

## Rendering the invisible visible: Lived values that support reflective practice

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### ABSTRACT

Context is influential when acquiring workplace learning, especially reflective skills. The following is a qualitative inquiry regarding a supervision group of novices developing reflective practice in the field of team facilitation. Using public reflection as a way of making thinking explicit, participants engaged in a mutual process of meaning making. The inquiry employed an instrumental case study approach. Data sets included debriefing sessions, individual, and group interviews covering the lifespan of the group. These data illuminated the developing reflective skills and the unfolding value processes embedded within the team's social interactions. The patterns demonstrated that novices could collectively increase the explicit expression of reflective thought linked to practice. Values acted as tacit rules promoting, governing, and shaping social interactions, supporting reflective practice.

### INTRODUCTION

Reflective practice is the ability to engage in the active, persistent analysis of beliefs and knowledge, and the consequences that follow from those beliefs and knowledge (Paris & Winograd, 2003) in the context of practice. This includes self-awareness and self-monitoring (Cotton, 1998). Within professional education, this refers to the novice's emerging ability to: analyze practice while enacting it; evaluate understanding; and model processes that support the development of expertise. Context is very influential in teaching and learning, especially when developing reflective skills (Scanlan, Care, & Udod, 2002). Values, a tacit contextual dimension of any learning relationship, can be an ally in developing reflective skills in professional education and workplace settings.

### Values and Reflective Practice

Cultures organize and codify themselves by constructing valuing systems. In turn, values can inhibit (Davis & Blanchard, 2004; Garcia-Morales, Lopez-Martin, & Llamas-Sanchez, 2006; Krumboltz, & Yeh, 1996) or enhance (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009; Fanning, 1995; Johnson & Thomas, 2009; Tatsuno, 1990, as cited by Montuori & Purser, 1999; Uduari-Solner & Keyes, 2000) various aspects of human activity, such as learning and collaboration. In collaborative work contexts, values operate as the moderators for interpersonal working relationships, tacit rules for governing the necessary social interaction. Though values have always been a central focus of reflective practices (Schön, 1983), the investigation of the impact of values on the development of reflective practice skills has been relatively neglected. Research has focused on the practitioner's reflection on identifying existing personal values and the degree of alignment between these values and the values

of the practice context (Black, 2005; Bolton, 2006; Cameron, Hayes, & Wren, 2000; Gardner, 2001). Generally, this has been done in hindsight, outside of the ongoing enactment of actual practice. However, Sparrow and Heel (2006) observed that when work teams engaged in collective reflection about their work processes using dialogue, shared values also significantly influenced team practices.

Values, both the expression and enactment of them in socially shared spaces, have been identified as key to the development of collaborative learning climates, influencing the development of cognitive and reflective skills (Uduari-Solner & Keyes, 2000). Nurturing the ability to consciously reflect in order to illuminate one's own practice is key in professional education and workplace knowledge production, since reflective skills initiate learning in unfamiliar contexts (Veenman & Beishuizen, 2004), play a central role when solving open-ended problems (Jausovec, 1994), and are linked to creative thought (Mumford, Baughman, & Sager, 2003; Nečka, 2003). However, the unfolding of personal values into the external social environment, the adoption of these values as norms regulating interaction within a culture of practice, and the impact of these values-in-action on reflection has received little attention. Tate and DeBroux (2001) found that a learning community that valued individual input was able to effectively encourage participation, promoting higher levels of expertise. Davies (1996) was able to improve nursing practice through a training intervention targeting participants' values. Unfortunately, the specific values that promote reflective practice in a collaborative setting and the values-in-action that nurture such a dynamic have not been the focus of any inquiry.

## **PURPOSE**

Since groups are a common format for developing reflective practice (Pavlovic & Friedland, 1997), I was interested in which lived values supported this process using the process of public reflection, a method for illuminating the inner world of novices under supervision in the field of organizational and team facilitation. Public reflection requires one to step back, ponder, and make explicit the meaning to self and others, what has recently transpired, been planned, observed, and achieved in practice (Raelin, 2000). It illuminates experience providing a basis for future action and creates shared meaning and knowledge, which is the foundation for practice-based learning. The focus of this inquiry was to chart the evolution of reflective practice in an authentic work context and the lived values that supported this evolution.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

I selected a qualitative methodology, using an instrumental case study approach (Yin, 1994). This method is more conducive to understanding meaning attributed by participants to events and how context influences action, while also identifying unanticipated phenomena (Maxwell, 1996).

