

here to draw from work on agency coalitions, for example, Stevenson, Mitchell and Florin, 1996). Rejection of sentimentality, however, does not require abandonment of the project.

Acknowledgement

John Stevenson, University of Rhode Island, for first making me aware of important parts of this literature.

Notes

- 1 The characteristics of learning organizations are detailed in other chapters of this book. See, for example, Gould's introductory account of the emergence of the concept.
- 2 The National Science Foundation (NSF) represents the American scientific community. It is one of the most prestigious agencies in Washington, and its director reports directly to the President' (House, Haug and Norris, 1996: 137).
- 3 For a useful and frequently cited discussion of the purposes of evaluation, see Chelmsky (1997). I would add to her list, 'Evaluation for justice' (cf. Shaw, 1999, ch. 1).
- 4 We have already noted, however, Stockdill et al.'s concern about the discrepancy between what funders say they want and the criteria they subsequently use to assess evaluation reports. I have been on the receiving end, for example, of criticism by the funders of an evaluation project funded to assess agency learning and justice issues, on the grounds of failing to test outcome hypotheses.
- 5 For a fuller outline of the development and significance of the enlightenment argument about evaluation use see Shaw (1999: 28-30, 73-4, 92-5, 119).
- 6 Community-based health programmes are one example in the health field (for example, Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone (1998). In Britain, the Economic and Social Research Council has invested heavily in the Research Capacity Building Network for teachers (see <http://www.alrp.org/> and <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsci/capacity/>).
- 7 See Shaw and Gould (2001: 172-3) for an appraisal of strong insider positions in social work.
- 8 This estimate is taken from a preliminary screening audit of practitioner research in South-East Wales, undertaken in 2002.
- 9 I am indebted to Knud Raminan's private communication at the 2002 'Evaluation for Practice' conference in Tampere (Finland) and for our workshop collaboration.
- 10 Kirk and Reid develop a corresponding logic in their critique of science and social work practice in the USA (Kirk and Reid, 2002)

Chapter 9

Reflecting on Practice: Exploring Individual and Organizational Learning through a Reflective Teaching Model¹

Bairbre Redmond

The degree of effectiveness with which the needs of service users in health and social care are met relies on the ability of individual professionals to recognize, understand and respond to the unique requirements of each service user. Good service delivery also depends on how well employing organizations can encourage and support their practitioners to work in partnership with service users. This chapter examines how, using a reflective training approach, a group of practitioners in the intellectual disability services explored not only their own attitudes to service users, but also how well their different employing agencies functioned as learning organizations, displaying capabilities of changing and responding to service user need. Most importantly, this chapter looks at how individual learning can become a catalyst for wider organizational learning, with practitioners importing new, reflective approaches back into their service agency in a way that can encourage organizational learning.

For the past 20 years the concept of reflective practice (Schön 1983; 1987) has been suggested as a concept that would allow social workers and other practitioners to move beyond inflexible practice guidelines and fixed competencies towards more responsive and thoughtful practice with their service users. Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985: 3) described reflection as 'a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understanding and appreciation'. Mezirow (1991: 104) considered reflection to be the process by which we 'critically assess the content, process or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience'. Agyris and Schön (1976; 1997), both eminent reflective writers, were also some of the first theoreticians in the area of learning organizations. They proposed that, just as individual reflective practitioners had to learn to question and change their tacit and habitual practice responses, so the learning organization had to be able to review its values, norms and practices in order to restructure its strategies and assumptions in a healthy new way (Coulshed and Mullender, 2001).

Background to the Research

Parents of children with a disability frequently report difficulties in being understood and appreciated by the professionals whom they encounter and of being poorly or insensitively treated by service organizations (Dale, 1996; Read, 2000; Redmond, 1996). As a social worker in the field of intellectual disability and, more recently, as a university-based academic researching in the area, the discontinuity between the needs of family carers and many of the professional and organizational responses offered to them had become depressingly familiar to me (Redmond, 1996; 1997). While much of the literature had previously focused on the pathological problems thought to be inevitably associated with families who had children with a disability, I became more interested in the apparent breakdown in communication between professionals and parents and between parents and service agencies. I also wanted to find ways of encouraging practitioners to re-examine some of their unconscious or tacit beliefs about parents that undermined their practice. I hoped that, by acknowledging and challenging some of the underlying individual and organizational attitudes towards parents, practitioners might find it easier to appreciate the unique concerns and expectations of individual parents about their children and thus become motivated to alter their practice in order to incorporate such new perspectives.

