

# Means for Facilitating Reflection

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This article is frankly a "how to" piece, intended to illustrate the use of various means for sparking, facilitating, and sustaining reflection at various levels and preparatory stages of professional practice. Application oriented though it may be, the presentation is conceptually grounded. My worst fear is that "reflection" and "reflective practice" may become only the latest in the casualty list of ideas with great potential that have been reduced to the level of tinkling jargon through uninformed use, primarily as symbolic smoke screens to convince our critics that we are working to make things better. If used in faddish or mandated ways without understanding and appreciation of the larger perspectives found in other articles in this issue, the means suggested here become mere gimmicks whose only potential is the further, unnecessary validation of Seymour Sarason's (1971) axiom that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

## Definitions

Reflection and reflective practice are defined variously in this journal and elsewhere. Hewson, Hewson and Jensen, working in medical education, accent "replaying' performances...for the purpose of articulating what is or was happening...making knowledge which is normally tacit more explicit" (1989, p. 4). MacKinnon, in a more restrictive view from teacher education, sees reflection as "a conceptual move," a shift from interpreting classroom events from a teacher or student teacher perspective to a pupil perspective, a "reconstruction of experience through which the teacher...begins to attend to features...previously ignored" (1989, p. 3). Hart emphasizes the "integration of knowledge with action through thought" (this issue), Schön's image is that of a "dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful" (1987, p. 31). Osterman

describes a "challenging, focused, and critical assessment of one's own behavior as a means toward the development of one's own craftsmanship."

For the purpose of this discussion, reflection is considered to be:

A cycle of paying deliberate, analytical attention to one's own actions in relation to intentions—as if from an external observer's perspective—for the purpose of expanding one's options and making decisions about improved ways of acting in the future, or in the midst of the action itself.

The distinction in the last phrase between future and present acknowledges Schön's (1983) important differentiation between reflection-on-action (reflection on a past event) and reflection-in-action (reflection in the midst of an ongoing action). The latter type is the more difficult to achieve, but the more powerful for improvement of practice because it results in "online" experiments to adjust and improve one's professional actions. It is more difficult to achieve because the actor must simultaneously attend to performing the action and observe and analyze his or her action, as if from an external perspective. Further, in reflection-in-action the actor is the sole collector of data on the event.

Reflection-on-action is accomplished "offline" at a time when full attention can be given to analysis and planning for the future without the imperative for immediate action. Further, though reflection is always self-analytical, when the focus is on a past event the actor may be aided by others who provide a facilitative structure, including the collection and presentation of data on the event under scrutiny. The great majority of attempts to teach and facilitate reflection concern reflection-on-

action. However, optimal professional performance assumes reflection-in-action. Those who work to facilitate reflection seem to assume that, with enough practice and consciousness, actors will be able to move themselves from reflection-on- to reflection-in-action. This assumption has yet to be tested.

### Characteristics of Means and their Applications

This article presents a sort of catalogue of means currently being used to facilitate reflection, and includes references to specific printed sources, programs, and individuals from which greater detail may be sought. The specific means and applications may be categorized on a number of overlapping sets of characteristics. The temporal dimension of present versus past focus has already been discussed. The medium dimension differentiates among the modalities used for collecting and presenting data for the reflective process. Media include writing, reading, observing and listening, talking, and electronic reproduction. The number dimension differentiates between reflective activities undertaken by individuals and groups. Though the majority of means are used with individuals, corporate reflection is both a possible and a potentially powerful means of improving professional practice. Locus of initiation is another dimension on which means and their uses vary. Some means are completely self-initiated, while others are suggested, structured and facilitated by external agents. The reality dimension differentiates between means which focus on events in actual professional practice that have real outcomes for both the practitioner and clients, and those which focus on contrived events such as simulations and role plays. Contrived settings are "safer" learning situations because they buffer both professionals and clients from real consequences, while the professional is in the awkward position of unlearning old and learning new ways of acting. But means that use contrived situations lack the complexity and importance of real professional events.

Osterman has more fully described the relationship between reflection and Kolb's (1984) four sequential stages of experiential learning: concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts or generalizations, and active experimentation. The means described here key in at different stages of the sequence. Some begin with reflection on prior experience, others begin with the generation of experience itself.

Finally, though not a dimension like the others, the examples I use are drawn from numerous fields and from various levels of professional practice: teacher

preparation, supervision and staff development, administrator preparation, medical and higher education.

## A Catalogue of Means

### WRITING

Writing is a powerful medium for learning, and a powerful means of facilitating reflection-on-action. Emig (1977) described the uniqueness of writing both as a language process and as a learning mode, by differentiating it from listening, talking, and reading. Writing is both process and product. As a learning activity it is simultaneously enactive (hand), iconic (eye), and symbolic (brain) in nature. Thus, both right and left sides of the brain are engaged in integrative reinforcement. Writing is self-produced feedback, available for immediate review and re-evaluation, and, because of its slower and self-regulating pace, it allows for a moving back and forth among past, present, and future. Writing, as a product, leaves a trail of the evolution of ideas as a form of long-term feedback. It is an active, engaging, and personal process.