### **Sampling**

Since this project was concerned with novices who wanted to become experts, I used the procedure of purposive sampling. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested this method, since random sampling may not produce the kind of sample that the project required. From a pool of new graduates who were affiliated with a professional association, I recruited volunteers who fulfilled the following criteria: were interested in gaining experience facilitating groups; expressed the explicit intention to become professionals; had no practical experience; wanted to work in a team; and had content knowledge of facilitation.

### **Participants**

The case was defined as a group of four novices (Stake, 1994), women aged 23 to 45. They were selected on the basis that they fulfilled the criteria outlined above. As well, they had little exposure to the notions of reflective practice, and were interested in participating in a structure that would encourage them to think about their facilitation, and learn from others about how they enacted their work.

I assumed the stance of complete member-researcher of the team (Adler & Adler, 1994; Spradley, 1980), since I was their informal supervisor and a full member of the environment. Being a complete member allowed me to grasp the depth of the subjectively lived experiences of the novices and give an insider's view of the supervision group. My role was to promote the gaining of expertise. In terms of my affective relationship with the participants, I attempted to cultivate a mentor-like role, a trusted counselor, a friend, an individual in whose charge is put a valued possession, duty, or responsibility (Torrance, 1984, as cited in Houtz, 1994). I was particularly mindful of issues of power, status (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and cognitive authority, given my role as facilitation expert and researcher, and attempted to continually rebalance interaction in favor of equanimity. I did this by focusing most of my verbal interventions on asking questions rather than making definitive statements.

### **Sources of Data**

Various sources of data were used in order to map the supervision group of novices as a system and chart the development of their reflective practice skills. Since expert reflective thinking develops as an on-going process (Sternberg, 1998), a developmental approach was taken. Therefore, this group was followed for six weeks, which comprised the entirety of its "life" and data was collected at each phase of its development.

*Debriefing sessions [DS].* Stories are the closest we come to experience as we tell others of our experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Sharing our internal world using narrative is such an intrinsic facet of human culture that we forget that stories also shape our experience. One function of the debriefing sessions for the supervision group was to use reflection to create retrospective sense making (Barrett, 1999) by telling stories of experiences. Since reflection skills are modifiable, public reflection was used in order to surface and make explicit these processes, and to transform storied

experience into knowledge about praxis. Public reflection also transfers individual learning into team learning.

The supervision group met twice per week, since the novices were facilitating a group Tuesdays and Thursdays for a period of six weeks. Directly after each facilitation experience, the supervision group convened to debrief for an average of 1.5 hours. A collaborative dialogue was created in which participants shared their observations, stories, and understandings of group process and their own practice of team facilitation. It was a time when they subjected their actions and interventions to critical consideration. Public reflection functioned as a way for participants to act as witnesses and audience to the stories of others, co-constructing a conceptual understanding of each other's facilitation practice. Since the focus of the discussion was on molding understanding into a unified meaningful whole, this time was an occasion to practice reflection.

In addition, this format of public reflection allowed the participants of the supervision group to develop the ability to apply, reshape, and reform extant knowledge to their specific context in order to foster novel responses (Mumford, Reiter-Palmon, & Redmond, 1994). In essence, the debriefing times were opportunities for the participants to open the "black box" of the mind and transform it into "glass" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The novices reported in their individual interviews that they tried to practice transparency in interpretations and understandings of how their competencies were progressing. Debriefing sessions of the supervision group were video taped in order to allow the voices of the participants to be clearly recorded, and to create a full record of a social event (Adler & Adler, 1994).

*Individual interviews* [II]. Each member of the supervision group was interviewed individually at one point during the inquiry. The interview was approached as a collaborative and interactive process. Using a conversational, semi-structured interview format (Kvale, 1996) to facilitate the development of trust, rapport, and maximum exploration (Fontana & Frey, 1994), I elicited stories about their experiences in the public reflection supervision circle, since this would be indicative of their schemas and their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). Interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours.

