

The Role of Collaborative Reflection in the Career Development of Adult Literacy and Basic Education Program Directors

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Abstract

Management development literature from a variety of fields shows reflection as effective means of career development (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Condermin & Morrin, 2004; Harada, 2001; Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005). This qualitative, phenomenological study explored collaborative forms of reflection and their influence on the career development of adult literacy and basic education program directors. Findings show that participants engaged in several forms of collaborative reflection that contributed to their career development in various ways.

Keywords: career development, reflection, reflective practice, professional development, adult literacy

Introduction to the Study

Few resources, such as job specific training and development programs, exist that support the career development of directors of adult literacy and basic education programs. A lack of funding forces most budgets to be shifted towards the career development of staff, particularly instructors of adult literacy and basic education. Yet, despite the lack of career development opportunities, directors of these programs remain an integral part of overall program operations. They are required to handle all facets of program operations, including resource acquisition, financial matters, human resources, training and development, and funding. They also plan, organize, and evaluate programs, work with staff and outside organizations; develop and implement training programs; effectively communicate and give presentations; manage budgets; and generate funding for operations (Alamprese, 1999). Most directors in these

adult education settings learn “on-the-job,” developing professionally through various types of learning situations. This study explores how directors of adult literacy and basic education programs develop in their careers, particularly in light of the lack of professional development opportunities available to them. One way to examine this phenomenon more closely is through the concept of reflection and its role in the career development process of these individuals. This study focuses on collaborative reflection, in particular, which, through this study, shows to play an important role in the career development of its participants.

Reflection can be characterized as a method to further oneself in their career (Condermin & Morrin, 2004). For this study, the term *reflection* is defined as any type of reflection that occurs in practice, which leads to the career development of a participant. *Collaborative reflection* is defined in the same way, yet indicates reflection is occurring with others, either in group or one-on-one situations, as opposed to the forms of reflection in isolation. The concept of reflection in practice is the guiding framework for this study, with adult literacy and basic education programs serving as a setting for the research.

Adult literacy and basic education programs offer a unique opportunity to explore collaborative reflection with respect to its role in career development. Directors working in these particular program settings often confront issues such as poor physical work conditions, isolation, lack of resources, and program concerns (Lytle, Belzer, & Reumann, 1992; Smith, Hofer, & Gillespie, 2001). Despite these barriers, directors are often required to learn their jobs on their own, rather than having

access to training, mentoring, coaching, or similar types of resources to assist with their career development. Therefore, reflection, particularly among colleagues, is often a necessity in order to develop professionally. Yet, little is actually known about how this reflection with others occurs, or, how it actually influences the career development process of these individuals.

The purpose of this study is to explore collaborative reflection and its role in the career development of adult literacy and basic education program directors. The overall purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to explore directors' perceptions of how they develop professionally and 2) to explore the role of collaborative reflection in their career development process.

Guiding this study are the following questions:

1. What are participants' perceptions concerning how they develop professionally in their careers?
2. How do participants experience collaborative reflection in their practice?
3. How does the experience of reflection contribute to the career development of participants?

Collaborative Reflection and Career Development

The concept of reflection in relationship to learning and career development can be linked back to Socrates (Daudelin, 1996); however, Dewey (1910, 1933, 1938) formalized the concept of reflection. In his earlier works, Dewey presented the idea of “thought” and training individuals how to think and reflect; his notion of reflective thought informed theorists by placing importance on the integration of new experience with past experience through



the process of reflection (Rigano & Edwards, 1998). Dewey's works remind us that reflection is a complex, rigorous, intellectual enterprise that takes time to do well (Rodgers, 2002); we can see the role of reflection in any form of learning activity (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

Since the time of Dewey's writing, the evolution of the concept of reflection has been defined through the works of many, with multiple perspectives supporting or challenging Dewey's original definition of the term. The works of Habermas, Freire, and Mezirow have significantly influenced our perceptions of the role of reflection in teaching and learning settings (Redmond, 2006). Other frameworks, such as those presented by Schön (1983), Boud (1995), and Kolb (1984), focus on the role of reflection within organizational and developmental contexts.