Put in different terms, writing is often a reflective process in itself. We often pause, cycle back, reread and rethink the very descriptions and ideas we are in the process of formulating and inscribing. We also capture our thought processes in a product to which we can later return to reassess, search for options, and plan for the future. When writing is done by the one reflecting, it also provides a durable self-perspective on events that can then be compared with perspectives, generated in other ways on the same events.

### JOURNALS

Adaptable in form and purpose, journals as a means of learning and reflection have both a long history and a strong set of contemporary advocates (Fulwiler, 1987). Barnett and Brill (1989), for example, use two kinds of journals in their principal preparation program. The "daily" journal is a running account of important events and interactions of concern to people—administrators, teachers, students, and parents—in internship settings. This journal is used, in part, to help aspiring principals to acquire an administrative and leadership perspective on events as they seek to shift roles from teacher to principal. Interns chronicle what they "see" or attend to (and, by absence, what they don't see) as they go about learning activities. The daily journal is used extensively in teacher and administrator preparation, especially in conjunction with the clinical elements of student teaching and administrative internship. Data in these records are available for reflection in a wide variety of ways. The journalist may search for patterns and meaning alone, or

may be aided by outside readers such as fellow interns, mentors, or professors.

A "critical incident" journal is more focused and structured than the free flowing daily variety. Here, selected important experiences are documented in detail. Barnett and Brill provide their students with a common format: (1) a brief summary description, (2) important questions generated by the event, (3) a list of new jargon or concepts, (4) subjective reactions to the incident, (5) a description of what they learned and how it might alter their future responses (1989, p. 10). The reflective nature of this form of journal needs no elaboration.

Patricia Schmuck (1988) uses another variation called the "learning journal" in a preparatory program for school superintendents. This is a loosely structured journal for focusing thoughts about practice. She reads the contents periodically, and she expects them to provide the focus of some class discussions. Schmuck views these journals as "a particularly valuable reflective tool for students 'finding their voices'" (p. 11).

Another form of journal that I use in the classroom might be termed "stop action." Action is literally stopped at various points during role plays or simulations, and students are asked to reflect on what has just transpired, and to write notes to themselves. Prior to a role play, for example, they record their intentions for action, what they wish to accomplish and by what means. Often, at the conclusion of the role play and before discussion of any kind, we stop to jot reflections on behavior in relation to intention. Sometimes the reflection time is after discussion; sometimes it is both before and after discussion. The "stop action" form of journal "models" and legitimates time for reflection, making it as important as traditional sharing through discussion.

### CASE RECORDS

Building on earlier work by Silver (1986), Osterman, at The Silver Center for Reflective Principals, Hofstra University, uses case records as a means for improving the reflective capacity of elementary and secondary principals. Writing a case record is a structured activity to support reflection-on-action. Principals choose problematic situations, either resolved or still in process, and describe them on case record forms. The record includes responses to basic questions: What is the nature of the problem? What alternatives did you consider? What did you hope to accomplish? What action did you take? What were the results of your actions? How would you evaluate the process? In reviewing your actions, what are your reflections, insights or conclusions?

The basic reflective value of writing is incorporated in producing the case record. Once the record is completed, there are a number of further uses that may spur reflection. Records may be shared and discussed with other principals or used as a vehicles for reflection in administrative internships with mentors or professors. Sharing with others who are encountering the same general types of problems is especially powerful. Further, as the Silver Center collects and files case records from a national constituency, it will be possible for individuals to receive packages of records on the same issue. Multiple cases should expand the number of available alternative approaches for an individual to consider. The Silver Center has also received a grant to pilot a computer network to interconnect selected Long Island principals and the university. The written nature, of both the cases and other communications in response to them, results in products of a lasting nature which are available for a wider audience than typical phone conversations among administrators.

Though Osterman is concentrating on the principal's role and its associated problems, it is easy to adapt the case record to any role, for example, teacher, chairperson, college administrator. The case record approach might be thought of as a structured form of critical incident journal.

### CONTRIVED SITUATIONS

This group of means includes case studies, role plays, simulations, and such specialized applications as micro-teaching. All of these are contrived in the sense that they lack the major dimensions of real professional practice, typically real outcomes for the client, or real professional responsibility for the practitioner. They also vary along a dimension of thinking through doing. Case studies generally provide a basis for examining multiple options for behavior and stating what one "would do" or "wants to do" in the situation. Simulations, role plays, and micro-teaching require one to put the "want to dos" to some form of action test. All forms of contrived situations lack the complexity of actual practice situations; however, they do have the advantages of being flexible, adaptable to classroom and laboratory settings, and able to generate public data available to a whole group.

