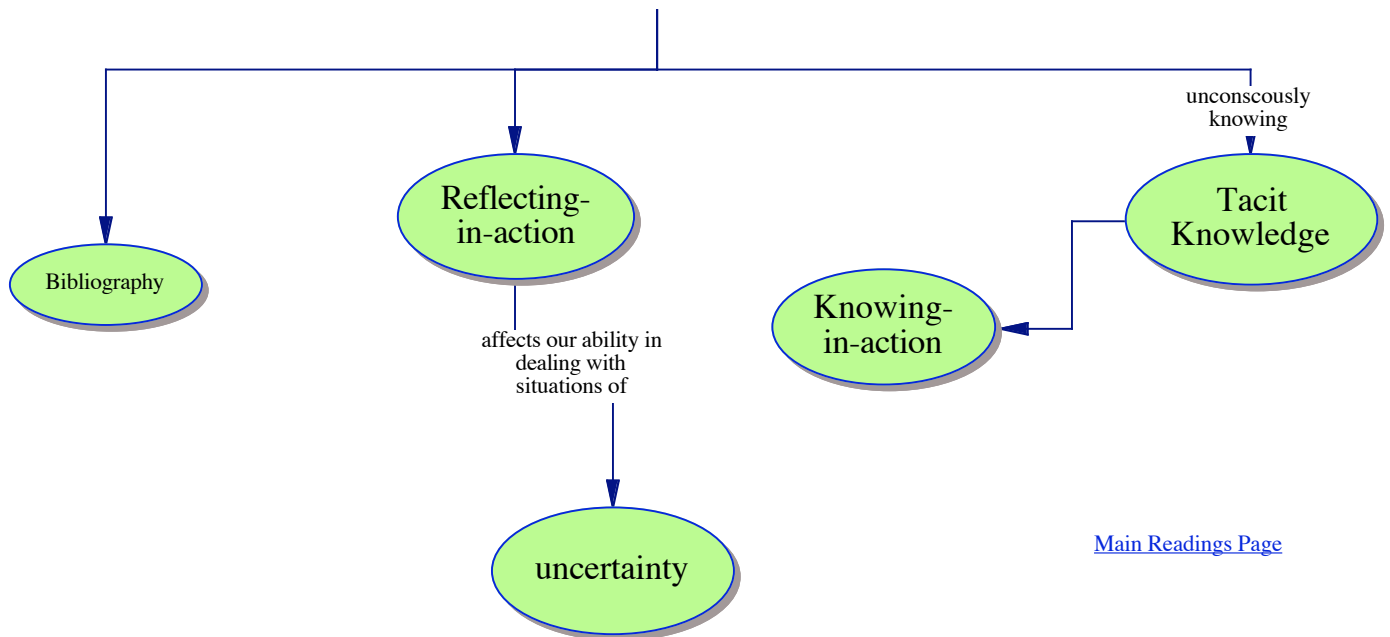


Reflection-in-action



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Reflection-in-action- review by Rob Clarke

Edited from: Schon, D. A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*.

London: Temple Smith, 50-68

This is a really easy to read and interesting article by one of the most influential writers about reflective practice, Donald Schon. There are four main concepts discussed in this article:

The nature of tacit knowledge.

Uncertainty and how we deal with it

Knowing in action

Reflecting in action and how this is tied to the core of a practitioner-researcher.

I. Tacit Knowledge

Schon explains tacit knowledge as the knowledge that we have when we are doing something automatically and intuitively:

"Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action (Edited from: Schon 1983)."

For example, once you have learned to ride a bike and had to really think about what you were doing. Once you have acquired the skills necessary and learned the rules of the road and so on, riding a bike becomes automatic and intuitive- you do it without thinking about it. Schon li

A. Knowing-in-action

Knowing in action is a nice description for the type of knowledge that we hold inside our

bodies that helps us to perform the activities that we do naturally and easily.

I have heard this type of knowledge referred to as PPK, or Personal Practical Knowledge (John Edwards, 9th International Conference on Thinking lecture, 2000).

II. Reflecting-in-action

Reflecting in action occurs when one is able to consciously evaluate and make changes on the spot during an event.

For those who deal well with uncertainty and unfamiliar situations, this is easy. Conversely for those who don't- this is a major challenge.

Schon goes on to explain that it is possible for those who have spent a long time doing the same type of job and go about it in the same way to begin to 'miss important opportunities to think about what he is doing'. They become drawn into certain patterns of error which Schon thinks a person may not correct. I don't necessarily agree with this.

I believe that the way in which a person reflects on what they are doing is intimately tied in with the way they perceive the world (see Caine and Caine, 1997 for an indepth discussion on this) and the mental models they have based on these perceptions.

Why is it that some teachers continue to teach in the same sorts of areas for long periods of time and are continually learning, innovating, changing and adapting to the changing world and its demands- yet other who are in the same position do not?

To summarise, I believe that it is possible to become 'dulled to experience' as the author suggests, but it is also entirely possible to stay fresh and be part of the changing horizon of experience and constantly strive towards enriching both the learning for our clients, but also the learning for ourselves.

A. uncertainty

Being comfortable with uncertainty is what I believe sets good teachers apart from great ones. A teacher who is able to create a sense of 'flow' in learning for their students, as well as themselves, is infinitely more flexible in both their approach and their attitude towards learning. They are open to change, challenge and innovation. Picture the notion of someone who has been in the same position for 25 years- have they had 25 years experience- or have they had 1 year of experience 25 times over?

I would argue that those who are not comfortable with change and uncertainty are less likely to take risks, try new things and therefore learn new ways of working and take on new ideas and therefore adapt their 'mental models'. This ties in with what Caine and Caine call "expanded cognitive horizons", where they refer to people having maps;

"to navigate through the world of information and meaning. the larger and more dynamical the maps, the more room they have to maneuver..., Caine and Caine 1997:116."

They further argue that these 'expanded cognitive horizons contribute to their 'perceptual orientation' which in turn affects and influences ones instructional practices (Caine and Caine 1997: 170-186). This also fits with the notion of 'dilemmas of schooling' posited by Berlak and Berlak (1981) where they explore the idea of educators being comfortable with the range and variety of challenges encountered in their daily work.

III. Bibliography

Caine, G. and Caine, R. (1997) *Unleashing the Power of Perceptual Change*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Berlak, A. and Berlak, H. (1981) *Dilemmas of Schooling*. London: Methuen, 125-37, 237.

Other References:

Edwards, J. (2000) Keynote lecture audio cassette: Participating in the Knowledge Economy. Auckland: "Breakthroughs" Ninth International Conference on Thinking.