More recently, management and executive professionals have received a significant amount of attention with respect to the impact of reflection on their career development. As pointed out by Daudelin (1997):

There is an immense learning potential in the challenges managers confront and the problems they solve during their everyday working experience. Managers need support to make sense out of these developmental experiences. What is required is a way of exploring causes, developing and testing hypotheses and eventually producing new knowledge. The process of reflection plays a key part in this. (p. 282)

Because of the numerous types of reflection occurring in practice, this study focuses specifically on collaborative reflection and its impact on career development. To understand this process more fully, a more detailed review of literature focused on collaborative reflection and its link to career development follows.

Reflection does not need to take place in isolation. As Bolton (2005) suggests, examination of one's practice should occur alongside open discussions with peers on pertinent issues, and through discussions with colleagues

from outside the practitioners' field. Research has shown that interaction with others can strengthen the reflective process in a variety of ways, prompting research to explore the opportunities presented by communication with others in a work setting. Interaction among practitioners is often linked to reflection in practice (Harada, 2001); collaboration has been found to be an intricate and evolving process based on a foundation of trust that allows the process to grow and emerge as career development (Albrecht, 2003).

Reflection among coworkers in the career development process has been shown to allow practitioners to explore their own points of view by comparing and discussing them with that of their colleagues (Williams, 2005). Collaboration occurs in many forms, including sharing of ideas and knowledge creation (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Melnychuk, 2001), and receiving feedback from more experienced peers (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). However, these collaborative forms of communication do not necessarily mean reflection will occur. As Ayas and Zeniuk (2001) found in their case study, in order for a collaborative workplace of reflective practitioners to exist and be effective, alternative approaches towards learning should be implemented.

One important aspect of collaborative reflection with respect to its role in career development is the use of reflective dialogue. This process consists of conversations with others where factors such as context and emotions of an individual as well as the thought processes play a role (Brockbank, McGill, & Beech, 2002). Individuals interact with colleagues in order to move from personal reflection towards interaction with others in the development of a reflective practice. Engaging in a reflective dialogue creates a different learning climate with those involved. It is unlike ordinary meetings where there may be detachment and varying degrees of involvement. If reflective dialogue is happening effectively, all are engaged. "There will be an intensity of listening and contributions, while the endeavor is to create and challenge meanings and understanding, where each person is at-

tending to the issue of the moment." (Brockbank & McGill, 1998, p. 106)

Reflective dialogue has been shown to enhance the career development of professionals, specifically at a supervisory level (Pearce, 1995). It has also shown to be a critical element in the process of strategic innovation (Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005), providing a framework for understanding how individuals within organizations think about strategy. Mezirow and Associates (2000) present another view of reflective dialogue. They contend that reflective discourse among individuals is an opportunity to challenge assumptions through discussion with colleagues. Through this process, those included in this process become more socially and contextually aware of these presuppositions when reaching conclusions and making decisions.

Reflective dialogue is also an important aspect of the mentoring process, a shared approach used to promote collaborative reflection (Smith, 1999). Mentoring programs typically partner experienced practitioners with novice practitioners in an effort to allow collaboration, guidance, and shared practices while peer mentoring programs allow those at similar levels in their professions mentor each other in a similar manner. Research shows that mentoring programs are a strategy to promote reflection within a variety of professional settings, indicating it to be an important factor in learning how to reflect in practice (Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005; Walkington, 2005). Barnett (1995) suggests this be carried out through a staged, thoughtful process in which mentors and their mentees move through several stages, including imitation, cultivation, separation, redefinition, disillusionment, parting, and transformation.

Learning to reflect on one's practice as part of the mentoring process has resulted in significant, positive outcomes to career development. One important outcome of the mentoring process is the development of new, organizational knowledge through reflection among those in the mentoring relationship (Egbu, 2006). Peer mentoring situations, in particular, have shown that peer mentoring enhances reflective



practice among professionals by encouraging discussion among peers (Arsenault, 2006). Problem-solving and higher-order thinking have also resulted from professional mentoring situations as well (Barnett, 1995).