Case studies and simulations are available from a number of sources. For administrative preparation, the University Council for Educational Administration has sets of materials for various roles in several kinds of school districts. The Kennedy School of Management at Harvard has also developed a number of cases applicable to administrative preparation. Role plays may be run off these or similar materials by having them acted out

in class. The actual experiences of students also provide a rich and motivating basis for developing role plays. The case records previously described, for example, may be converted into role plays by simply using the statement of the problem and a bit of extended background material.

Contrived situations are not of themselves reflective vehicles. Some use them to demonstrate a one "right answer," others as opportunities to reflect. For reflective purposes these situations allow for generation of behavior, which the actor may then process either alone or with the support and help of others. I make broad use of contrived situations when working with students to test their educational and administrative platforms. What participants actually do in the simulations or role plays contains elements of their theory-in-use. They can then compare what they did to the espoused theory contained in the platform. As an instructor, I find it most important to provide a structure that facilitates feedback from other participants to the central actor. What the actor needs for reflection is descriptive reports of how his or her actions were experienced by others, the outcomes produced in others, and his or her intentions as the others experienced them. These are grist for reflection. Telling the actor how to behave differently destroys the possibility for reflection. The instructor has a very important role in guiding the use of contrived activities. Simply "throwing out" a case or role play for students "to kick around" is counterproductive to reflection, because the typical response is to tell the actor how to do it better.

Bruce Barnett, in an Indiana University principal preparation program, makes similar use of contrived situations (Barnett & Brill, 1989). In addition, he has students reflect upon and chart their behaviors relative to a set of skills that were advanced by the National Association of Secondary School Principals as criteria for identifying administrative candidates. This reflection provides aspirants with a comparison of their actions with the expectations advanced by their professional association. Discrepancies indicate areas for work. Barry Jentz, in workshops on "How to Tell People Things They Don't Want to Hear," videotapes short role plays.<sup>2</sup> The two-person contrived situations run for only thirty seconds to a minute, but provide powerful data for reflection by the participant and observers.

Donald Cruickshank at Ohio State University has, over the past ten or more years, developed a system of simulated teaching for the preservice education of teachers. Termed "reflective teaching," his goal is to prepare teachers who are "students" (1987). He divides classes

into groups of four to six with each individual playing, in rotation, the roles of teacher and learner/feedback agent. The designated teachers prepare and teach a 10- to 15-minute "common reflective -teaching lesson," knowing that the learner's achievement outcomes and satisfaction levels will be assessed on standard feedback instruments at the conclusion of the lesson. Achievement outcomes and satisfaction feedback are then shared in a small group discussion guided by structured questions. Sample questions include: What does the group believe contributed most to achievement and satisfaction? What does the group believe got in the way of achievement and satisfaction? What did you learn or recall about effective teaching and learning? After 15 minutes of discussion, the small groups are all brought together, and the instructor leads a cross-group discussion with questions eliciting descriptions, for example: What happened that facilitated learning and satisfaction? Students play the role of teacher at least once, and play that of learner several times. One cycle of reflective teaching takes from 60 to 75 minutes.

In research on this structure for developing reflection on teaching, students who were engaged in the process produced proportionately more analytical statements about teaching and learning than did a control group (Cruickshank, Kennedy, Williams, Holton, & Fay, 1981). The basic structure of Cruickshank's simulated activity has transfer potential to other areas, such as supervisory conferences and administrator meetings with parents.

#### **INSTRUMENT FEEDBACK**

Standard diagnostic, counseling, and even research instruments may be of tremendous value in sparking the "surprises" which lead to significant reflection, or in providing analytical categories for reflection on one's theory-in-use. I have found that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) provides broad, meaningful, and helpful feedback to students engaged in the platform writing and testing process. This instrument, based on Jungian concepts, provides information on how the individual tends to process information, focus attention, and come to decisions. Further, it focuses on an individual's strengths. It is used widely in counseling high school, liberal arts, theological, business, and nursing students, and for enhancing work groups in corporate, university, and social service agencies.

Since administrators work in ambiguous circumstances, I also use feedback from a tolerance/intolerance of ambiguity scale (Budner, 1962) to provide aspirants, or practicing administrators or supervisors, with data useful for reflecting on their actions and comfort levels in

various situations. Barnett and Brill (1989) use Kolb's (1985) Learning Style Inventory to give their principal-preparation students information about the particular stages of experiential learning they are most likely to employ. Cruickshank (1987) suggests using various classroom observation instruments (Simon & Boyer, 1967, 1969, 1970; Flanders, 1970) as aids to reflection for students in teacher preparation. These are but a few examples of instruments that are useful to facilitate individual reflection. At the corporate level, many of the survey feedback methods associated with organizational development may be used for group reflection. Schmuck and Runkels' *Handbook for Organizational Development in Schools* (1972) is an excellent source of such instruments.

### ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK

Tape and video recorders provide complete and replayable records of events for reflection-on-action. Although tape recorders are limited to audio data, they produce complete records that are inexpensive, readily available, relatively unobtrusive, and that can be operated by the individual seeking the data or by others. Audio tapes are easy to reproduce, take home, and can even be played while commuting to work.