This led me to examine some general theories of reflection and to consider how the adoption of a reflective stance might assist practitioners in developing more thoughtful and multidimensional perspectives of their clients. In particular I became drawn to the work of Donald Schön (1983; 1987; 1991) and his collaborative work with Chris Argyris and Schön, 1974; 1996) which was concerned with developing a concept of reflective practice in order to encourage professionals to adopt a less 'expert' stance with their clients. Schön (1983; 29) claimed that professionals who were capable of adopting such a reflective approach in their work would, among other things, be more responsive to the needs of their clients. He saw the reflective practitioner as being capable of appreciating the uniqueness of the individual client situation and that the working contract forged between client and reflective professional would be marked by accountability, flexibility and accessibility. Importantly, Argyris and Schön also saw reflective change going beyond the scope of the individual practitioner and they considered reflection to be an essential component of a learning organization. Senge (1990a) described such an organization as one where individuals expand their capacity to produce the results they wish to achieve, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are encouraged and where people can learn together.

At the core of my research was the design and implementation of a new reflective model of teaching and learning which I used with a multidisciplinary group of practitioners in a reflective practicum – a university-based learning environment. Over a six-month period, using an action research approach, I applied this reflective model with a group of $N = 19$ practitioners who were working in the area of intellectual disability and who were also attending a part-time postgraduate course in intellectual disability studies. These practitioners, who were from different professional backgrounds (including social work, nursing, psychology, teaching and

medicine), initially examined their existing perceptions of the parents with whom they worked. Through the model's increasingly complex teaching and learning approaches, these practitioners were then encouraged to re-examine some of their perspectives on those with whom they worked and to explore, attempt and critically analyse more reflective and responsive ways of working.

Schön (1983; 1987) hypothesized that, if practitioners begin to reflect upon their practice they can then use the knowledge gained from that reflection to develop and improve their practice, making it more responsive to their clients' needs. Simply put, once practitioners begin to think about what they are doing, they are less likely to produce habitual professional responses that may have little to do with their clients' unique and complex needs. Part of such a reflective insight also incorporates how one's professional practice is framed by organization factors that help or hinder positive change and learning in practice. Just as the individual practitioner, through reflection, can learn how to respond more creatively to client need, so too does the organization need to reflect on its tacit routines and procedures that may hinder the development of effective, responsive practice.

Barriers to Change in the Learning Organization

It is important to note that this research was primarily concerned with the analysis of critical change in individual learners in a reflective teaching and training environment, and it was not specifically designed to address organizational problems. If it had been, it could also have been sited within an organization, rather than the more remote university environment. However, the impact of organizational function on individual change became a frequently mentioned issue by the practitioners in the research. This chapter looks specifically at these organizational learning aspects – how individual practitioners saw their work as being constrained or liberated by the organization in which they worked. It also explores how the practitioners used the university-based classroom as a base from which to attempt to effect personal work changes that could also become a catalyst for wider organizational learning.

Argyris and Schön (1996) argued that, in order to understand why unhelpful and unproductive practice exists within an organization, it is necessary to explore the underlying, tacit belief system that controls and shapes the actions that subsequently occur. Central to what Argyris and Schön called 'theory of action' is a recognition of the difference between what individuals say they do in practice (espoused theory) and what they actually end up doing (theory-in-use). The espoused theory represents the public face of an individual or organization's practice, normally articulated in mission statements or best practice guidelines. However, as Flood (1999) points out, the theory of action is primarily concerned with theories-in-use – the kind of professional behaviours that come into play especially when individual practitioners feel embarrassed, stressed or under threat. On such occasions, in a bid to soothe over, cover-up or defend situations, actions of unilateral control, self-protection and defensiveness are more likely to occur. What is important to note about such defensive practice is that practitioners may well be unaware of why they are

behaving in this way or what the consequences of such behaviour are likely to be. What is also important is recognizing how organizations, in spite of their public espoused theories of action, may well encourage and foster tacit beliefs that allow unhelpful practice to continue.