It is apparent through the research that collaborative forms of reflection occur in various ways, and have a positive impact on practice as well as the career development process. This body of literature serves as the underpinnings for this study, as it also shows a clearer picture of how reflection with others can influence career development

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative, phenomenological research design was used to conduct this study. The overall purpose of qualitative research is to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret their experience (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Qualitative data are comprised of detailed descriptions of people and events in natural settings; depth and understanding emerge from recording what people say in their own words and capturing their modifiers or qualifiers with carefully worded probe questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The type of qualitative research used in a study is dependent on the design; for this study phenomenology was ideal because it focuses on the essence or structure of an experience (Creswell, 2003; Merriam & Associates, 2002) as described by participants in a study (Creswell, 2003). The interpretation of these reflective strategies and methods, as well as the similarities and differences between them, are aligned with the interpretive nature of phenomenological research. Merriam and Simpson (2000) state that: "phenomenologists are interested in showing how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience. This form of inquiry is an attempt to deal with inner experiences unprobed in everyday life."

Participant Selection

To select participants for this study, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling is the selection of information-rich cases for study in depth, from which one can learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). A critical part of the sample selection was the qualification of potential participants for the study. Selected participants in this study were a group of ten directors of adult literacy and basic education programs who, at the time of the study were: 1) currently responsible for directing an adult education program, with over 90% of their time on the job during the week dedicated to managing or directing the program; 2) referred by a professional organization related to adult education, or from other participants in the study; and 3) in the role of an adult education program director for a minimum of 5 years at the time the interview was conducted (either in their present position, or a position with another organization).

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through one-on-one, semi-structured taped interviews with ten total participants; each interview ranged in length from one to two hours. Questions were designed to prompt discussion in several areas, including the role of participants in their work setting, and what learning strategies they use to develop their careers; how participants cope with problems and decision-making processes, and the methods used to handle moments of discouragement. Semi-structured interviews related to these topics generated discussion of reflection and its role in the career development of participants in this study.

Data Analysis

Davies (2007) offers several important guidelines for content analysis which were used during the analysis phase of this study:

1. Remembering the goal is to explore individual or situational perspectives,

2. Reminding yourself of the research questions and continually coming back to them,
3. Maintaining a dynamic and circular relationship between data analysis and data collection,
4. Working with scripts which are functional for my specific readability preferences,
5. Coming up with a coding method, either through colors or highlights, which will allow me to cross-compare interviews, and
6. Considering all responses and not dismissing any "throwaway" remarks.

The analysis phase of this study relied on bracketing, as described by Husserl (1927). The concept of bracketing, according to Husserl, relies heavily on our perceptions of experiences and separating those experiences from outside influences. An overall awareness and subsequent notations of this during the analysis phase assisted with the bracketing process.

After gathering all transcripts, they were reviewed several times and major areas relevant to the purpose of the study were noted, with specific focus on details, stories, and moments throughout each interview that led to the engagement of reflective practice and the furthering of the professional development of the individual.

After noting these areas for consideration, interviews were compared for similarities. As a result, major themes emerged that ran through the data that are subsequently detailed in the findings. Specifically, when reviewing themes and supporting topics, color-coding to separate relevant quotes and additional statements that support the findings of this study were used. This entailed choosing separate colored highlighters for each theme, and using that color to highlight any relevant dialogue in the transcripts. This color-coding method allowed for differentiation among topics, and organized information efficiently and effectively. Specifically, it allowed to organize topics and potential areas for discussion, as well as bring attention to any potential, quotable statements.



Once the topics and potentials areas for discussion were identified, an additional comparison was conducted to ensure analysis of the data was exhausted. As a result, additional themes emerged which are presented in the findings.

Findings

For adult literacy and basic education program directors, the board of directors (board), co-workers, and other colleagues in the field provided opportunity for career development through collaborative reflection. A description of the findings related to the collaborative reflection that occurred with respect to these three groups, starting with the board of directors follows.

