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Foreword

Society is always taken by surprise at any new example of commonsense.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

What makes more sense than teachers embracing the role of reflective practitioners and engaging in practical action research in their classrooms? After all, they are closest to the action in the classroom; they are the most informed about the intricacies of that action; and teachers, along with students, of course, are key stakeholders in any action in the classroom. Why wouldn't it be prudent, logical and even inevitable that teachers would be reflective about their craft and invested in becoming more skilled in their practice?

As one traces the evolutionary process of staff development over the past 30 years, three phases emerge: Phase 1 'The One-Shot Deal'; Phase 2 'The Spray Paint Method'; and Phase 3 'The Teacher as Researcher.' See Figure 1 for the Evolution of Professional Development Opportunities chart.

Evolution of Professional Development Opportunities

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
'One Shot Deal'	'Spray Paint Method'	'Teacher as Researcher'
District institute day or inservice day	Site-based plans for staff development	Reflective practice through professional inquiry
1970s	1980s	1990s

Figure 1

Practical Action Research

Reflect

Improve

Inquire

Figure 2

The first phase is characterised by the 'one-shot deal', which is comprised of a regional school closure day or a school inservice day. This day is an opportunity for staff to gather together for a rousing motivational interlude. This earliest phase is followed by a more comprehensive concept of staff development recognised as the 'spray paint method'. Much as one fixes a room by cleaning it up with a new paint job, this second phase of staff development is often seen as a fix-it-up approach in which staff are exposed to a new look. In this phase site-based teams determine a valued innovation and multiple days and multiple means are designed to ensure 'coverage' of all staff with the new idea.

Not to sound too cynical, the 'one-shot deal' and the 'spray paint method' do offer limited opportunities for teachers to learn and to improve. Yet, current practice is evidenced by this evolution of terminology. Moving from the singular idea of an 'inservice day' to the inclusion-ary term of 'staff development', the current, the matured and the preferred term, 'professional development', affirms the teacher as a professional who has a voice in his or her own development.

Embedded in the concept of professional development is the belief that individual teachers, in a continuous and unending cycle, reflect on their own practice, select relevant goals and choose appropriate inquiry methods to investigate their ideas about the teaching and learning scenarios in their classrooms.

What Richard Schmuck has provided with *Practical Action Research for Change* is a formalised look at the continual process of intense reflection, informed inquiry and planned improvement (see Figure 2).

Within the pages of this book, Schmuck provides an overarching rationale to justify the role of action research within the arena of academic research. In addition, Schmuck defines and distinguishes between proactive and responsive action research and, in turn, delineates the phases of each.

With this book, teachers and administrators find an invaluable source of practical ideas as they engage in the professional inquiry of reflective practice. With this user-friendly guide, individuals, as well as collaborative and cooperative groups of educators, are given powerful tools to use in their quest for better instruction and enhanced student learning.

In fact, *Practical Action Research for Change* indelibly marks the third phase of the evolutionary march toward school improvement. Through professional development activities of the highest order—personally relevant inquiry, directed by the reflective practitioners—the teacher's voice is heard in the school improvement process. After all, what makes more sense then teachers reflecting upon and inquiring about their own teaching?

—Robin Fogarty
June 1997

Chapter 1

Reflective Professional Practice

They only babble who practise not reflection. I shall think; and thought is silence.
                                                          —*Richard Brinsley Sheridan*

Thought takes place as internal conversation, having developed through social process.
                                                          —*George Herbert Mead*

Reflection is thinking about one's own behaviours in the future, the past or the present. The playwright Sheridan accurately proclaims that 'thought is silence'—however, social psychologist George Mead believes that there is an integral association between thinking and social interaction and that thought is a kind of solitary dialogue (Mead, 1934).

Reflections of the Future, the Past and the Present

Educators who do not think about the future cannot contemplate the results of their actions. Educators who do not think about the past cannot ready themselves for change. Educators who do not think about the present cannot understand what to do next. Without solitary dialogue, educators do not know what they truly value.

Educators think about their future behaviours when they plan, design or rehearse. When learning to play the trumpet in primary school, my teacher prodded me to go over the notes and fingering in my mind before I played. In high school, my football coach told us to rehearse attacking plays in our heads before the games. In a college composition course, I was assigned to read, *Think Before You Write* (Leary and Smith, 1951) and my university speech instructor urged me to visualise my audience in my mind's eye before walking to the podium.

Now, as a professor, I seldom enter the classroom without at least a skeletal teaching plan, nor do I carry out research or consultation without guiding questions and an explicit design. Indeed, for teachers and students alike, thinking about future behaviours is an essential and necessary stepping stone to effective action. See Figure 1.1 for an example of a teacher reflecting on the future.

Educators also benefit from thinking seriously about their past behaviours—how their behaviours came across to others and what