Identifying Theories-in-Use

One of the first research tasks I undertook with the professional group was to explore any differences between the way they publicly stated that they worked with families and the underlying, tacit belief systems that might account for their actual practice being different. Within the university classroom the practitioners began to explore the way they felt about the families of children with a disability with whom they worked. A review of the practitioners' references to parents recorded in the early weeks of the research showed them generally not to be related to specific parents, rather to parents as a general group. When analysed, the practitioners' references to parents fell into a number of categories or typologies, the most common of which were:

- parents who were misunderstood and badly treated by the system;
- parents with whom it was difficult to work.

The first category related to parents whom the practitioners felt had been poorly treated by other professionals and by the service organizations.

Parents are ignored a lot of the time and not listened to, then they get angry with frustration. (Social worker)

They have to take what's there, rather than what they really need in terms of services, then the service providers are annoyed that they aren't more satisfied with what's being offered. (Doctor)

Parents often feel they are afraid to complain, that they'll be seen as a 'baddie'. That they will be seen as disruptive, like who would they be to voice criticism? They then give that reinforcement by us [professionals] by saying to them that we're all-knowing, you know, we are the experts, you know best. (Nurse Manager)

They are required to be grateful a lot of the time, not to make trouble, the services really like thankful parents. (Nurse)

The comments shown above are typical of those recorded in this category. In essence, many of the practitioners argued that the organizations in which they worked often failed to offer adequate services to those with disability and their families. Not only this, but also many of these organizations ignored parents or made it difficult for them to express dissatisfaction at this situation. These views are certainly supported by research findings. Although the past 20 years have seen increasing attempts to include those with disability and their carers more

meaningfully in decision-making, evidence exists that parents, in particular continue to remain isolated within organizational structures (see Cunningham and Davies, 1985; McConachie, 1994; Miltner and Miltner, 1983). Pernel (1986) suggests that this type of organizational resistance to change can be traced to growing internal and external pressures on organizations nominally committed to empowerment and openness. Such pressures may then lead to service users becoming frustrated and helpless in their dealings with organizations whose mission is, ostensibly, to serve them. Another pertinent factor is that organizational entropy may also relate to older issues relating to varying professional status. Taylor (2000) notes that the predominantly medical structures in which some social workers and nurses work significantly affect their potential to practice in ways that they might ideally choose.

The comments noted above, however, do not offer much of a clue as to the underlying individual and organizational belief systems that might contribute to this unhelpful practice. However, the comments recorded in the second category showed some practitioners identifying negative parental behaviour as a barrier to good working relationships.

Sometimes you try very hard to get something for them [parents], it takes a lot of effort, then they say, 'is that all?'. You never seem to get it right sometimes. After a while you sometime don't feel like trying any more. (Social worker)

We can only offer what we have, but it never seems enough. (Nurse)

I don't like to say it, but some of them [parents] can be very pushy. No matter what you do, it won't be right. (Nurse)

This final comment demonstrates an important reason why stasis may occur in organizational learning – the identification of a rationale why change in poor practice need not happen. In this case, the practitioners have identified that many parents receive a poor service, but some of them have also made an underlying suggestion that it may not be worth while to change this situation because, no matter what is tried, it will not be enough for the families. Argyris and Schön (1996) called this single-loop learning, a type of instrumental learning that occurs within an organization where underlying assumptions 'excuse' the maintenance of the status quo. Figure 9.1 shows how Argyris and Schön's theory of action can be applied to the practice issues arising for the practitioners in this research. In this incidence, there was clear agreement that the publicly espoused theories of both the individual practitioners and their organizations were that the views of parents should be included and heeded in the process of service provision and delivery. However, the theory-in-use recorded in the research indicated that many of the practitioners felt that parents were difficult to work with. The practitioners also noted that their organizations tended to adopt the same belief system, with the resulting practice strategy of minimizing parental involvement, for example 'parents are ignored a lot of the time and not listened to' thus leading to increased anger and frustration for families.

