

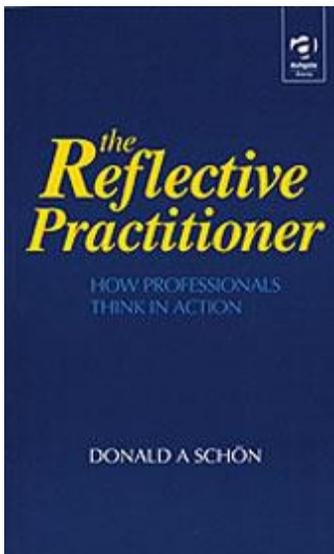
# Donald Schon's Presentation 1987: "Educating the Reflective Practitioner"

## Donald Alan Schon (1930-1997)



- *Trained as a Philosopher*
- *Was an Accomplished Jazz and Chamber Musician*
- *Played Piano and Clarinet*
- *Academic writing was reflective musical structures/improvisations*
- *3 key elements of thinking included:*
  - *Exploring Learning Systems*
  - *Double-Loop and Organizational Learning*
  - *Relationship of reflection-in-action to professional activity*
- *First book did not deal with Education instead looked at reflective practices of Professionals.*

## Article Context: American Educational Research Association



- *This is not in fact an academic article: Instead it is the transcript for a talk he gave to the American Educational Research Association Washington, DC.*
- *It may seem slightly confusing and out of context because many of the professionals referred to were in the audience and did not require any additional background or introduction.*
- *This presentation/article was written at a time where there was a "Crisis of Professional Confidence"*
- *Professionals in many recognized fields were starting to question their level of authority and there was a perceived division between theory and practice.*
- *Society had developed a dependency on all forms of professionals to act as social decision makers.*
- *Schon originally wrote his book to help professionals incorporate important information and increase confidence provide missing gap for confidence and helping professionals feel at ease with their position*

## Questions and Considerations Based on the Article

1. *Let's consider the first example given by Schon, this is the two boys playing with the blocks and trying to create the patterns based on the others instructions. Many of the teacher's who originally viewed the situation were very quick to assume there was a "problem" with the boy who **could not** follow instructions*
  - a. *What do you consider to be "junk categories" and how can teachers avoid unnecessary categorization*
  - b. *School knowledge as a molecular product (4 different views on molecular products)*
  - c. *What is the difference between school knowledge and reflection in action (transferability of knowledge)*
2. *In our modern and changing society the expectations placed on educators are perpetually changing. We are asked to be the coach, moral compass, peacemaker and guidance councilor just to name a few... oh yah and by the way we still have to teach the curriculum. Based on what we have experienced, our own personal reflections and Donald's Schons view of the reflective practitioner what do we feel is the most important parameters of our role as teacher?*
3. *Dr. Schon spends a lot of time in his writing speaking about Reflection in Action (perceiving and making course corrections while still inside the situation) vs. Reflection on Reflection in Action (The intellectual debrief that we all engage in subsequent to experiences). By understanding the difference between these two sets of skills how can we better utilize them in our own practice?*
4. *About mid way though the article Schon shares with us an experiment completed by Vgotsky. Peasants were asked to categorize 3 of 4 together and provide a justification for their decision. The choices were: Hammer, a Log, Ax and Saw. The peasants coming from experience identified firewood and eliminated the hammer; however the educated person eliminated the log and saw the overall useful category of "tools".*
  - a. *Schon uses this example to illustrate "school knowledge"; the idea that higher education is made up of general open ended and theoretical thinking. How can we educate our students without in essence sanitizing them of opinion and experiences?*
  - b. *What valued lessons can we take away/what can we do in our own classrooms to help our students "use tools" vs. just "creating firewood".*
5. *Dr. Schon speaks at lengths about the role of "The Coach".*
  - a. *What would it mean to educate teachers to teach reflectively and apply knowledge in action to teaching kids?*
  - b. *Describe or try to image a classroom where students were taught by a teacher who applied knowledge in action, how would it look?*
  - c. *What is the difference between the knowledge in action model and where we are now? How do we get from here to there?*
6. *Twinkle, Twinkle little star was big part of the way that Dr. Schon helped describe and bring understanding to the idea of naming and giving a title to knowledge (quantifying/Concrete practice)*

- a. What does it mean to encourage and force learning of skills before applying theory to knowledge?
  - b. Can you think of examples where you already teach a skill prior to naming it (such as learning the sounds of notes before learning the names)?
  - c. Are there any other areas, now you know and understand this concept that you would be able to apply this type of thinking?
7. In today's society kids are afraid of the prospect of failure. As teachers we know that failure is part of the learning process and a safe and healthy way to learn and develop.
- a. How can we reduce the level of defensiveness within the classroom and allow students to lower learning defenses in exchange for knowledge acquisition
  - b. Based on knowledge of the current situations and reflections of the past what can we perceive the long-term outcome will be for these students later as adults if they do not embrace "failure" in their formative years?
8. Schon's theories tend to be very resource intensive especially when it comes to the about of time required to spend on each individual student in order to glean the most successful and meaningful results.
- a. Is it possible for a teacher with 20-30 students in their class to truly apply Schon's theories to teaching?
  - b. What are some small things we can try? Or is it even worth it to try when mastery cannot be accomplished (essential: are we better to focus our efforts elsewhere?)

### BONUS: Depending on Time –

- Below is a model based almost exclusively on Schon's research on reflective practices created by the University on Indiana.
  - What comes to mind when you see this chart and study the ways one category translates into the next.
  - Is this model an accurate representation of your own knowledge/reflection/classroom practices?

