

## Asking The Right Questions, Looking In All The Right Places: Embedding Knowledge Construction in Professional Education

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*The yearning for spirituality and social responsibility in HRD illuminates the need for reflective practice in professional education to be transformed by multiple sources of information and praxis questions. Theological reflection, a form of reflective practice, is contextualized by praxis questions, spirituality, and social analysis. An alternative model of reflective practice is proposed which addresses the need for spirituality and socially responsive learning at work.*

Keywords: Reflective Practice, Spirituality, Social Responsibility

Human resource developers are seeking ways to integrate spirituality and social responsibility through knowledge construction processes (Dirkx, 1997; Hatcher, 2000). Current models of reflective practice do not respond sufficiently to learners' need for spiritual integration (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003) or connection to social issues (Hayes & Wilson, 2000). Theological reflection, a form of reflective practice in ministry, provides a model of reflective practice which embeds the problem solving process using spiritual information in a social context. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate an alternative model of reflective practice embedded in a spiritual and socially responsible framework.

### HRD's Quest for Spirituality and Social Responsibility

The desire for spirituality and social responsibility in human resource development points toward the need to incorporate a holistic set of experiences and questions of social responsibility into models of reflective practice. Human resource development theory is extending its discussion about learning and performance to include spirituality, values, and meaning (Bates, Hatcher, Holton III, & Chalofsky, 2001) and social justice and responsibility (Hatcher, 2000). The search for spirituality, values, and meaning in HRD goes beyond *adding* these facets to theory to *transforming* theory in light of these dimensions (Dirkx, 1997). Transforming theory and practice is a process of constructing knowledge with additional sources of information and praxis questions (Fenwick, 2000; Lee, 1994). Sources of information are the types of data we use to make decisions. The data includes cognitive, affective, spiritual, political, and communal experiences. Praxis questions are questions designed to evoke a vision of the common good or socially responsible outcomes. Praxis is understood as doing for the purpose of creating the common good. Integrating spiritual information and being socially responsible are points of development in human resource development.

#### *Spiritual Integration*

Bates, Hatcher, Holton III, & Chalofsky (2001) proposed a statement of purpose for human resource development that seeks to integrate learning, performance, and spirituality perspectives. The underlying assumption of the purpose statement was that the integration of the three perspectives was desirable and could enhance the field. The effort to include the spiritual dimension of individuals points to the need to integrate spiritual information in professional education. Spirituality was defined in the purpose statement as "human potential" or "the latent capabilities in humans for growth and development" (Bates, et. al, 2001, p. 9-1). The definition, while avoiding some of the ambiguity and diversity of the term, spirituality, limits the ability to conceptualize the interconnection with larger contexts (i.e., social justice, ecological issues) thereby limiting our ability to imagine more complex, interdependent outcomes (i.e., socially responsible outcomes). Potential was defined primarily in terms of the individual rather than the social. The statement of purpose pointed to the need to include spiritual information in human resource development processes.

The ongoing discussion on spirituality at work validates the need for alternative sources of information in constructing knowledge for learning and performance. Chalofsky (1997) identifies giving to others and bringing your whole self (mind, body, emotion, and spirit) to work as primary components of meaningful work. He argues for the inclusion of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual information in learning and performing. Spirituality is understood as the construction of knowledge through symbolic and unconscious events (Tisdell, 2003) and is ever

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present in the learning process (Dirkx, 1997). Spiritual information may include meaning, practices, or rituals that express an individual's "awareness of something greater than ourselves" (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 1). Tapping into this information during reflective practice is one way to incorporate this source of information.

While the statement of purpose highlighted the need to include spiritual information in knowledge construction, a limitation of the statement was its inability to include questions of social responsibility. The search for spirituality is connected to the search for social responsibility through awareness of human interconnectedness (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003).

#### *Social Responsibility*

Human resource development models based on productivity, profit, and performance are being challenged for narrowly defining outcomes and processes (Bates, et al., 2001). The economic theory underlying human resource development is expanding from an exclusive focus on the financial bottom line to include other indicators of success. These indicators include the impact on social communities and the environment. Models for performance improvement are beginning to include socially responsive outcomes (Hatcher, 2000). "Performance therefore is defined as outcomes of a systematic approach to positive and desired changes in the individual, processes, organization, community, society, and the environment" (p. 27-3). At the organizational level, models are available to support socially responsible performance.