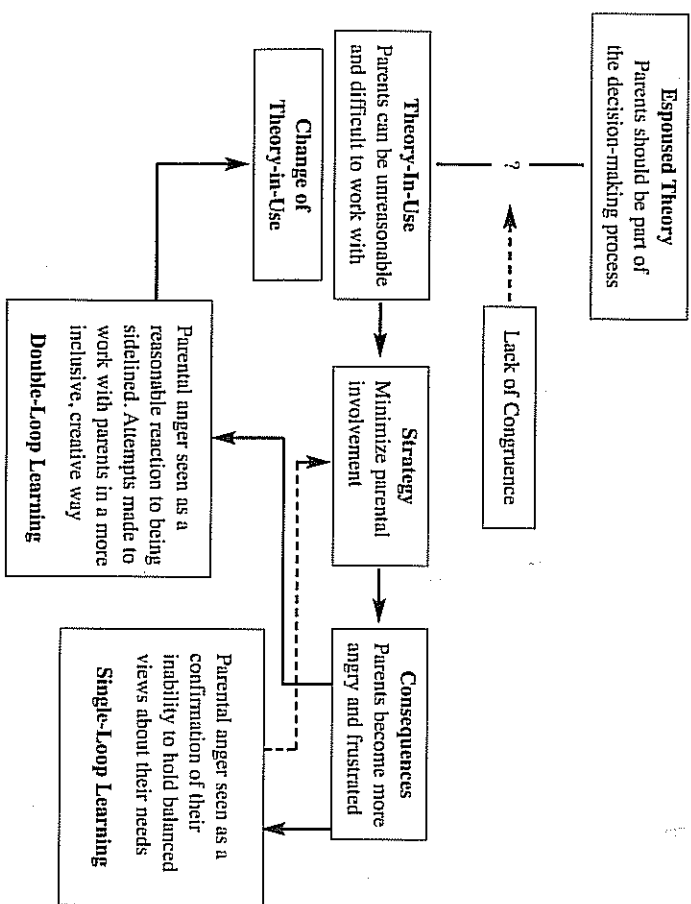


Figure 9.1 Argyris and Schön's theory of action

Source: adapted from Argyris and Schön (1973: 21)

Single-Loop and Double-Loop Learning

The critical issue that now arises is how the individual and the organization choose to learn from this situation. When faced with a poor outcome of an action, Argyris and Schön (1974; 1996) differentiated between two types of learning that can take place for both the individual and the organization, calling them single- and double-loop learning. These terms have similarities with Bateson's (1972) first and second order learning. In general terms single-loop or first order learning describes a conservative response to a situation that seeks to maintain the status quo and to uphold existing values and beliefs. Double-loop or second order learning is characterized by the search for and exploration of alternative routes, rules and goals, rather than attempting to maintain current routines (Lant and Mezias, 1999).

If, in the example below, the parents' anger and frustration is seen as a confirmation of their unreasonable attitudes towards service providers, then no action need be taken and the practice of minimizing parents' contact is justified and can continue. Single-loop learning can then be seen to have occurred with the result that the marginalization of parents may well intensify. However, if the outcome of the action causes a reappraisal of the flawed theory-in-use and parental anger is seen

as a justifiable reaction to marginalization that can be ameliorated by more inclusive practice approaches, then double-loop learning has taken place. Unlike single-loop learning where the organizational frames of reference remain static, double-loop learning requires the organization to learn a new frame of references within which to operate (Huber, 1991), thereby making it possible to change the flawed theory-in-use.

As Figure 9.1 demonstrates, as long as the professional belief system remains within the single loop, then little change can occur and flawed reasoning will support this organizational entropy. What is more worrying is that, within the single-loop structure, organizational function will most likely continue to be defective. In this case, it is likely that parents will remain marginalized. Even if, as the comments of the professionals in the research suggested, there is an awareness that the 'system' seems to treat parents badly, unless both individual and organizational learning takes place, then practitioners and service user will remain trapped in a malfunctioning loop.

Systems Thinking

Helping individual practitioners to become capable of double-loop learning involves a number of complex, but interconnected, steps. These involve not only helping practitioners to see how their own tacit belief systems and their theories-in-use effect their practice, but also encouraging them to appreciate the functions of the organization in which they work and recognizing their place and their role within that organizational system. This appreciation of systems thinking is well established within the canon of social work theory. In the 1970s systems theory had a great impact on social work thinking with the work of Pincus and Minihan (1973), Specht and Vickerly (1977) and Davies (1977). The belief underpinning much of systems theory was that, in order to bring about change and equilibrium, practitioners had to analyse the social system and find the origin of the current system malfunction (Howe, 1987). This concept has considerable resonance with Peter Senge's (1990a) view of systems thinking as being the cornerstone of the learning organization, as people in organizations begin to appreciate how existing ideas and actions affect practice outcomes, then a newer, more fertile vision of change can emerge. Most importantly Senge argues that systems thinking allows individuals to move from seeing parts to seeing wholes and from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants, capable of creating positive change. Bolam and Deal (1997: 27) state that an inability to understand systems dynamics results in what appears to be a good description of single-loop learning where we are led into 'cycles of blaming and self-defence: the enemy is always out there, and problems are always caused by someone else'.