Teachers at all levels may tape their classes, supervisors may tape their pre- and post-conferences, principals may tape their opening day speeches, and leaders may tape their meetings. In organizational development work, I have used tapes of meeting interactions both for my own reflection, and for that of individuals and groups. Others have used taped "self-talk" as "electronic journals," in ways similar to those outlined in a previous section. Though not as inherently reflective a means as writing, talking to yourself on tape makes explicit what might otherwise remain tacit.

Videotape is the most complete means available for capturing events for later reflection-on-action. The potential power of video as a reflective medium was illustrated by a conversation with a new graduate dean who had the familiar problem of a tenured, highly reputed faculty, many of whom taught miserably. He was able to convince a number of faculty members to be videotaped in the classroom, and promised that the tapes were for their eyes only. He kept his word. The simple act of observing their own teaching apparently raised sufficient dissonance between the way they thought of themselves as professors and what they saw, that it motivated some of them to improve. Student evaluations also indicated this improvement.

Allan MacKinnon (1989) described the use of video-

tapes of student groups engaged in science labs as a basis for student-teacher supervision in a reflective teaching practicum. In this case, his reflective goal was to make a "conceptual move" in the interpretation of classroom events, from a student-teacher perspective to a student perspective. The video data provided both the completeness and the replay capability that enabled the teachers to appreciate the 'reasonableness' of the pupils' ideas" (p. 3).

Marina Hewson et. al. (1989) used videotape as a major source of behavioral data to assist medical educators—attending physicians—reflect on their clinical teaching of residents. Staffing sessions in which the physician worked with residents were regularly taped. The physician also received resident feedback from a paper and pencil inventory on clinical teaching behaviors. From these data, the educational supervisor negotiated with the physician to concentrate on selected clinical teaching behaviors. The supervisor and physician then viewed the videotape together. The tape review was the process through which the physician was able to indicate dissatisfaction or "provocative dissonance" with his or her clinical teaching behavior. Reflection was facilitated, and with the help of the supervisor in the role of "coach," the physician could reframe the teaching event and make plans for improved practice. The three roles in the medical education illustration are parallel to standard supervisor, teacher, and student roles in K-12 education. Videotape is also frequently used in microteaching laboratories. One major difference between this and the medical example is that, in the former the tape is a "real" situation, whereas in microteaching the situation contains both real and contrived elements.

The field of clinical psychology has traditionally used videotapes of therapy sessions for reflection and improvement of practice. When tapes are viewed by a group, the emphasis is on reframing or reconceptualizing the problematic situation being observed, rather than on criticizing the actions of the practitioner. The description in the last article in this issue, of the power of videotape for moving a collaborative group forward with individual and corporate reflection, is a graphic and concrete example of the importance of moving this older tradition of learning and problem solving into education.

Though it produces rich and completely objective (or "nonfiltered") data, videotaping has drawbacks. Although the equipment is growing increasingly light and compact, it is still cumbersome compared to a small audio tape recorder. Its presence is more obtrusive, at least originally, and may affect behavior more than a

tape recorder. And if any focal movements are required, another person is needed to operate the equipment.

### **METAPHOR**

Metaphor is a human construction created as part of the fundamental drive to name, categorize, and give meaning to the events of life (Bowers, 1980). For teachers and administrators working in complex, pluralistic, and ambiguous work environments, metaphor is one means of creating and clarifying personal meaning amidst multiple values, claims, and pressures (Provenzo, McCloskey, Kottkamp, & Cohn, 1989). As such, metaphor is a powerful and flexible means for reflection.

Larry Wells, social studies teacher at Hillsboro High School, Missouri, developed the following extended metaphor in reflecting upon his teaching style and contrasting it with that of a colleague:

I have a colleague who teaches as though he's on the Delta Queen [a paddle wheel riverboat] and we're all sitting here on the Delta Queen. He's got a microphone in his hand, and he's talking about over here is this and over there is that, and everybody's just sitting there looking back and forth. When I think of myself, and I hope—you know I don't always do this—my kids are in the canoe, and they're coming down the stream, and we go along the routes where it's somewhat wavy, and we go along the rapids, and they turn over sometimes. You've got to let them turn over and get wet and paddle back upstream sometimes, go back through a little obstacle here, but along the way, they're going to experience that river so much more than somebody who's on the Delta Queen, who's just listening (Cohn, Kottkamp & Provenzo, 1987, p. 135).

Wells' metaphor helps him to categorize and attach meaning to his particular style and intent in teaching, and to contrast it with the other styles and intentions which some of his colleagues pursue. It also provides him with a basis to reflect on whether his teaching behavior has been congruent with his intention in a particular lesson. In describing his metaphor we also see an instance of reflection-in-action. When he stated, "you know I don't always do this," he is showing awareness of the discrepancies between some of his teaching and his intentions. Though elicited through an interview, Wells' metaphor was self-initiated. Supervisors of student teachers, inservice teachers, or administrative interns might also ask their supervisees to develop their own

general metaphors of teaching or administration, or metaphors for particular lessons or administrative acts.

