

11.965, Reflective Practice, Or, How to Give Global Relevance to Local Knowledge
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Lecture 1: Introduction to Reflective Practice

Introduction

Course on Reflective Practice: Theory and Art in the Action

Course will have three main parts:

1. introduction to reflective practice
2. how to apply this method in policy situations – solve controversies and improve creativity
3. future – Schon's book is 20 years old, there have been developments since that can enhance the approach

Instructors introduce themselves.

Sebastiao helps people organize their knowledge to make decisions. He is a visiting scholar at CRCP (Center for Reflective Community Practice). Reflective practice is a very important tool for people who are working "on the ground".

Claudia – reflective practice is a skill you can teach others. A lot of what this course covers is similar to her experiences while writing her master's thesis.

Students introduce themselves, their background with reflective practice, and what they hope to get out of this course.

Syllabus:

1. learning
2. methodology, reflect on experience of first day
3. knowledge generation (different methods)
4. concepts and theories that are the basis for reflective practice
5. visual work – images are very important
6. reframing, how to understand the same problem in new ways. Most difficult problems cannot be solved with the understanding we had when we first looked at the problem.
7. conceptual learning, a way to renew our minds and keep up with current knowledge
8. reflective practice in the future

Course will be evaluated based on attendance, participation, and a brief paper at the end.

PowerPoint Slides

- People believe that when we are acting, we are not thinking. This is not true.
- If one professional performs better than another, we usually think that he is more intelligent or better prepared. But the real reason has to do with the cognitive tools each person is using during their actions.
- There is a difference between someone's formal ideas and the ideas being used in their work.

- Schon criticized the “battery model” of professional schools (fill up with knowledge during school, and then use it up in the world).
- We may have a theory, yet not be able to use it adequately.
- For example, poverty in a small town in Peru. What part of our theoretical knowledge can be useful to help these people? We need not only professional training, but experience and intuition. We need artistry more than technique, perhaps.
- Two different frameworks for thinking – the formal and the real. Assumptions underlying the policy decisions that you make.
- An assumption in city planning: with more data, services will improve.
- Theory-in-use is about assumptions. For example, at MIT a lot of people think that if they go to a poor country and help them to innovate their technology, their lives will be better. Assumption: main reason for poverty is technology.
- Espoused theory is the explanation we give.
- Most of the time, the way we actually work and the explanation we give are different.
- People in developing countries have a lot of knowledge. We need to recognize this knowledge, so that they can recognize it as well. A goal of reflective practice: help people gain ownership of their knowledge.
- Also, using new concepts and theories allows our brains to continue to adapt and learn – a nice side benefit.
- This presentation was a brief introduction to reflective practice.

Questions and Responses to the Presentation

It is important to let people be the author of their plans, so that they can learn from their mistakes. We must enable them to express their ideas in ways that make sense to them. The decisions and responsibilities need to be from them.

Clarification: is this about understanding other people's logic?

Are you understanding what someone is saying, or interpreting (modifying) it to understand it through your own logic?

Question about responsibility and mistakes.

If the mistake is someone else's, we don't tend to put in effort toward understanding. We just choose not to work with them again. If it is our mistake, we feel ashamed, etc. But this makes us remember what we should do, and this practice is an important part of learning. Also, if it is our own decision, we will be more analytical before the decision is made.

Even thinking of ourselves as professionals makes it difficult to see a situation at ground level. Need to consider many different perspectives within a community.

Participant Exercise

How did you learn a skill, such as riding a bike or driving a car or writing your name? Each person should remember one experience and describe the process graphically (such as a flow chart or concept map). It should be concrete, not conceptual.

Students are given 5 minutes to do this.

Short presentations:

- Riding a bike – more of a physical description
- Snowboarding – start with instruction and previous knowledge, physical experimentation, learning to not use some of the previous knowledge, first moment of success, moving on to greater mastery
- Reading a map
- Riding a bike (as an adult) – visualizing, watching others do it
- Learning Language – focusing more on how he felt during the process. Feeling alone, struggles with self-worth, but also moments of elation and overcoming challenges. Learning curve is slow at first, rapid for awhile, then a kind of plateau. Gradual incorporation into society, sense of accomplishment and self-worth due to learning this skill.
- Driving a car – didn't have a car, so contracted out for lessons, and then could get car and practice.
- Rock climbing – understanding the challenge, watching other people, learning the rules and equipment with guidance. Need to change perspective – the goal is how to climb, looking for each hold, not to get to the top.
- Integration into a focus group (ongoing) – new ideas, then integration into your mindset
- Typing – comfortable environment, pick out a concrete skill, build up to harder skills
- Navigating the T
- Skiing – fear experienced by self, confidence gained by teaching others

Most cases began with instruction. We generally assimilate the instruction into whatever assumptions we already have – we don't receive the instructions in a pure way. Also, the role of mistakes is important, as is the role of success. That sets the stage for a new level of learning.

It's interesting how some people focus on context (social, physical, emotional). Different levels of abstraction as well.

Think about your experience in describing this learning experience. Making tacit knowledge explicit (by explaining to others).

Tomorrow: the practice of reflection, in a more structured way.