No models at the individual level are available to support socially responsible learning in the workplace. A primary model for learning used in professional education is reflective practice. Learning is necessary when novel problems arise, requiring new solutions. Learning at the individual level uses models of reflective practice that solve the problem without consideration of the social and environmental contexts. An alternative model of reflective practice is needed to systematically incorporate social responsibility in knowledge construction processes. Reflecting on social responsibility acknowledges our human interconnectedness and is further developed with the use of spiritual information.

Spirituality and social responsibility, or the search for a common good, are intertwined (English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003). Spirituality brings individuals' meaning and practices to the work of creating the common good from within the team and organizational context. A model of reflective practice is needed that affirms the relationship between spirituality and social responsibility and supports learning within the workplace. The yearning for a spiritually integrated and socially responsible reflective practice also draws insight from the paradigm shift in knowledge construction.

### **New Ways of Constructing Knowledge**

The paradigm shift in knowledge construction reveals important questions for the use of reflective practice. Knowledge construction is the creation of new knowledge in specific and concrete situations. Knowledge construction is a phrase that emerged during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reveal the political and historically situated reality of learning (Habermas, 1971). The idea of knowledge construction critiques learning as the process of acquiring knowledge and expands learning to include the social construction of what we know. Knowledge construction has undergone a paradigm shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulting in the movement from the transmission of knowledge to the transformation of learning processes and outcomes as summarized in Table 1. The table shows the shift in knowledge construction along various dimensions of learning.

*Table 1. A Paradigm Shift in Knowledge Construction*

Dimensions of Learning	Old Paradigm of Knowledge Construction	New Paradigm of Knowledge Construction
Relationship to knowledge	Transmission	Transformation
Metaphors for learning	Acquisition	Conversation
Context	Abstract	Situated
Goal of learning	Rational knowledge	Social Transformation
Orientation of learning	Past	Future
Focus of learning	Acquisition & Application	Transforming theory & practice
Metaphysics of learning	Essentialism, Essence	Historical consciousness, Existence
Pinnacle of learning	Theoretical	Phonosis (informed action)
View of learner	Knower	Actor/Agent

Prior to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dominant model of knowledge construction in professional education was described as the transmission model (Schon, 1983). The steps of transmitting knowledge included: a) generating knowledge by the experts (academics), b) teaching the knowledge to the professionals, and c) professionals applying the knowledge in their practice. The linear, unreflective application of theory did not provide the knowledge required to solve new problems. Theory and academics, or experts who taught the theory, were the authoritative sources for learning and education. This often resulted in the insufficient relevancy of knowledge for practitioners (Schon, 1987).

In the transformation model, the learner is actively engaged in creating knowledge by reflecting on practice and making connections to pre-existing knowledge (Lee, 1995; Schon, 1983, 1987). The transformation model affirms affective experience, community involvement, and the authority of the practitioner's experiences (Lee, 1995; Schon, 1987). As practitioners' experience increases in value and authority, expert practitioners become authoritative sources (Schon, 1987). In reflective practice, practitioners' experience has authority in the construction of knowledge (Schon, 1983). Reflective practice has only shifted slightly by embracing the active, authoritative role of the practitioner. Reflective practice has not evolved far enough to integrate spirituality and social transformation.

Social transformation is based on the realization that knowledge construction is not a neutral process and social and political interests are at stake in the process (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000). Complex processes are required to discern the social and political interests involved in constructing knowledge. The complex processes include accounting for the perspectives of various stakeholders, assessing the impact on social and environmental communities, and designing a vision of the common good. The paradigm shift unveils these processes and poses questions to help build systems of learning that explicitly account for the various interests.

The paradigm shift in knowledge construction illuminates three questions for professional education relevant to the use of reflective practice (Lee, 1994, Mott, 2000, Schon, 1983, Whitehead & Whitehead, 1980, 1995). The first question shaping professional education is what practical end(s) does knowledge construction serve? Habermas (1973) and Lee (1994) distinguish between the "practical" ends or praxis questions of what we should do and the "technical" means of how we should do things. Praxis questions ask "what kind of world do we want to make" and "what is the common good?" By focusing on the technical means to problem solving, professional education has missed the opportunity to define a vision of the common good and to work towards that end by addressing the praxis questions (Lee, 1994). Questions about the purpose and intent of professional education shape its development. If the purpose of professional education is to efficiently and effectively solve problems, then curriculum will be designed to achieve this end. If the purpose of education is to create a world we want to make for future generations, the curriculum will include the development of values and meaning to shape the use of technical knowledge.