*Group interview* [GI]. I also conducted a group interview (Morgan, 1997) at the conclusion of the inquiry. A group interview is the formal systematic questioning of all participants simultaneously, in order to give the novices an opportunity to collectively sum up their experiences of working in the supervision team; to provide a rich data set; and to stimulate the participants to elaborate beyond the usual boundaries of expression constrained by individual interpretation. Group interviews also tend to have a synergistic effect, generating more insights than individual interviews. This group interview lasted 2.5 hours.

Both the individual interviews and the group interview were videotaped, and used to triangulate the data in order to provide coherence and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Practice Context**

Since the development of reflective practice skills happen in the context of real world practice, I wanted to conduct my inquiry in an authentic setting. I was asked to test out a new format for a class. I was allotted 4 teaching assistants (essentially volunteer position since payment consisted of a small honorarium). It provided a natural novice apprenticeship environment, since it is typical that apprentices learn mostly in relation to other apprentices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The four participants-teaching assistants facilitated four learning groups with ten members in each group. It was their task to facilitate learning in their groups through group discussion and accomplishment of various experiential assignments and activities within the context of the course.

### **Data Analysis**

Videotapes were transcribed and rendered into text for analysis. They were considered a form of collective “think-aloud protocol,” a common approach for illuminating cognitive performance (Chi, 1997; Young, 2005). Coding was done for process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) at the level of units of meaning. Rather than coding in disconnected parsed categories, I used the category string technique (Dey, 1999), in order to retain a holistic sensibility to the analysis. Each string contained strands that signified major categories. Each strand contained knots representing subcategories. Therefore subcategories were linked to major categories linked to representations, connected through meaning. Codes regarding both reflective practice and values were linked to sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969) based on formulations in the literature. Sensitizing concepts provide a functional pool of readily activatable coding pegs (Miles and Huberman, 1994) drawn from established conceptions. Sequences of evolving action/interaction, and changing conditions were noted. The coding traced over time the flow of continuous reflective practice processes that exhibited the requisite properties, the presence of values in the social interactions, and variations or shifts from one condition to another.

### **Addressing Issues of Understanding and Trustworthiness**

Maxwell (2002) suggested that understanding may be a more fundamental, and by extension, more useful concept than validity when considering qualitative research, since it refers more directly to accounts and inferences, the essence of the inquiry, rather than methods. My overall rationale was to utilize a coherence theory of truth approach that asserts that truth is coherence within a system (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criteria that guided this inquiry to ensure trustworthiness (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) of the data were:

- credibility (in place of internal validity), that is, the extent that the constructions adequately represent the reality of the participants in the supervision group;
- transferability (in place of external validity) in that I took responsibility for adequately and thickly describing the supervision group experience so that those who wish to transfer this to another context can do so with an adequate data base (this is a particularly important dimension since systems are unique in unexpected ways, and therefore it may never be possible to make more than a few obvious generalizations);

- dependability (in place of reliability), that is, the data are internally coherent; and
- confirmability (in place of objectivity), that is, the extent to which the theoretical implications about reflective practice and values are grounded in the data.

These criteria are particularly vital if the purpose of the study is to describe or understand the experience of the researched, and not to predict or control that experience.