Collaborative Reflection with the Board of Directors

Directors' experiences of collaborative reflection with their respective boards are a key factor in their career development. In brief, a board is often essential to the governance of a non-profit organization, including the majority of the adult education programs included in this study. In the case of the organizations involved in this study, board members were typically executives of large organizations, educators from outside the organization itself, and directors of businesses involved in literacy initiatives as philanthropy. Through this study, it was discovered that board members were often responsible for collaborating with directors to reflect upon specific, critical incidents that occurred in the organization, providing opportunity to work through and learn from difficult situations. When faced with a difficult personnel situation, Deb (all names were changed to maintain confidentiality), for example, went to one of the board members for further discussion:

We talked for about a half hour. I explained [the situation] and he gave me some really great ideas on how to handle it because, of course, a lot of issues these days have legal implications and you can't just go running off at the mouth.

When Deb speaks about her relationships with the board, exchanges such as this one are viewed as more

than an advice-seeking session. Deb proclaims that, through discussions such as these, she has learned from the board. The involvement of their working relationship, development of an understanding of accountability, and experiencing development of good habits in practice, such as how to stay calm in crises, how to be a more courteous person, and how to learn from past mistakes for betterment of future practice all stemmed from interactions with the board on a continual basis.

In Sarah's situation, she made a point to keep the board aware of what was happening with the adult education unit of the organization she worked for, allowing her to foster a productive, reflective dialogue with them when necessary. To do this, she believed that it was critical to continually prepare the board so they knew what is going on with her particular department:

I'm always involved in the board prep so that they know what's going on with us. I think it's dangerous if you don't have your adult ed. program positioned in that way. I talk to other [programs] and they'll have their adult ed. sort of an ancillary program. There's advantages. The advantage is people don't know what you're doing. The disadvantage is that people don't know what you're doing. It can come back to haunt you.

Sarah chose to use the board to her advantage in developing her practice through reflective dialogue. They were active in her decision-making, and she participated in the board meetings, and she went to them for support in a variety of situations. She perceived that the reflective dialogue she maintained with them assisted her in all of these areas.

In addition to the board, coworkers within an organization were also perceived as playing an important role in the career development through reflection. This collaboration with co-workers was the case for many of the individuals interviewed for this study. In many situations, directors' experiences in the development of a reflective dialogue with coworkers, and reflection within group settings were necessary for the overall

success of the director, as well as the organization.

Collaborative Reflection with Coworkers

A good example of reflective dialoging within practice occurred when a turnover in the position of the overall program director at an adult education center resulted in the remaining directors and managers developing what was labeled a "learning circle" with each other. Eric, the director of educational programs at the center says that the lack of overall leadership led the group to form an informal leadership team (the "learning circle"), which consulted regularly to help steer operations.

Sarah, an educational program director for a larger, regional teacher resource center, found that the supervisors who worked for her had been some of the most influential relationships she had forged in her 19-year tenure with the organization, offering opportunity for development through reflection in an experience she called the "collaborative leadership approach". This approach provided opportunities to learn that there was "no one way" to do something right.

In some situations, however, collaborative, reflective dialogue with coworkers was relatively non-existent, hindering the role reflection had in areas such as decision-making, learning new tasks, and problem solving. The absence of interaction among coworkers seemed to follow from a perceived lack of internal resources, management style, and the replacement of internal relationships with ones external to the organization. In addition to relationships with internal staff and board members, directors tended to rely on managers of other programs or professionals in the field to collaborative reflect. The majority of these relationships were valuable to many of the participants in this study for experiencing reflection in practice, thus, contributing to their overall professional development.

Collaborative Reflection with Professional Colleagues

Several participants mentioned a state professional development conference, as well as other conferences and



meetings, as a valuable opportunity to experience engagement with other members of the field outside their own, respective organizations, thus positively impacting their careers. For many, these conferences allowed for the discussion of current events in the field as well as overall support and feedback for how one handles certain situations in practice. Eric's organization, in particular, promotes professional development through conferences and provides funding for staff to attend such events. While these types of events offered more formalized training and workshops for career development, Eric believed having staff commit to the conference is a priceless opportunity to experience socialization within the field, allowing him the opportunity to learn from those external to his organization. For others, a lack of time and financial resources hindered the opportunity to attend such programs.

