learning: “Significant learning generally involves fluctuating episodes of anxiety-producing self-scrutiny and energy-inducing leaps forward in ability and understanding” (Brookfield, 1992, p. 12). Such is the journey of a reflective educator.

CLOSING

Education is about learning—not only student learning, but also staff and school community learning. Learning is a function of reflection, as depicted in Figure 1.4. “Adults do not learn from experience, they learn from processing experience” (Arin-Krupp as cited in Garmston & Wellman, 1997, p. 1). Dewey asserted years ago that experience itself is not enough. Ten years of teaching can be ten years of learning from experience with continuous improvement, or it can be one year with no learning repeated ten times. Learning and improvement can no longer be optional. Reflection, therefore, must be at the center of individual and organizational renewal initiatives.

Reflective practice offers one powerful way for educators—individually and collectively—to stay challenged, effective, and alive in their work. When educators in a school join together to reflect and learn, they make a difference by harnessing the potential of their collective resources: diverse experience and expertise, shared purpose and responsibility for students, expanded understanding of students throughout the school, professional and social support, and hopefulness about meaningful and sustained improvement. Despite the hectic pace and the steady demands, increasing

Figure 1.4 Learning by Reflection on Experience

Source: Inspired by Judi Arin-Krupp.



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numbers of educators are making it a priority to create space in their professional lives to ground their reflection and learning, as well as to learn while flying. In doing so, they are being nurtured to grow and are expanding their repertoire of effective instructional practices. They are moving from a culture of doing to a culture of learning with doing.

In Chapter 2, we describe and offer examples of fundamental skills for learning reflective practices and growing reflective practice communities. In Chapter 3, we identify practices and offer examples for leading the development of reflective practices in schools and districts. Chapters 4 through 7 focus on specific considerations and strategies for advancing reflective practices at each level (e.g., individual, partner, small group or team, and school or districtwide) of the reflective practice spiral. In this edition we offer many new examples from practice that offer ways that many schools and educators are grounding the learning and development through intentionally designed learning structures and processes, tailoring their focus on the particular learning aims for students.

Peter Block (2002) shares, “the value of another’s experience is to give us hope, not to tell us how or whether to proceed” (p. 24). By offering examples from practice we hope to inspire ideas, energy, and action. We realize, however, that our examples cannot tell you how, specifically, to proceed in your particular place of practice. Gather with your colleagues, listen and learn from one another. You will figure out how to start. From there, your ongoing reflection on and for practice will guide your next moves forward. Hats off to you! Connect. Reflect. Learn. Grow. Get better. Celebrate. Renew.

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