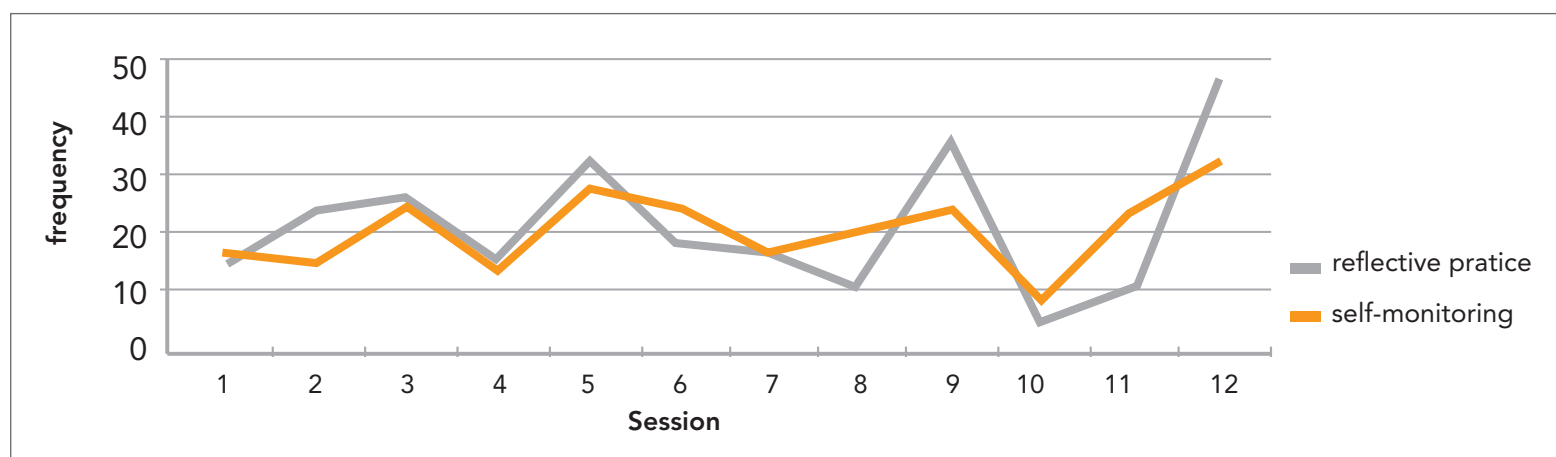
## RESULTS

Reflection in this system was comprised of two main activities: *reflective practice* and *self-monitoring*.

### Reflective Practice

Since I was particularly interested in reflective practice as a shared collaborative activity, I combined the codes for all of the novices. Figure 1 illustrates that the frequencies of reflective practice, generally increased over time. However, the variable path suggests that these skills in facilitation novices may be sensitive to the context and demands of the situation since the valleys corresponded to times that the groups experienced the normal transitions of growth and development (Lacoursiere, 1980), which were often characterized by turbulence (Kass, 2005). This turbulence sometimes generated self-doubt for the participants, which temporarily dampened their reflective practice skills.

Figure 1: Growth of Novice Reflective Practice Thinking



Reflective practice was defined as any statement that suggested either *reflection-in-action* or *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1983). Reflection-in-action is the reflection one engages in while doing something. This capacity to reflect on professional action allows the novice to engage in a process of continuous learning, and was frequently an example of reflection happening within the immediate context of the debriefing sessions. Reflection-on-action is reflection on an action after having enacted it. This type of reflection links thought and action with reflection and allows a novice to think about and critically analyze actions with the goal of improving practice. This was generally focused on reflections of the novices' facilitation actions, and constituted the vast majority of this code. Reflective practice occasionally expressed as uncertainty about what action to take, common for novices of all domains. The following quotes are those utterances that were coded as displaying the characteristics of reflective practice.

Lara<sup>1</sup>, a 23-year-old single woman, described an event where she was at a loss as how to respond to a question.

**Lara:** *And I didn't know what to do with that, 'cause I had no idea, so I just said, "Well, I don't know..."* (DS)

Sometimes, reflective practice was expressed as certainty about actions taken, which formed the basis of the self-confidence that the novices needed. Opal, a 37 year-old married mother who returned to school for a new career, was faced with a team that was resistant to examining its own work dynamics. She believed that she had an ethical responsibility to make sure the group members gained some insight, despite their reluctance.

**Opal:** *But, I felt I had to... "What are you taking with you? What happens when you go into a group next time?"* (DS)

By periodically stepping back from the team facilitation experience, participants in the supervision group were able to make explicit meaning of the events and the implications on practice, by reflecting to an audience of others who were sharing a similar experience. Catherine, a 29 year-old partnered woman contemplating life after graduate school, became aware of some of the contextual features that determined her actions.