In order to help the practitioners begin to use systems thinking I became interested in taking some approaches originally designed for use in systemic family therapy and adapting them for use in an organizational sense. I wanted to offer practitioners ways in which they could begin to 'see' the organizational systems within which they were operating and to appreciate the interconnectedness of

elements within that system, including their own position and that of their clients. Senge (1990a) also recommends the use of 'system maps' in encouraging systemic thinking. The eco-map was first developed in 1975 by Ann Hartman as a way to help workers in child protection to examine the needs of families (Hartman, 1978). Rooted in systems theory, the eco-map provides a visual representation of the complex connections within elements of a social system. Used in family work it offers opportunities for family members to see the nature of the relationships between different elements of their life system which may be either supportive, stressful, encouraging or openly hostile (Hartman and Laird, 1983). In the context of this research I used organizational eco-maps as a way of getting the practitioners to visualize the complex connections within their employing organization, to map the different subsystems that exist within it and to note the nature of the practitioner's relationship with each element in the system. The organizational subsystems and the nature and quality of the interrelationships between them (such as strong, supportive, hostile and so on) were portrayed in the eco-map by the traditional symbols used in family eco-maps and genograms (see Hartman and Laird, 1983; McGoldrick and Gerson, 1985).

In completing the eco-maps of their employing organizations, many practitioners reinforced the image of themselves as professionals caught in the middle between the 'bad' service and its victim, the complaining parent. Five of the 19 practitioners in the research prepared a graphical representation of their employing organization which placed themselves between the management and the parents. All of these professionals indicated that the relationship in this position was antagonistic or hostile. Four other practitioners represented themselves in the eco-map as being entangled in antagonistic or hostile relationships between doctors and parents. There is a danger that such an image of being an innocent observer caught between two hostile factions within the organization may further remove the practitioner from the need to effect change in his or her own practice. Indeed, in the early stages of the research it was noted that no practitioner talked of testing the validity of this image by engaging with individual parents to see how they perceived the situation, nor did any practitioner suggest that they could advocate with others on behalf of parents.

The Learning Individual and the Learning Organization

Working with individual practitioners in a university environment, away from their organizational settings, offers a challenge to a reflective teacher who is interested in improving not only individual learning, but also seeing how that learning can impact on the employing organization. However, Argyris and Schön (1996) are clear that it is the thinking and acting of individual practitioners that influences the capacity for productive learning at the organizational level. Likewise Senge states that 'organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning, but without it no organisational learning occurs' (Senge, 1990a: 139).

In order to foster such individual reflective learning, the central part of the research consisted of the practitioners being exposed to a number of reflective

teaching approaches to encourage them to adopt a double-loop approach to some of the issues arising from their work. These included the drawing up of family-focused plans and using different reflective class exercises aimed at helping the practitioners to explore alternative perceptions of the parents with whom they worked. Parents came into the classroom to discuss pertinent practice issues with the practitioners who were also encouraged to keep learning journals of the changes occurring in their work practices. An important component of this reflective work was the preparation by the practitioners of short written case studies based on a challenging intervention or critical incident that they had encountered with a parent. The practitioners were asked to divide the case studies into an account of the dialogue that occurred, augmented by a record of their own internal thoughts as the interaction progressed. Asking practitioners to recall and record their unspoken opinions behind the interaction was aimed at encouraging them to begin to 're-see' aspects of the action from the parental perspective. This form of case study presentation originally used by Argyris and Schön (1974) in their research into both individual and organizational learning, bears a close resemblance to the process recording used in social work. Papell and Skolnick (1992: 23) see process recording as an important tool for stimulating reflection in social work students and Papell (1976: 1) considers the process recording to be a 'much taken-for-granted instrument for social work learning' which is commonly used without full appreciation of its reflective potential.