The second question is what sources of information will be engaged in knowledge construction processes? Will affective, communal, spiritual, and environmental sensory data or information be brought into the construction of knowledge or will it rely strictly on rational data? Massumi (2002) argues that rational "information is a bit player in the project of inducing a global transformation" and that sensation provides the greater possibilities of change (p. 124). Sensation includes feelings, symbols, and images. Professional education programs vary in the degree of diversifying sources of information used in knowledge construction processes (Fenwick, 2000). Developing meaning and value requires the inclusion of multiple sources of information such as emotional, physical, social, political, environmental, and spiritual experiences.

The third question is how do models of knowledge construction used in professional education address the first two questions? Models are representations of processes. With exceptions (Hatcher, 2000; Kaufman, 2000), models of knowledge construction do not include a component for answering the praxis question but focus only on solving problems encountered by professionals (Schon, 1983). Is the opportunity for envisioning socially responsible actions accounted for in models of reflective practice and theological reflection? Are alternative sources of information accounted for in the models or do they only reflect rational processes? These knowledge construction questions point to areas needing development in professional education and its use of reflective practice.

## **Reflective Practice**

Reflective practice grew out of the realization that technical rationality or the application of theory to practice was insufficient for the unique and surprising challenges faced by professionals (Schon, 1983). The primary architects of reflective practice in adult education are Schon (1983, 1987) and Boud, Keough, and Walker (1985). Schon's (1983) original model of reflective practice is complemented by Boud, et.al's (1985) use of affective information. Models of reflective practice are dynamic and evolve with new sources of information and new challenges.

Professionals, or practitioners, as Schon called them, engaged in reflection-in-action to meet the challenges of new situations that did not meet the requirements of accepted theory. Reflecting in action is the ability to think about what one is doing and to change one's actions simultaneously (Schon, 1983). The ability to reflect on and learn from professional activity to determine appropriate ways to behave in the future is the keystone idea of Schon's reflective practice model.

Schon (1983) identifies four primary movements in reflective practice. These movements include reframing the problem, drawing on a repertoire or familiar exemplars, formulating a new hypothesis, and testing the hypothesis. The testing does not occur as a formal experiment but in the broad sense of confirming or refuting a hypothesis. Boud, et.al (1985) present another model of reflection for professionals that affirms the role of affective experience.

Boud, et.al.(1985) identify three primary factors in turning experience into learning. The first factor is to return to the experience in a descriptive way, without evaluation or judgment. The second factor is to attend to feelings surrounding the experience to allow supportive feelings to move the process forward and to work through obstructive feelings. The third factor involves re-evaluating the experience. Re-evaluation includes linking the experience with prior knowledge (association), integrating the experience with prior knowledge (integration), testing it in some way (validation), and taking ownership of the new learning (appropriation). Boud et. al's (1985) model of reflective practice expands Schon's model by incorporating the affective dimension of experience.

While the linear, problem oriented models of reflective practice advanced by Schon (1983) and Boud, et.al (1985) affirm the creative, affective role of the practitioner, they do not incorporate spiritual information or a vision of social responsibility. The models do affirm the importance of the practitioner's experience and feelings. The models need further development to integrate spirituality, social responsibility, and the full paradigm shift in knowledge construction. By examining theological reflection, a model of reflective practice used in ministry education, insights illuminate a potential path of further development for reflective practice.

### **Theological Reflection**

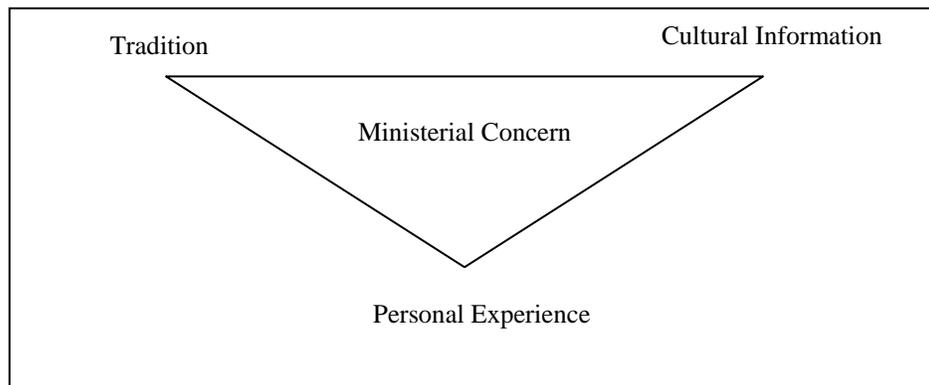
Theological reflection, a form of reflective practice in ministry, is a knowledge construction process that incorporates spirituality and social responsibility and reflects the paradigm shift in knowledge construction. Ministry is a profession with particular knowledge and skills including theological reflection. By examining a model of theological reflection used in graduate education in ministry, possibilities emerge for an alternative model of reflective practice in human resource development