**Catherine:** *I could let them walk away totally miserable, and freakin' out, or say something... So I said something.* (DS)

Facilitators are not immune to the covert emotional dynamics that teams exert to evade responsibility (Bion, 1961). Reflective practice helped the novices in the supervision group to be aware of these hidden processes that shape dynamics and group functioning.

**Catherine:** *I felt it when I was talking to them. "Okay, I'm totally getting sucked into this collusion."* (DS)

As the sessions progressed, the novices displayed an increased awareness of the emotional undercurrents inherent in groups since it became a regular topic of conversation. Ann, a 45 year-old widow who was adding facilitation to her marketable skills, could distinguish the fact that the team's poor task performance was not due to her, but the group's steadfast ignoring of the task's parameters.

**Ann:** *I don't remember ever saying that, but somehow... they have to blame somebody, so they blamed me. Then you start questioning... did I really...? But I know I didn't.* (DS)

These reflections provided the novices with a more realistic picture of their capacities and effectiveness as facilitators, giving them a real sense of their limits. These ethical and psychological boundaries are extremely important for future facilitation practitioners to maintain when working with groups and teams in organizations and communities. This collective reflective process gave the novices in the supervision group the added advantage of illuminating their rationale for action.

**Catherine:** *I cut them off, because I felt they needed to leave with a feeling, "Okay, we at least know what we have to do for next week."* (DS)

Sometimes the best intervention is inaction. Knowing this option, and its justification, was also a by-product of this activity. Lara faced a dilemma of confronting a team member who was creating unnecessary tension and conflict within the group.

**Lara:** *But I didn't say it, because I thought I'm going to create something else... and I don't feel that I have that responsibility to do something like that.* (DS)

In the supervision group, reflective practice grounded critical reflection and future action, producing fertile ground for creative problem solving (Wakefield, 2003). Reflective practice became rooted in solid theoretical frameworks (the observational dimensions of Dimock (1993), the various group development theories as described in Kass (2005), and the notions of intervention outlined by Reddy (1994) became habitual touchstones for the public reflections), stored in memory for future use. Catherine devised an effective intervention based on her reflection that the team was using a check-in ritual to waste time.

**Catherine:** *I'll give them that feedback next time, about taking too much time.* (DS)

These statements were the result of the social interactions among the individuals on the supervision group, and were activated in early sessions by an effort to recreate the facilitation example for others in storied form. Reflective practice appeared following a response to a comment or question by another novice. In later sessions, participants were able to engage in reflective practice readily. The only time this skill needed to be “nudged” by others was when the novice experienced a facilitation or group crisis that was temporarily beyond the level of her current competence. Catherine was concerned about her susceptibility to be manipulated by the emotional dependency of group members around her position of “authority.” She, in fact, was maneuvered to become a “go-between” for two members who were engaged in conflict.

**Catherine:** *They're both doing the same thing. What's going to happen now is: Zara said, "Could I call you or e-mail you and you could let me know your take on this?" They don't want to face it...*

[Opal mimes reeling in a fish with a rod.]

**Ann:** *That's what it's all about.*

**Catherine:** *Honestly, they don't want to face it.*

**Rosemary:** *Did you just see what she did? Do it again, Opal.*

**Catherine:** *Fished in... fished in. But...*

**Rosemary:** *She hooked you and now she's reeling you in.* (DS)

This interchange illuminates how the group was able to create a window for Catherine to examine a dynamic of which she was momentarily blinded.



### Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring demonstrated awareness about one's own behavior, including monitoring understanding and the extent to which a person perceived and regulated awareness, observations, and assumptions. Figure 1 shows that the frequencies for self-monitoring generally displayed the same pattern over time as reflective practice.

A key concept in the field of facilitation and organizational or community change is the notion of "self-as-instrument" (Hanson, 2000). This concept focuses on the incorporation of personhood and relational skills as necessary tools for practice. Self-monitoring statements suggest that this was becoming an emergent characteristic of these novices. This skill gave them opportunities to explore and verbalize the uncertainty that is endemic to being a novice. The following quotes are those utterances that were coded as displaying the characteristics of self-monitoring.

When asked a question about a specific term, Ann surprised herself by demonstrating competency.