The preparation of these case studies and their presentation and analysis in the classroom proved to be an important aspect of helping the practitioners to move beyond single-loop practice. The research revealed that, through the work on their case studies, many of the practitioners began to be able to examine the dichotomies between what they set out to achieve in their work with parents and what ultimately occurred in the practice environment. The practitioners were also challenged to specify their perception of the parents at the start of the interaction and to note how this perception aided or hampered the work they subsequently attempted. Finally, the practitioners were encouraged to reflect upon how successful their espoused theory had been in achieving their perceived goals in the interaction with the parent/s.

Emerging Reflective Change

By the fourth month of the research, a qualitative change was being noted in the content analysis of the practitioners' discussion on their work with parents. Instead of seeing their practice as being constrained by organizational strictures, some of the practitioners began describing changes that they had made in their own practice that challenged poor organizational responses to parents and families. Annette, a nurse in a large residential care setting, had been struggling with the structure of her employing organization, perceiving it as unresponsive to the needs of family carers. Her solution to this difficulty came in the form of a simple but effective change in her own practice.

Annette:

I've done something that was a real change in my work that I got from this class. In the unit that I work in when inquiries or one of the families rang about one of our residents we, the staff, took the call and dealt with the enquiry. Now I've begun to say to the family member 'would you like to speak to your sister or brother or son', whatever. The first time I did it, the mother said 'why is there something wrong?', but the families really like to chat with their family member now. But there was no reason why we had always taken the calls, the person with the disability was just sitting there while we took the call on their behalf, but everybody did it. We all had the conversation with family, answered questions then said to the person 'Your Mum rang'. It was only when I, like you said, reflected on what I was doing, it really was like something out of the dark ages, you know."

Social worker: Do a lot of the other staff still do it?

It's beginning to change since I started doing it, but it just feels so strange to me now that I ever did it. It's only a little thing, but, it's been really important to me that I made that change. You start to do things because everybody else does it that way. Then you see, reflect, on the situation from the parents' point of view and try something different just to see what will happen, and it's so different, like why didn't you see it before.

Annette's description of the small but significant change in her work practice is a good example of the adoption of newer, double-loop, reflective practice – devising new action strategies which expose previous inconsistencies and increase effective practice. In her brief description Annette had identified inconsistent practice behaviour – taking a telephone call on behalf of a person who is present and able to use a phone. Annette indicated that her reason for behaving in this way was because 'everybody else did it', revealing how unquestioned organizational practices contribute to unreflective individual practice behaviour.

In a subsequent discussion, Annette noted that the impetus for her to change her individual practice and subsequently to create a small learning incident in their organization came from the completion of her individual case study – 'that exercise made me think about things I "just do" at work'. 'Just doing' is a good way to describe tacit practice that is imbedded in single-loop thinking. Such practice occurs primarily out of habit and professional convenience, is seldom evaluated and may be replicated, unchallenged, by successive professionals. Annette's story indicates the effectiveness of creating a reflective training environment that helps practitioners to begin to examine what they 'just do' with parents and to evaluate its efficacy both for the parents and for themselves. What also emerged from a content analysis of the students' discussion was that the time spent on the individual case studies represented a period of significant critically reflective learning for many of the practitioners in the class.

An important aspect of reflective teaching and reflective practice also emerges from Annette's story – the need to help practitioners to incorporate and evaluate the

validity of new perspectives in their ongoing practice. Annette indicated that being in a reflective teaching environment had helped her see her original practice response as being 'like something out of the dark ages', and she wondered why she did not see the inconsistency in her practice before. This highlights a significant part of double-loop, reflective learning – finding previously acceptable practices now inappropriate. Mezirow (1991: 6) called this attitudinal shift 'perspective transformation' and Brookfield (1987: 27–30) named it 'critical learning'. Mezirow saw 'perspective transformation' as an emancipatory process 'of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings' (Mezirow, 1981: 6). Mezirow equated his perspective transformation with Freire's (1972) 'conscientization' and Habermas's (1984) 'emancipatory action' and saw it as a central function of adult learning and education (Mezirow, 1981: 6; 1991: 37–63).

A crucial aspect of perspective transformation or critically reflective learning is that, once achieved, it becomes very difficult for the practitioner to return to earlier unreflective ways of working. Colette, a senior nurse manager commented:

getting into that way of [reflective] thinking gets to you, once you've looked at the deeper meanings for both yourselves and the parents, how they think, how things really are for them, then you can't go back. It would probably be a whole lot easier if you could but you have to look at things differently now.