Because Eric's organization was supported by a larger, nationwide non-profit, and the fact that he worked for a United Way agency, he had the benefit of using resources from multiple, external resources. His opportunities for collaborative reflection with respect to the development of his career were greater than they would be in an organization with less resources or affiliations. However, Eric stated that he got calls from other managers all of the time asking for advice on how to deal with certain issues, and believed that extended partnerships were a constant source for experiencing learning opportunities.

For Kara, interaction with an individual on a program evaluation team led her to reflect more about her own participation in national and local electronic list-serves as well as her own professional activity. Kara's experience of interacting with this particular individual through the evaluation process made her want to think about adult education on a more national level; thus, she changed her overall participation in some of the career development opportunities available to her.

Experiences in practice that led to career development often occurred through the reflective, collaborative nature of the relationships directors forged with those internal and external to the organization. These opportunities for

collaborative reflection led to career development in a variety of ways. The essence of these experiences is discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Phenomenological research deals with inner experiences of everyday practice (Merriam & Associates, 2002). To do this, this study draws upon the essence of the lived experience (Patton, 1990) of each participant, looking to draw parallels between collaborative forms of reflection and career development of program directors. The next section describes four separate areas related to the essence of the experience of collaborative reflection with respect to career development, including:

1. Development of the ability to work through difficult situations,
2. Decision-making and learning from mistakes,
3. Discovery of multiple approaches, and
4. Progressive knowledge acquisition related to current happenings in the field.

Working through difficult situations

For the participants, career development often took the form of developing the ability to work through difficult situations through the experience of collaborative reflection. Those who had more developed relationships outside the field sought out colleagues or board members; those who were more comfortable with internal staff, or newer to their roles relied more heavily on internal resources. Regardless, the impact of having a support system was crucial to the development of the ability of working through difficult situations in practice. This supports previous findings that indicate collaborative relationships as being an important part of the career development process with respect to reflection (Albrecht, 2003; Harada, 2001; Williams, 2005).

The findings of the present study, however, indicate that directors chose to spend more time building relationships based on the amount of collaborative reflection that occurred with certain colleagues or groups. In general, if a participant preferred relating to board

members, they spent more time building those relationships; if they relied more on internal staff, they made a point to be more inclusive of them. This was not the case in every situation, but it was a trend that undergirded the relationship building process. The existing literature does not explore the relationships of group members outside the group dynamics. That is, if directors "prefer" to collaborate with certain individuals and not others, we know little about the dynamics that remain among those who are "left out" of the collaborative process and the director themselves.

Decision-making and learning from mistakes

Also, participants' reflections on their past or future actions with others often sought reaffirmation of a decision which was already made or about to be made; that is, collaboration with others in the field gave confidence to those in the decision-making role. Certainly, in these particular situations, reflective practice is taking place. As Merriam and Cafferella (1999) state, "reflective practice allows one to make judgments in complex and murky situations -- judgments based on experience and prior knowledge" (p. 232). In some situations, when directors did not know how to handle a problem, outside assistance was necessary to decide on a probable, ideal solution. That said, trust and confidentiality among colleagues, whether internal or external, showed to be incredibly important elements in collaboration.

The process of reflecting on practice also led to improved decision-making. Learning from mistakes, an essence of the experience of collaborative reflection typically arose out of conversations with individuals at higher levels either within or outside the organization. These types of mentoring situations, in general, have shown to be an important factor in learning how to reflect in practice (Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005; Walkington, 2005). For the participants in this study, formal mentoring situations often provided opportunity to collaboratively reflect on mistakes, consider other options, or provide alternative solutions.