**Ann:** *So then I explained what a norm was, and thought, "Thank goodness I remember!"* (DS)

Self-monitoring also highlighted their awareness of the borders of their own perception. Opal became aware of how she was relying on conjecture rather than observation in understanding a team member's response. This awareness alerted her to the intrinsic limitations of this source of data about group process.

**Opal:** *And I think she had the impression that I felt... here's an assumption, but... that I felt that they should be disclosing things of a more... personal nature...* (DS)

Self-monitoring allowed the novices in the supervision group to "normalize" the fact that issues under discussion were not clear-cut, but ill-defined. There were areas where we all lacked clarity and full understanding.

**Opal:** *...when you say stuff about your group or you pick up on something, you actually made me realize a lot of this stuff I'm not getting.* (DS)

The self can be a powerful instrument of group diagnosis, much like a barometer, for implicit and subliminal group dynamics. In describing a team that was characterized by intense frenetic and unfocused task activity, Catherine pinpointed her own bodily reactions to such an environment.

**Catherine:** *I was getting a headache just watching them. I felt so much tension in the group... There were some members that were trying to vocalize and they couldn't, because there's too much going on. They were like... [strangled sound]* (DS)

However, no facilitator is infallible, and is subject to misdiagnosing dynamics.

**Lara:** *They were all excited because they thought they'd passed the [group's] conflict... At the beginning, honestly, I was a little bit fooled.* (DS)

The novices were able to identify their own emotional reactions to events that shaped their interpretations. Opal became conscious of her empathetic responses to two team members who were involved in a conflict within the group, balancing a concern for both members involved.

**Opal:** *I didn't want Lydia to feel as if she was left out, and I didn't want Oscar really to... take anything badly.* (DS)

Self-monitoring also functioned as a window to their “shadow side” (Arrien, 1993). This personality construct suggests that the shadow is the container for things about the self one is not proud of, qualities one denies or disowns, or secretly prefers to blame on others. Awareness of this facet of self is crucial since it can shape and skew a facilitator’s interventions. Lara revealed her own irritation and defensiveness at a team member who was excessively whining and complaining.

**Lara:** *...and I started to get very annoyed. I didn't do anything, obviously.* (DS)

All of these opportunities to self-monitor their behavior, thoughts, and reactions were times when they could fine tune themselves into more expert facilitation instruments. Reflective practice and self-monitoring demonstrated the emergence of their ability to navigate the foreground of events within the team with the background of reflective practice.

**Values**

Three dominant strands within the values category emerged describing the overall values climate of the supervision group of novices. Table I illustrates the frequency of the codes of the values lived within this supervision group. Since the research question focused on lived values

*Table 1:* Frequency Table of Code String for Process Category of Values

Code String	Sessions												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
<b>Values-positive regard for others</b>													
caring/sensitivity/empathy	2	-	10	10	17	14	9	19	15	7	12	13	128
helpfulness	1	2	4	6	15	6	6	11	23	13	18	17	122
supportiveness/empowerment	16	19	20	16	30	23	16	24	25	29	24	25	267
<b>Values-promoting inquiry</b>													
listening/questioning for clarity	12	1	9	10	6	5	12	17	21	22	36	32	183
Mutuality/plurality	20	4	9	8	17	2	8	8	3	7	6	2	94
okay to make mistakes	-	1	-	11	4	5	2	9	10	10	6	6	65
openness to disagreement/feedback	2	7	17	11	12	8	6	10	24	10	13	3	123
<b>Values-disclosing the self</b>													
honesty/transparency	3	6	9	3	11	1	5	9	15	6	5	13	86
lack of confidence/ self-reliance- self-confidence	7	4	6	7	23	3	5	4	13	6	4	21	103

within the supervision group, values were not coded separately for novice and supervisor; however, examples from the novices are provided. The discussion will focus on codes that had a frequency greater than sixty which were deemed noteworthy. The following quotes are those utterances that were coded as displaying the characteristics of the specific values under discussion, or were statements from the interviews corroborating the participant's perception of this value's presence in the supervision group.

