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Reflection as the Key to Intuitive Knowing

In *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983), Schön introduced the idea of knowing-in-action or “*reflection-in-action*,” observing that “[w]hen we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions in everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know . . . [because it is] implicit in our patterns or action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing” (p. 49). According to Schön, knowing-in-action complements reflection.

“There is a puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As he tries to make sense of it, he also reflects on the understandings which have been implicit in his actions, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, restructures, and embodies in further action” (p. 50).

Kincheloe, Slattery, and Steinberg (2000) argue that observation and analysis of teaching practices, “*reflection-on-action*,” is essential to the success of the teaching-learning process. Research of teaching practices, through instructors’ explicit observations of their own practices and responses to their students, is a basic principle of good teaching; and, through observation of practice, instructors conceptualize their teaching and make connections to the social environment in which consciousness forms and meaningful learning takes place. Teaching journals and other forms of self-reflection generally fall into this category.

Numerous researchers (Conway, 2001; Hatton & Smith, 1994; Van Manen, 1995) have also pointed out that there is a third type of reflection, that of “examining something that one plans to do and using prior knowledge and experience to inform one’s future actions. Such reflection prior to action can be referred to as ‘*reflection-for-practice*’” (McKinster *et al.*, 2006) or *reflection-for-action*. Reflection in this sense does not refer solely to looking back in time, rather it refers to the recalling of related experiences that took place in the past as one anticipates or reflects upon future actions (Conway, 2001).

More than a century ago, Dewey (1902) pointed out that the instructors must determine the best methods for guiding students’ learning by (1) identifying practical experiences with respect to their discipline in order to connect the learner to the discipline; (2) knowing how to use those experiences; and (3) using discipline-based knowledge to identify students’ “needs and doings” (pp. 242-243). Although Dewey used the term “psychologizing” to describe this phenomenon, he understood that instructors must conduct research as they teach by collecting data on their students’ learning through “*reflection-in-action*” and “*reflection-on-action*” because they are the only ones in a position to see how to connect students’ prior experiences and interests with the central ideas and concepts of their disciplines. By collecting teaching-learning data in this way, and by making connections to students’ prior experiences, instructors can make better use of “*reflection-for-action*.”

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