A common thread among many of the participants that allowed for directors to learn from their mistakes through collaborative reflection was the respect they held for those who had worked in the field for long periods of time; often, they sought conversations from those who they (or others) held in high regard. Just as important is the approachability of these outside mentors to assist less-experienced directors when they make mistakes. This openness allowed participants to be less inhibited when approaching these individuals, allowing a friendly, productive relationship developed.

The development of strong, trusting, understanding relationships was a key to effective collaborative reflection among colleagues. Therefore, it was common for participants to strive to achieve respect from staff and their peers in the field. Not surprisingly, those who forged strong relationships seemed to benefit more from experiencing collaborative reflection; they had a strong network of “go-to” people for support and collaboration. Also important to note is that of the few participants who seemed less inclined to seek support through reflective dialogue, these individuals lacked development opportunities in practice from conversations with colleagues. They often sought support internally or from other sources.

Discovering multiple approaches

Relationship development often led to discovering and experiencing multiple approaches towards various areas of practice. Strong relationships and the development of multiple solutions often went hand-in-hand. When more individuals were involved in tasks such as decision-making, working on projects, and discussing new ideas, multiple approaches to these emerged. The discovery of multiple approaches develops practice in a variety of ways. As Kreber (2004) suggests, a multi-faceted, educational development initiative towards reflective practice should include the promotion of meaning, recording of experiences, addressing learning goals, and self-regulated learning. In this study, most notably, the experience of collaborative reflection that is inclusive

of multiple individuals within the organization led to a more collaborative working environment, where each individual felt as though they were contributing.

More importantly, particularly within an adult education agency setting where there are varying backgrounds and viewpoints among individuals involved, the inclusion of many individuals in reflection led to a more critical approach towards elements of practice. This is particularly aligned with Mezirow and Associates’ (2000) view which sees reflective dialogue as an opportunity to challenge assumptions through discussion with colleagues. Along those lines, it was common among several directors to come to different conclusions about areas of practice once reflective dialogue occurred. Where there may have been one, well-defined solution or idea towards a specific situation, reflective dialogue allowed directors to see the situation from viewpoints of others, creating opportunity to change practice to accommodate what was truly happening from multiple points of view.

Keeping current in the field

A final finding, which describes an additional facet of the essence of collaborative reflection, is that discussion with others was often sought in order to keep relevant in the field. Specifically, instead of attending formal training sessions, the discourse regarding political influences, student requirements, state mandates, curriculum, program development, and other areas was developed further primarily through discussions with others.

Looking at these findings from a closer lens it becomes clear that the relationships a director develops with others are vital to career development with respect to the experience and essence of collaborative reflection in practice. It was not uncommon for participants to rely on opinions, discussion, and conversations with others to make decisions in their jobs. Without strong, developed relationships with others in the field, the network of individuals who could assist them with making decisions would also be affected. Key to this relationship development is the

trust building that occurs among managers and other individuals. Without trust from both parties, the experience of collaborative reflection would be less productive. This interdependency of strong working relationships and decision-making was a major factor in the experience of reflection in practice and the development of these skills.

Along these same lines, collaborative reflection often was a welcome reprieve when managers were faced with many similar situations or when they became overwhelmed with too many decisions that needed to be made. The experience of collaborating with others for input allowed managers to remain less stagnant in their roles, either re-affirming decisions they already had made, or developing new solutions to old problems and issues.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

As research continues to explore the relationship between reflective practice and professional development, this study furthers the understanding of reflective practice as a framework in management development, with particular focus on collaborative reflection.

It is already known that professional development often occurs through reflective practice (Condermin & Morrin, 2004). Reflective practice has been studied in relationship to management development from various perspectives pertaining to how one makes sense out of development opportunities in practice (Daudelin, 1996). More specifically, individuals can reflect in various ways, including the critical reflection and questioning of daily happenings within practice (Brookfield, 1990, 1991; Mezirow, 1991). This self-assessment process leads to further understanding of how one can make better, informed decisions, solve problems, and learn through the reflective process (Boud, 1995).