*Positive regard for others.* The most preponderant code strand was positive regard for others, which were values that enhanced interpersonal relationships, were other-oriented, and promoted positive interactions. This strand was composed of three major knots. The most prolific was the knot supportiveness/empowerment, which were statements that demonstrated affirmation or confirmation that actions taken were appropriate or interesting.

**Catherine:** *So I said, "Well how do you think you might change that? What could you do as a group to increase your comfort level right now?"*

**Ann:** *Good question.*

**Opal:** *Yeah. (DS)*

These statements endorsed a hunch or diagnosis as credible. Catherine, describing how an idea fell flat, proposed that it was too soon for the team to commit to a course of action. This was in the first debriefing session of the supervision group, so support and encouragement were important values to cultivate the novices' risk-taking and engagement. These statements communicated a sense of cognitive authority or expert power to the novice who made a proposition, a diagnosis, or suggestion.

Support was present even when things were not turning out well. When two team members manipulated Catherine, the group of novices did not chide her; rather they supported her to find an effective way to address the situation.

**Catherine:** *Yes, I'm angry because I want them to deal with this in the group. I feel that it would be so much more effective. But...*

**Rosemary:** *Say that...*

**Lara:** *Yeah, exactly.*

**Ann:** *Exactly. Right there. (DS)*

In examining all 267 instances of this value, it seems that the meta-message communicated by this value was that, in this supervision group, there was support for every member, and that the novices were doing their best. This value seemed to function as a foundational one, setting the tone for subsequent supervision group interactions. It seemed to create a supportive climate for the novice group as a place to develop competency and an acknowledgement of its emergence. This sense of support and competency was a primary attraction of this group for the novices.

**Catherine:** *...it's how we worked in the [supervision] group and the way they listened and the way they shared and the fact that no one said it was a stupid thing to do, or "How could you say that?" Or, "Come on, Catherine, you couldn't see she was playing you like a 5 cent violin?" No one said things like that. (GI)*

The second strongest knot in this strand was caring/sensitivity/empathy. Statements showed appreciation, concern, or warmth. These verbalizations communicated that the speaker was affected by or was responding empathetically to the emotions of others. Direct expressions of care were evident. Empathy was extended to novice members of the supervision group when times became difficult. Ann extended her caring concern to Catherine, demonstrating her understanding by taking her perspective.

**Ann:** *It's hard to know what to do when you... and it's your first experience, and... I wouldn't know what I'd do. (DS)*

Overall, in examining all 128 codes in context, this value seemed to create a climate of nurturing in this supervision group, suggesting that it functioned as a foundational value contextualizing learning and social interactions within an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984). This value emanated from the caring capacity of the individuals who participated in this inquiry, and was a guiding force for one in particular.

**Opal:** *Making someone's path maybe a little bit easier... doing as much as I can for someone that is within my realm of experience. (II)*

The final major knot in this category strand was helpfulness. This referred to comments that attempted to share useful information, practical suggestions, or alternate views in order to clarify, to enlarge the options for action, or to lend assistance. In a previous session of the supervision group, Ann received a suggestion for how to deal with silent tension in the team. She reported back how it worked, and this then became a concrete option for other novice facilitators to consider.

**Ann:** *Also what [you] suggested I say...*

**Lara:** *Which was? Refresh my memory.*

**Ann:** *Yeah. I wrote it down because I really... "Sometimes it's useful for a group to say those things that are unsaid during group time." (DS)*

This value was also seen when individuals provided explanations in an effort to help a member who was struggling to make meaning of an ill-defined problem. Ann helped Catherine to understand the behavior of one member who had missed two meetings of his team.

**Rosemary:** *Maybe he's never really gotten included.*

**Catherine:** *No.*

**Ann:** *No, I would be resentful if I was gone and came in and said, "Well, I want to tell you where I was," and nobody cared. I wouldn't feel welcome. (DS)*

When analyzing all 122 of the interactions involving this code, it appears that this value communicated the idea that one was not alone, and other members of this supervision group were there to assist at every available opportunity. This value seemed to act as an intrinsic motivating force for the novices to take risks by searching for and offering alternate perceptions or explanations, solutions, and mental models in order to increase the quality of the pool of possible solutions. Helpfulness was a tacit rule governing the social interactions of this social system of novices. It also had a lasting effect.