Several years ago, I asked a doctoral student whom I believed to be an effective high school principal whether he used any metaphors to guide his work. "Yes," he responded enthusiastically, "I am Captain Kirk of the Starship Enterprise!" He went on to unpack his meanings taken from the metaphor. Like the Captain, he was ultimately and completely responsible for the overall safety, welfare, and achievements of his organization. Like Kirk with his crew of Scotty, Mr. Spock and others, he too had a number of competent and motivated teachers, administrators, and non-certified personnel—all specialists in one work area or another—on whom he could rely for the specifics of task accomplishment, but it was his responsibility to keep them all working within the larger picture and design of the Enterprise. He alone was responsible for communicating the vision of that mission to the adults and students, and for seeing that the school was moving toward the mission in a balanced way.

For this principal, the Captain Kirk metaphor was a highly packed, shorthand set of meanings about his work. His metaphor was a basis for reflection. It was a readily available image, useful in maintaining balance and purposeful direction in the daily fray of administration, the activities of which are frequently characterized in terms of brevity, variety, and fragmentation (Peterson, 1977).

Reflecting on the metaphor helped him to "keep his head straight" when he was deciding whether to delegate a task or do it himself, when weighing organizational versus individual interest or welfare, and when deciding what the "big issues" worthy of greater reflection are, among the myriad issues presenting themselves to him in the course of the day. The metaphor was his, nor something imposed externally. Its creation and elaboration no doubt arose from a series of reflective acts, and it provided him with a basis for continuing acts of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

Several other examples suggest how external agents may help actors to create metaphors as a means to initiate and continue reflection. Helen B. Regan (1989) reports using metaphor during a trust building session on a project in which she was attempting to gain commitment from several schools to join a year-long teacher-principal collaborative leadership project. She asked each participant to describe a metaphor for his or her school. The metaphors of two principals were offered as examples:

My school is a hot air balloon concealed in a large box with an open top. It is actually quite colorful, but no one can see that because of the box. The balloon is not tethered, but it does not take off because the basket is filled with bricks. I see myself having just scrambled on board and struggling to throw out the bricks. I want the balloon to take off so everyone can appreciate the beauty of its colors, but the bricks are very heavy. I'm going to have a hard time throwing them out myself.

My school is an exuberant marching band. It's playing enthusiastically and marching off up a hill. Everyone has on a colorful uniform. But the uniforms are a little askew and the players are not all together. I'm up on the hill watching and I can't decide what to do. If I'm the band leader maybe I should get out in front and set the tempo and the direction for the march. But I can't see them when I'm in front, and I worry that I'll lose touch with their talent and enthusiasm. Maybe I could be more effective coordinating things from the top of the hill, but I'm not sure how to get my message across from that spot (Regan, 1989, pp. 5-6).

The Captain Kirk, hot air balloon, and marching band metaphors are all from high school principals, but they might just as easily have come from elementary teachers or university department chairpersons. In fact, though she does not describe them, Regan had each of the six or seven teachers who accompanied the principals produce their own metaphors for the school. Considered privately, each metaphor contains tremendous potential to spark and continue reflection, but shared publicly the various metaphors, with her rich and multiple images for the same school, provide both a powerful and motivating basis for corporate reflection, and a potential for investigating and initiating collaborative leadership and decision making. Consider the possibilities, for instance, of requesting each member of an elementary, secondary, or university department to bring a metaphor of the group to its next meeting as a spark for reflection about goals, or new directions, or improved processes of working together.

Gray and Deal (1982) recorded yet another use of metaphor to spark reflection in a corporate setting. In this case, the goal was the initiation of school improvement projects in several South Bronx elementary schools. As external organizational development agents, Gray and Deal wanted to move the schools to a position of being self-critical and self-developing organizations.

Their primary means for the development process was metaphor, in this instance, the telling of multiple stories from the perspectives of many roles—principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, and students. Through a structured process of telling and listening to the specific metaphors in various stories (e.g. “our collective experience is like that of a tribe of wanderers lost in a deep jungle where a few have survival skills and many are near panic” and “our collective experience reminds me of an orchestra with no string section and two trumpeters plotting to destroy the conductor” (Gray and Deal, 1982, p. 7), the various role groups in the two schools began to forge a “functional we.” The functional we is the analog of the “I” in personality structure; it is a set of meanings shared by all groups, in a developing community of perspective and interest, rather than in isolated role groups with their own dissimilar and conflict-laden stories. The functional we is forged through the process of reflecting on multiple metaphors, and it becomes “a self-conscious place from which action is contemplated and initiated” (Gray & Deal, 1982, p. 5). In one school the functional we emerged easily; in the other it was a struggle. In the second case, the group struggle finally produced a metaphor of the school as “centerless.” In reflecting on the metaphor, someone finally blurted out: “The principal doesn't lead!” The taboo was broken. The principal indicated a reluctance to dominate, and had no idea that they perceived this as a leadership vacuum; he expressed willingness to reexamine his leadership style. Silence turned to energy, and the process of developing common meaning began in earnest.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1977) argues that metaphor enables an individual to describe discrepancies between the experienced and the expected, to make explicit the pluralistic meanings and values in a situation, and to create new understandings in that situation. All three attributes of metaphor make it a powerful, flexible, and useful means for reflection among professional practitioners. Educators seem to use a profusion of metaphors (see for example, Provenzo, et. al., 1989). They are ready grist for reflection, when we consciously attend to our own creations. And in the role of facilitator of reflection for others, metaphor is a means readily available.