Another implication for the concept of collaborative reflective practice, in particular, is its general applicability to management development, especially as organizations look at new, innovative ways of managing programs. Often, organizations look to implement more formalized training programs to encour-



age management development. As most participants said this training was helpful for more administrative tasks, it did not emphasize some of the other relevant areas management development that emerged review of literature. Development of decision-making, problem-solving, and collaborative working relationships, all common areas of more formal management development programs such as interpersonal skills, knowledge management, strategic planning, and creativity (Evans, 2005) are also important.

To address the need for innovation in programming, organizations should look towards first fostering reflective practice, as it plays an integral role in professional development. Gosling and Mintzberg (2004) support this suggestion, recommending integration of management education with practice as well as a less prescriptive classroom environment, and encouragement of reflective practice. While the managers who participated in this study all seemed to develop collaborative reflective practices in their practice over time, more awareness of it, and its contribution to professional development would allow learning to occur more readily.

Along these lines, some of the more studied, proven techniques of working towards collaborative reflective practice might allow for it to occur more readily in practice as well. As Liimatainen *et al.* (2001) concluded in their study of the development of reflection among nursing students, various approaches and methods toward reflection are needed to support learning from practice. For ABE managers, maximizing collaborative reflection through deliberate strategies could enhance their professional development by choosing the techniques that work for them.

Collaborative reflective practice proved to be an important part of each participant's development in this study, regardless of his or her personality type or values. Literature linking reflection to an individual's values or personality type to professional development in practice is scarce. Wellington and Austin (1996) discuss a multifaceted approach towards orienting reflective practice in education that considers values, but fails to look beyond one's val-

ues towards education. Further research is certainly needed in this area.

In a broader sense, the adult education institutions that prepare ABE managers to work in the field of adult education should consider development of educational opportunities along these lines as well. As the need for ABE and similar programs continues to rise, development of those working in this field will continue to be critical. This may include promotion of collaborative reflection, awareness of self-reflection, and other, relevant topics that are not typically offered through formalized coursework.

As collaboration within practice was a key finding which contributed to the development of ABE managers, the implication is that more opportunity for this to occur should be considered. Organizations should look to promoting more deliberate, collaborative opportunities with the sole purpose of allowing managers to work together to discuss, problem-solve, generate ideas, and resolve issues. Also, interpersonal skills, group dynamics, and communication skills are also important, so that managers can effectively engage in collaboration.

It is already known that reflective practice has significant implications for management development. As Raelin (1993) points out:

Management as a holistic skill must blend theory and action. Theory makes sense only through practice, but practice makes sense only through reflection as enhanced by theory. Managers need both, and they need interaction between the two if they are going to prepare themselves to cope with the changing landscape of business experience. (p. 88-89)

Raelin's views have a profound implication for future ABE management research. As was notable in this study, reflection was a holistic, less prescriptive process. Researchers need to address this viewpoint more fully to better understand how more holistic views of reflection impact learning in practice. Most current studies focus on one "type" of reflective practice, rather than a conceptual, less structured point of

view. As research goes forward, consideration of this viewpoint will impact practice in the field of ABE management development, and other fields as well.

Next, there is a definite link between personality type and reflection in practice. Yet, this study can only make general assumptions based on the data collected. Research needs to explore this area more fully, addressing questions pertaining to how certain personalities and values are related to how reflection occurs in practice. By doing this, fields of practice can better understand how to address the learning of certain personality types or make changes and revisions to existing programs to better serve the needs of employees.

As Kreber (2004) and Moon (1999; 2004) both note, reflective practice is an unclear term; this study expands our knowledge of this framework in various ways. Most importantly, the exploration of collaborative reflective practice took place within a specific educational context; however, the participants were not teachers or students, as is typical in the research in this area. Also, since this study explored management professionals in an adult education setting, the study was able to extract the essence of certain experiences which are typical of this specific population, allowing us to see beyond some of the experiences of the participants normally studied in this setting. Therefore, as Kreber (2004) calls for further involvement in the actual process of reflective practice (rather than a more solitary activity), the reflective practices among ABE managers may begin to touch the surface of the broader questions regarding what collaborative reflective practice essentially is, and how it is effective.



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