Making such a critical transformation is not achieved without difficulty. Colette also highlighted a significant factor in achieving perspective transformation or conscientization – the fact that, by reaching this state of awareness, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to return to one's previous unreflective state. By undertaking critical reflection it becomes difficult or impossible to 'unknow' what has been discovered; as Colette said: 'You can't go back.' What became more evident towards the end of the research was the number of practitioners who were now facing previously routine work situations that had now become less tolerable for them. A number of practitioners used the group for support in such incidences. This is probably best exemplified in Bernie's case. In the last month of the research, Bernie, a psychologist, discussed how a meeting with parents, which would previously have been routine practice, now presented her with considerable difficulties.

Bernie:

We had a typical example last week of parents coming in for a case conference, and all the professionals concerned met half an hour before to plan the meeting, to decide what we were going to say to them. I was going to leave and say 'I'll come back when the parents come in. But I didn't.

Doctor:

But do you not have to prepare at some stage? If the professionals hadn't met up before hand, don't they have to get together?

Bernie:

Why? Why do the professionals have to get their side of things sorted out before they meet the parents. Why couldn't everybody

involved get together at the same time. The parents should have really come in at the beginning and we could brainstorm with them, they could brainstorm with us. It's not like we had answers for them. I just feel such a coward that I didn't make a stand, refused to go in until the parents were invited in. Next time I'm doing it differently, I couldn't be part of that again, it feels wrong now.

There is evidence in the foregoing conversation that some of the practitioners in the research were becoming aware not only that they were capable of seeing new and more complex parental perspectives, but that they were also constrained by organizational perspectives that maintained a more limited, one-dimensional view of parents and their needs. This placed Bernie in a dilemma of whether to work within her new, double-loop model of parents, or to return to the more distant 'expert' stance of her colleagues. Her own response to the dilemma is clear 'next time I'm doing it differently, I couldn't be part of that again, it feels wrong now'.

Reflective Learners, Unreflective Organizations

Ironically, Bernie's case highlights both the success of my reflective model in helping the practitioners to become reflective in their work and the dilemma that this achievement created. Wendy, a family support worker, expressed the predicament well: 'I think that here, with you, on a Friday you can see things clearly, but you get back to work on a Monday, into the system, and the changes you want to make are much harder to implement than you thought'. On a number of occasions practitioners discussed their awareness of the fact that the acquisition of a more reflective, double-loop learning approach in professional practice cannot happen independently of the larger work situation. What also emerged were the difficulties inherent in adopting a more reflective approach within their own work agencies. What began to appear in the later sessions of the research was a growing awareness on the part of the practitioners that, although their practice was becoming more reflective and more double loop in character, many of their employing organizations remained fundamentally single-loop systems.

This awareness that organizational structures limited their ability to become more reflective in their practice confirms Schön's assertion (1983: 328-9) that many organizations tend to resist a professional's attempt to move from single-loop to double-loop, reflective practice. It could be argued that it is unfair to expose individual professionals to a learning environment which causes them to consider fundamental change in their practice when they must return to a work setting that may not support such changes. However, there are a number of separate indications emerging from this research which refute this view. Once reflective, double-loop perspectives have been encouraged then it becomes more difficult for that reflection to be 'undone' and the practitioners are less unlikely to return to a previous unreflective state of awareness. Thus by engaging in active reflection, individuals are fundamentally changed in how they perceive certain situations and in how they behave in such circumstances. This was evidenced in this research by the number of

practitioners who talked about 'not going back' to old ways of practice. Not only did these practitioners not want to return to old ways of acting and thinking, they described themselves as being unable to do so. Individuals may also seek to find different ways of incorporating their new perspectives into their work organization at some time in the future. A good example of this is one of the practitioners, a senior doctor, who, seven months after the research ended, contacted me to say that she had drafted a new policy document on parental inclusion that she was preparing to implement in her organization.