### PLATFORMS

Writing and testing an educational or administrative platform is a process drawn directly from Argyris and Schön's *Theory in Practice* (1974). Some conceptual background is needed before describing a platform development process. Argyris and Schön differentiate between an actor's “espoused theory” and an actor's

"theory-in-use." The espoused theory contains the beliefs, values, and assumptions concerning action that he or she can make explicit. It is a public statement of intention. The theory-in-use, on the other hand, is a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that actually guides observable action. It is often tacit; that is, the actor is often unable to state explicitly the beliefs, values, and assumptions underlying his or her actual behavior, even though this underlying theory-in-use results in relatively consistent behavior. The relationship between espoused theory and theory-in-use is the relationship between a stated intention and an action's result. Intention and action may be either congruous or incongruous. Awareness of incongruity between what an individual espouses and what he or she does is one of the strongest motivations for personal change (Zaltman, Florio, & Sikorski, 1977). In order to release the potential for change inherent in the realization of a discrepancy between one's intent and result, the tacit aspects of the theory-in-use must be made explicit. It is here that reflection enters. Through reflection on such discrepancies, and with the help of others supplying data and feedback, it is possible to move the theory-in-action from the tacit to the explicit realm. Only when that which actually guides an actor's behavior is made explicitly available to him or her is there potential for behavioral change.

A platform is one's espoused theory, one's stated beliefs and assumptions for guiding professional practice, or more colloquially, one's philosophy of education or administration (Kottkamp, 1982; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983). Writing a platform engages the author in a reflective process. In my experience, few teachers or administrators, even those with many years of practice, have ever put themselves through the disciplined and difficult process of reflecting upon and recording the assumptions and beliefs that guide their professional intentions. If taken seriously, writing a platform is tough, but rewarding, work.

Experienced professionals, in my experience, often feel a great sense of inadequacy, embarrassment, confusion, or other negative emotional states. They often request a structure to facilitate their struggles to think and write. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983) suggested ten educational issues to be addressed in a platform, for example: the aims of education, the image of the learner, the value of the curriculum, the image of the teacher, and the preferred teacher-student relationship. For supervisors, they suggested two additional issues: the purpose of supervision, and the preferred process of supervision. Barnett and Brill (1989) in their work with aspiring principals suggested that administrative platforms be written in

relationship to seven elements of an instructional leadership model (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982): personal, district, and external characteristics, principal management behavior, school climate, instructional organization, and student learning. My own preference is to suggest possible issues as a provisional structure, but also to encourage students to develop platforms that authentically represent themselves, rather than having them adhere to a particular theory or authority. I usually have students write both a preliminary platform and then a revised version. Many stay close to a model like Sergiovanni and Starratt's in the initial attempt, but produce more personal and honest statements in the revision. If the platform is to be tested for discrepancies with actual performance, it is important that it truly represent the individual, including both the major issues focused upon and those ignored.

Platform writing is facilitated by structuring time for students to discuss in small groups their feelings, states, as well as the content of their work. (The incredible power of emotions unleashed during the analytic examination of one's professional activity is vividly described by Teresa Curtis and Kathryn Zietlow in the last article of this issue.) Once their platforms are written, I ask them to respond to the work of the others in their group, according to a tight structure. First, they look for internal logical consistency and inconsistency among the parts. Second, they state any assumptions which seem to underlie the platform, or its parts, which the author has not explicitly identified. As instructor, I do not grade them, but I respond to all platforms according to exactly the same criteria. The point of the feedback is to provide each individual with information that is useful for and likely to help trigger reflection about the platform. All responses are to be descriptive rather than judgmental—a point discussed at length at the end of this article. When students want to praise, argue with, or give advice to a colleague, they are asked to stifle the urge to do so. Rather, I ask them to use their desire to criticize and advise as information to reflect about themselves. Judgments they make about others—if viewed as mirrors—are really statements about their own beliefs, values and assumptions. They are requested to record these stifled judgments in their own journals as grist for their own reflection. Students find that remaining descriptive is very difficult, they gain insight when they have managed to do it.