Lee (1994) claimed that graduate education in ministry is the most progressive form of professional education. Theological reflection provides professional education with models that incorporate questions about the common good and multiple sources of information that push the evolution of professional education programs, including human resource development. The praxis questions, sources of information, and models of theological reflection differ from reflective practice due to its grounding in the literature on practical theology (Lee, 1995; Whitehead & Whitehead, 1980, 1995). Practical theology brings together theory, praxis, and technical or instrumental knowledge in response "to a major paradigm shift within Western culture" (Lee, 1994, 25). The shift in knowledge construction involves the move from seeking truth in right belief (orthodoxy) to finding truth in right action (orthopraxy) (Lee, 1994). The focus in practical theology has moved from theory and metaphysics to informed action or praxis. Technical or instrumental knowledge serves praxis rather than being applied theory. These dimensions place informed action at the center of the learning endeavor rather than intellectual affirmations.

Theological reflection is the process of correlating experience and tradition (Kinast, 2000). Theological reflection is a conversation between individual and communal experience and the wisdom of a religious tradition to seek the vision of the common good and meaning in life (Killen & de Beer, 1994). The tradition component provides inspiration for praxis, cultural information includes social analysis, and personal experience incorporates cognitive, affective, and spiritual information (see Figure 1). The search to resolve ministerial concerns is embedded in the conversation between tradition, cultural information, and personal experience.

For example, a minister is presented with the problem of the lack of participation of women in the church's pastoral board. Engaging the model of theological reflection, the minister attends to information from her own personal experience, cultural information, and information from the spiritual tradition of the church. From her own experience, she may remember her own struggles with church hierarchy and feel anger and discouragement. She may also tell the story of her spiritual journey for strength and encouragement. A spiritual journey is evolution of the meaning, images, and feelings in the individual's relationship with the Ultimate over time. The cultural or social analysis reveals the historically submissive and private role women played in religion as well as successful strategies for empowerment and assertiveness. Analysis of the tradition may include reading scripture and feminist theologians that lift up positive models for women in church leadership.

Figure 1. Model of Theological Reflection (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1980, p. 14)



By attending to information in all three areas; personal, cultural, and tradition, the minister decides and implements an approach to affirm the leadership role of women in the church and secure their participation on the board. The systematic construction of knowledge in theological reflection incorporates multiple sources of information (mental, emotional, social, and spiritual) (Killen and de Beer, 1994). Spiritual information is elicited from the reflection on personal experience. The analysis in the cultural and tradition areas reveals social injustice (i.e., history of women’s oppression) and a vision of socially responsible outcomes (i.e., women in church leadership). Theological reflection brings together spirituality and social engagement in a transformative manner (Holland & Henriot, 2002). Theological reflection embodies the paradigm shift of knowledge construction and serves as model for reflective practice in human resource development by incorporating questions about the common good and multiple sources of information.

### Alternative Model of Reflective Practice

The system of reflection begins with asking the right question and looking in the right places for the answers. The right question goes beyond “how do we solve the problem” and “how do we improve performance” to “what type of world do we want?” In practical theology, this is called the praxis question. The praxis question is the foundation for curriculum development and evaluation of professional education. Imagine the impact of centralizing this question in the professional education of human resource developers. The questions of learning and performance will occur naturally within an explicit context of meaning, value, and vision.

Answering the praxis question requires diverse dimensions of knowledge. Cognitive, empirical information is one source for constructing knowledge about our world. The yearning for spirituality tells us that it is not enough. We are feeling, imagining, symbolic, and communal beings who envision a world with all our senses and capacities. Constructing knowledge needs to include the full spectrum of cognitive, affective, biological, spiritual, political, and communal information to adequately answer the praxis question. This complexifies our models, processes, and experience of knowledge construction and raises issues of multi-modal research and theory development. By embedding the problem within the praxis questions and multiple sources of information, human resource developers may find satisfaction for spiritual and social justice yearnings (see Figure 2.).