Individual change, as discussed above, has the capacity to introduce collective change. Thus, individual practitioners returning to the workplace with new, more reflective perspectives of service users have the potential to become models of change for other practitioners. A danger exists in that a newly reflective practitioner may attempt to 'evangelize' other professionals in a way that elicits defensive responses from colleagues. However, if that practitioner is already thinking reflectively, then it is more likely that he or she will introduce collective change with a sensitivity of how this change may appear to fellow workers. In this way the reflective practitioner can become a reflective teacher in the learning organization. This was evidenced in this research by Bernie's decision to change her method of participation in her agency's case conference practices and by Annette's decision to change her method of dealing with telephone calls from parents. Here a small individual change, initially viewed with suspicion, was gradually accepted as a new practice norm by her co-workers and her agency. More recent research (Redmond and McEvoy, 2002) has looked at longer-term effects of postgraduate education on practitioners in the area of intellectual disability. This research has revealed that 83 per cent of this cohort of practitioners with whom I worked within the reflective teaching model considered that, over two years after the end of the course, they were significantly more confident of being able to introduce change in their organization.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Senge (1990a: 139) talks of the importance of starting, in the learning organization, from the perspective of the individual practitioner and of allowing that personal vision to become the basis of the shared vision of the organization. He warns that when a top-down, organizational vision is imposed 'the result is compliance, never commitment. On the other hand, people with a strong sense of personal direction can join together to create a power synergy towards what [they] truly want' (ibid.). Unfortunately, some practitioners in health and social care areas face the frustration of practice within organizational constraints that fail to encompass their personal vision or view such perspectives as a threat to organizational stability. At worst, barriers to organizational learning and growth can become so insurmountable that practitioners no longer remember that they ever had a vision about their work at all – they have lost what Senge described as their personal mastery, leaving them with little option in how they can practice.

This research suggests that that a reflective training and learning environment

offers experienced practitioners a way of reappraising the very value base of their own practice and that of the organization in which they work. Not only that, it allows them to review their approaches to service users and to appreciate the parts of their practice that may be driven or constrained by organizational thinking. Most importantly it can give them both the space and the support to see themselves as innovators of change in the wider organizational sense.

There is a tendency to view the university or college classroom as being only relevant to initial professional training with the added belief that experienced practitioners need only be 'topped up' with newer practice knowledge and advanced competencies at discreet junctures in their careers. Gould (2000) notes that just as the learning organization is not limited to course-based learning, reflective learning goes beyond the inductive application of knowledge or techniques. What this research has demonstrated is that the classroom can also be used as a reflective practicum – somewhere where practitioners can focus on practice issues in a participatory, supportive setting away from the pressures of the workplace. This practicum is also a place where practitioners can review their own position within their organizations and, with help, see how they can operate within that organization in the most effective and professionally satisfying way for themselves and for those with whom they work.

Note

- 1 The material in this chapter is developed in further detail in the forthcoming publication: Redmond, B. (2004) *Developing Reflective Practice in Health and Social Services: A Model of Teaching and Learning for Students and Professionals*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Chapter 10

Living out Histories and Identities in Organizations: A Case Study from Three Perspectives

Harjeet Badwall, Patricia O'Connor and Amy Rossiter

This chapter explores the complexity of organizational change as a reflective process by discussing a specific change process in which the authors participated. While there are many different kinds of objectives and change processes in organizations, we are interested in the ways historical identities organized through relations of domination infuse organizations' attempts to manage conflict and difference. Our claim is that such historical relations present deep challenges to identities and that this reality imposes the necessity of connecting reflective processes with larger social struggles.

We will describe a period of conflict during attempted organizational change in a health agency located in the inner city of a large, urban centre. Our reflection is presented from the perspectives of Patricia, a member of management staff at the agency, of Harjeet, a former student in the agency who had been hired on a contract, and of Amy, a visiting professor who was spending part of her sabbatical working at the agency. We are using these accounts in order to explore the complexity and perhaps the limits of critical reflective practice in organizations. We hope to add our experiences to the literature on reflective practice (Fook, 1996; Gould and Taylor, 1996) with particular regard to the organization itself as a site of practice.

The Context

The events at the health agency took place during the zenith of 'reforms' of the neo-liberal government of the province of Ontario, Canada. These 'reforms' involved the cancellation of social housing, welfare cutbacks, agency closings, the declination of the social safety network and the rise of homelessness as a visible issue, signalling a sea change in Canadian values. Among activists and advocates, hopelessness and despair were mixed with guarded determination to continue to resist government policies and the authoritarian governmental response to protest. While usual practices of holding government accountable did not work, the needs encountered by social service agencies increased exponentially.

As homelessness and substance use became more visible in the agency's