Once the platform is formulated, even in a preliminary stage, it may become a vehicle for reflection on the congruity or incongruity between espoused theory and theory-in-use, between intention and action, or between what I say and what I do." What is required for this



stage of reflection is a number of "tests," that is, segments of professional action which can be compared with the platform. These tests may be generated in a wide variety of ways. They can come from actual daily practice, events in an internship, behavior in a small group during class, or contrived situations like role plays. Reflection on intention/action or platform/behavior relationships may be greatly facilitated by descriptive data from external sources. Such sources include electronically reproduced playbacks of events, structured feedback in the form of instruments, and the many varieties of feedback from other persons who witness or feel the effects of the action, such as role play participants, mentors, internship supervisors, and reflective interviewers. When the source of feedback is another human being, it is difficult, but important, to remain descriptive. After a role play, for example, the important information needed by the central actor to spark reflection often includes descriptions of what others perceived the outcome to be and descriptions of their emotional states during and after the events. This is the kind of information the actor needs to make a self-assessment about whether the intent of the action was accomplished, and if not, why. What actors do not need from others—role play participants or omniscient instructors—is advice. Advice, judgment, so-called constructive criticism, and praise all inhibit reflection, as will be explained below.

The platform writing and testing sequence may be used broadly, and in imaginative ways. Several of my former administrative students have adapted these ideas as a basis for supervising new teachers. Novices write platforms, which are then tested through frequent and complete cycles of clinical supervision. Others, as chairpersons, encouraged department members to write and to share platforms as a means of working toward better definition of the department's goals and vision. In all such cases, collaborative action was a goal and the former student initiated work with subordinates or colleagues by openly sharing his or her platform first.

#### **SHADOWING AND REFLECTIVE INTERVIEWING**

Shadowing and reflective interviewing are a pair of means for encouraging reflection among practicing administrators developed by Bruce Barnett and his colleagues at the Far West Laboratory. These processes emerged from research that was conducted on the instructional management of principals, (Dwyer, Lee, Rowan, & Bossert, 1983) in which the subjects of the research reported that they liked being followed around and later interviewed by the researchers, because it reduced their sense of isolation, gave them someone

with whom to discuss their daily work, and helped them to think about their own actions. Shadowing and reflective interviewing were then developed as central components of the Lab's peer-assisted leadership (PAL) Program (Barnett, 1985, 1987).

Shadowing and reflective interviewing were developed for pairs of practicing principals. But, when Barnett moved to a university position, he adapted the process to pairs of mentors and principal-preparation students (Barnett & Brill, 1989). Shadowing consists of one of the members following the other through at least four hours of typical administrative practice. The shadower takes accurate, specific, and descriptive notes. Later, the shadower conducts a reflective interview of at least one hour by asking questions based on the data recorded during the shadowing. The purpose of the interview is to help clarify the intent, meaning, and outcomes of the partner's actions. The partners then switch roles; the shadower is shadowed, and then interviewed.

The process sounds easy, but the skills, orientations, beliefs, and level of trust necessary for the process to yield worthwhile results takes considerable time and concentrated effort. In the original format, the principal pairs went through six full-day workshops spaced at six-week intervals. However, the process is reported to facilitate reflection in both roles. The one being shadowed receives release from isolation, descriptive data on his or her actions, and non-threatening questions designed to spark reflection. The shadowing partner receives release from isolation, and the opportunity to observe a peer in action over a prolonged period. The recording and reviewing of data to develop interview questions, as well as the interview process itself, also sparks reflection for the shadower (Barnett, 1987).

In the original PAL program, the partners went on to additional stages of work. Each learned to cluster shadowing data by themes, and from these they constructed a model of observed professional practice for the partner. Though Barnett's original work did not include platform writing and testing, it is easy to see the parallel between the models of practice presented to partners and the depictions of theory-in-use as constructed over considerable observation time by a trusted and helpful outside agent.

#### **MIXES AND MATCHES**

Although presented as relatively distinct, the various means for reflection may be, and have been, combined to increase and reinforce their individual values. Hewson and colleagues (1989), in helping attending physicians to reflect upon their clinical teaching, com-

bined feedback from a standard instrument on clinical teaching, videotape of the teaching, and a process similar to reflective interviewing. Videotaping, rather than human observing and describing, is used as a means of data. In the medical education situation, videotape may be used because the subject is relatively stationary. But videotape is not well suited to gathering data on the "on the go" practice of principals, hence the utility of shadowing.

My work with platforms incorporates journals, contrived situations, case records, and instrument feedback. Barnett and Brill (1989), in a recently developed principal-preparation program at Indiana University, combined PAL shadowing and reflective interviewing processes with simulations, journal writing, a framework of instructional leadership, and platform development in the context of a cohort of students who remain together for their entire preparation program. The possibilities of combining and interweaving means of facilitating reflection are limited only by imagination.

### **A Caution on Helping Others to Reflect**

All approaches to reflection as a vehicle for improving professional practice are based on a typically unstated assumption: The practitioner is in total control of deciding whether to reflect, and, as a result, whether and how to change his or her practice. We cannot reflect for anyone else. We cannot force anyone else to change behavior through reflection. Thus, although reflection is a powerful means for improving the practice of those who desire to do so, it is not a panacea. We cannot use it to change the recalcitrant, the malicious, the unmotivated, or those who have given up all hope.