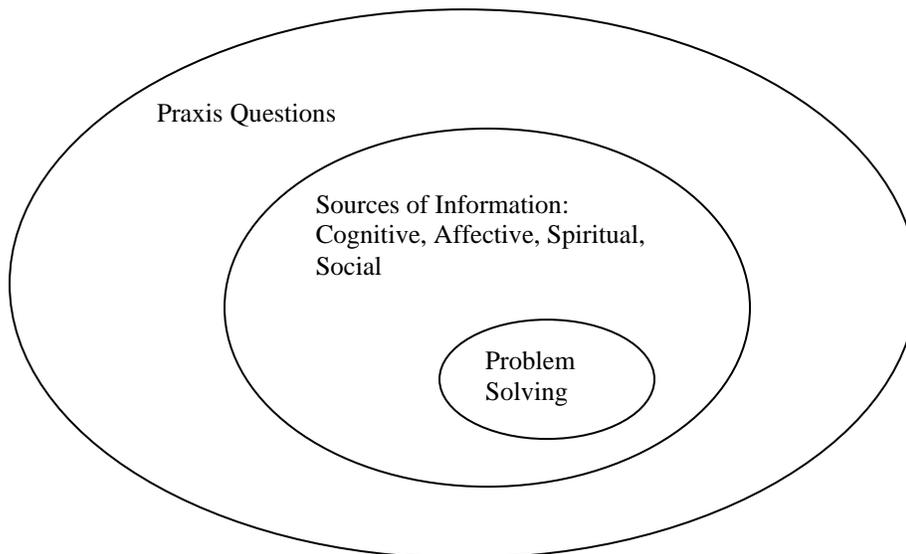
Figure 2 uses an embedded model rather than the triangulated model used in theological reflection to illustrate the relationships between the praxis questions, sources of information, and problem solving. Embeddedness shows the enhanced context of problem solving activity – within a vision of the common good generated by responses to the praxis questions and within data generated from multiple sources of information. The sources of information are embedded within the praxis questions because the responses to the questions or vision validate the sources used in solving the problem. If the vision is narrowly defined as profit, the social, affective, and spiritual experience of individuals is not validated. The cognitive and technical information will be sufficient to address the problem. The embedded model parallels the economist, Karl Polanyi’s, vision of re-embedding economic theory in a vision of the social good (Dalton, 1986). The vision should drive the economy, not the economy drive the vision.

For example, a manager is faced with low customer satisfaction ratings from his employees. Using the traditional model of reflective practice, the manager will reframe the problem (e.g., employees are not trained properly), draw on repertoire of exemplars (e.g., identify successful training modules), formulate a new hypothesis

(e.g., better trained employees will yield higher customer satisfaction ratings), and test hypothesis (e.g., measure satisfaction ratings after training).

Using the embedded model of reflective practice, the manager seeks the resolution of the problem by asking praxis questions in the outer circle. The praxis questions may include: a) what is the desired outcome for the customer, b) what is the desired quality of work life for the employees, and c) what knowledge and skills are needed for life-affirming relationships. The answers to the praxis questions paint a vision of the common good and social responsibility. Within this vision, the manager seeks information from multiple sources to insure a holistic context. Using cognitive information (e.g., draw on literature regarding customer satisfaction), affective information (e.g., how the employees feeling about their relationships with customers), spiritual information (e.g., what meaning do his employees ascribe to their work and interactions), and social information (e.g. what is the overall work environment contributing or inhibiting to the desired outcomes), the manager now has a context to address the problem of low customer satisfaction ratings.

*Figure 2. Embedded Model of Reflective Practice*



Using the vision generated by the praxis questions and the data from cognitive, affective, and spiritual sources, the manager engages the problem. Schon's 4 step reflective practice model may be engaged at this point or another problem solving technique using the information from the two outlying circles. The manager may have discovered that the employees do not feel connected to the organizational mission and the spiritual meaning of their work. Resolving the problem in the embedded context results in workshops for the employees to connect their personal and team experience with the organizational mission. The embedded model of reflective practice generates multifaceted, spiritual, and socially responsive solutions to work problems.

### **Implications for Human Resource Development**

Reflective practice plays an important role in knowledge construction in the workplace. Professional education programs teach models of reflective practice and need to move beyond the rationalistic, problem oriented use. The yearning for spirituality and socially responsive human resource development and the shift in constructing knowledge require more complex models of reflection. The alternative model proposed in this paper is a starting point for complexifying models of reflective practice. Further research is needed to describe the use (or non-use) of praxis questions and multiple sources of information in professional education programs. Curriculum development in professional education will be impacted by integrating spirituality and including questions of social responsibility. Program evaluation will need to include an assessment of the use of multiple sources of information including spirituality and socially responsive outcomes.

As human resource developers who value the spiritual dimension of individuals and the need for socially responsible outcomes, the development of complex models of reflection is essential for fulfilling our values. If we do not acknowledge spirituality and the common good in the models used by professionals to solve problems and construct knowledge in their field, then it is highly unlikely that the solutions will be integrated and responsive. Our yearning for spirituality and social justice demands that we ask the right questions and look in all the right places for answers.

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