Having made clear the assumption about locus of control over reflection itself, it is still true that, in many of the applications discussed in this article, another person helps the one who reflects by setting conditions or structure and by providing data necessary for reflection-on-action to occur. This external helping relationship is, for example, almost universally the case in teacher and administrator preparation programs. As helpers and data providers we can never guarantee that reflection will occur, but it is almost certain that we can prevent it from occurring. How we "help" conditions whether or not we really do help.

Communication is the central issue in helping. The principle is simple. We must communicate using descriptions and refrain from using prescriptions. But actually doing this is very difficult, and, for most of us it requires a great deal of reflection-on- and

reflection-in-action.

Descriptions are communications that carry messages of fact. They are about what "is" or "was." Though not always completely "scientific," a descriptive communication contains a message that most reasonable people could come to consensus about. In transactional analysis terms, descriptions are "adult messages" (Berne, 1964). The ultimate in useful, descriptive messages for reflection are video or audio tape recordings. These are objective records of actions in replayable form. They are not filtered by human beings. However, once we begin to talk about the tape with the one attempting to reflect, we can either communicate descriptively or lapse into prescriptive communication.

Prescriptions are communications that carry messages of evaluation. They can be straightforward evaluations in the form of judgments of good or bad, beautiful or ugly, excellent or poor, right or wrong. They can be slightly more oblique evaluations, in the form of "you should..." or "you ought to..." In transactional analysis terms, these are "critical parent messages" (Berne, 1964). Prescriptions can also be evaluative messages containing untested assumptions about the motivation of another person, for example, "You were making excuses to the student about..." In all cases the sender of the prescription is deciding something for or about the receiver. The prescriber is in one form or another taking a superior stance, telling the other what to do, taking the responsibility for creating meaning, and deciding on behavior change for the actor.

Prescriptions result in "defensive communication" (Gibb, 1961), and a reduction in trust and openness. They are heard as: "Defend yourself!" On receiving a prescription, the listener stops listening, stops attending to data such as a videotape, and prepares a retort of defense. For example, "You ought to..." typically elicits the response, "But you don't understand. If you were in this situation..." "You were making excuses..." may elicit result, "I wasn't making excuses..." When in fact, the person may have been making excuses. But, in reflection a self-made conclusion to that effect is required. If the external "helper" makes the conclusion and presents it prescriptively, the possibility of the actor reaching that conclusion him or herself all but evaporates. The result is the same even when the prescription is "positive," as is forcefully illustrated by Teresa Curtis in the last article of this issue. In explaining why she was able to change her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors through a collaborative reflection project, she cites the noncritical, non-judgmental climate established. She concludes: "But we were also not praised. We really had

to draw on what we believed in individually and to make decisions. It had to come from within" (emphasis added). Prescription of any kind, even the positive sort, stops reflection and absolves the actor of responsibility.

The descriptive versus prescriptive issue is well illustrated in the history of clinical supervision. As originally conceptualized, clinical supervision is a premier opportunity for reflection. In the pre-conference the teacher and supervisor decide on the focus; that is, they decide what kind of data the supervisor is to collect. In the post-conference the supervisor presents data; that is, he describes to the teacher what was seen, so that he or she may come to conclusions about what happened and what to do about it. Prescription plays little or no role in the process. As practiced, "clinical supervision" bears little resemblance to the original ideas. The pre-conference is often not held; instead, the supervisor makes a unilateral evaluation about what is important to examine. Further, the post-conference frequently consists entirely of prescription, and, even where description is included, prescriptions must be delivered in the end, because of state or district mandates. Evaluation, which is what "clinical" has become, almost completely precludes the probability of real reflection on practice. The teacher simply doesn't listen, much less reflect.

The dominant and persistent use of prescriptive language by supervisors has been documented. It has also been shown that supervisors can learn to become more descriptive, but it is a process that requires months of concentrated work—not a one day shot (Johnston, 1985). The problem appears to be at least two-fold. First, we are so practiced in delivering prescriptions in our roles as teachers, administrators, professors, and parents, and so supported in our belief that this is what we are supposed to do, that we literally lack another image of how we might behave. Second, to suspend prescribing is to give up the assumption that others will change because we tell them to, and to adopt the assumption that real change is controlled by the one acting.

This description "stuff" is tough to accept and tougher to act on. When I work with students in the platform sequence, we spend more time on providing descriptive feedback than any other single issue. It is tough to learn to be a mirror for someone else, when we are so used to being the authority and the one with answers. It is tough, but it is central to establishing the kind of caring, collaborative, open, trusting, participatory setting described by Osterman as essential to nourishing reflective practice.

## NOTES

1. Detail concerning case records, the newsletter *Praxis*, and the work of the Silver Center for Reflective Principals may be obtained from Dr. Karen Osterman, Director, The Silver Center for Reflective Principals, Hofstra University, School of Education, Hempstead, NY 11550.

2. Detail on this workshop and related issues may be obtained from Barry Jentz, Leadership and Learning, Inc., 99 School Street, Weston, MA 02193

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