**Lara:** *You know, they [the supervision group] helped me... And I was really in need of help... 'cause I didn't really know how to address the issue in a way that I wouldn't be solving the problem for my team... I wanted the group to work out their own stuff... to learn... And the fact that Opal said that, was definitely a catalyst for me... it gave me more confidence. (II)*

The values in this strand seemed to create a climate of psychological safety so that trust among the novice participants of the supervision group could develop. This foundation of trust appears to have acted as a springboard for the risking that is necessary to push the boundaries of competency into the terrain of expertise. As the novice group demonstrated that risk-taking was not a threatening activity, this increased trust within the system (Gibb, 1978), which increased the motivation to take risks.

*Promoting inquiry.* The next dominant value strand, promoting inquiry, were values that encouraged the promotion of a collaborative climate of exploration and learning through inquiry. This strand was composed of two major knots, one influential minor knot, and a double knot that embodied an interesting dialectical tension. The most prolific knot was listening/questioning for clarity, which demonstrated focused listening and confirmed understanding of the speaker's message and emotion. These comments attempted to show that the speaker had been tracking the conversation by paraphrasing what had been understood. Questions were attempts to deepen or clarify the discussion for all novice members of the supervision group. They sometimes presented an opportunity to deepen reflection. Lara described an event where a member left her team meeting unexpectedly.

**Opal:** *...what was the conflict?*

**Lara:** *Oh, Dana took it personally when Rachel said, "You guys are acting too harsh..." She left crying. Then they got her back. And they talked about it.*

**Opal:** *But did she say anything about it? Because you said... that Dana was talking...*

**Lara:** *But after... Dana did say that she felt very confused as to what was going on. But, me, I'm thinking, yeah, but why not just say, "Time out, I'm confused."*

**Opal:** *It sounds like there's something under the table. (DS)*

In examining all 183 instances of this code in context, the meta-message of this value suggested that the members of this supervision group were engaged, following the discussion, and were interested in what the speaker was sharing. Since each participant shared "important" material, this value seems to have had the additional effect of communicating an implicit message of worth to the novice. Feeling understood has the supplemental benefit of creating feelings of significance for the speaker (Johnson, 2003). Perhaps it also communicated the implicit system norm that all members of the supervision

group were committed to understanding what was going on in the teams, and that they all had a stake in everyone's development. This appears to have encouraged increased mutual self-disclosure, contributions of perspectives, and aided the exploration of the problem space and efforts to construct meaning.

**Catherine:** *We gave feedback to each other [in the supervision group] and there was no, "You're wrong", or "I can't believe you're saying that". I never went home and felt so-and-so doesn't agree with me or so-and-so didn't think I did a good job. (GI)*

The other dominant knot was openness to disagreement/feedback, which communicated a willingness to hear and receive conflicting perspectives designed to improve practice. The underlying intention of skill improvement and the explicit and implicit expressions of caring are what differentiated these interactions from destructive criticism. This value was concerned with hashing out differences of opinion or interpretation.

**Catherine:** *But do you agree with that? Knowing someone's [favorite] color makes you feel you can question what they're saying?*

**Ann:** *No, but I think in terms of cohesion in my team...*

**Catherine:** *How? I don't see it.*

**Ann:** *They just felt better about each other. I don't know... I'm just saying that they accomplished a lot today in ten minutes because of that... (DS)*

This value also functioned as a way of displaying openness to modify actions, communicating a message about being open to create alternatives for "next time." When examining all 128 instances of this code in context, the overall impact of this value on the supervision group appears to have encouraged the stance of controversy as a framework to generate a variety of inputs into the social system; controversy, as an example of social system turbulence, can contribute to creating individuals who were open learning systems (Espejo, 2003). Controversy also tends to nurture the acceptance of complexity and multiple perspectives in discussion (Pressley & McCormick, 1995). This value implied not only a desire to influence by sharing perspectives, but a willingness to accept input from others, and an openness to change in response to that input. This openness was very important for the participants, since it not only gave them the permission to make hunches and take risks, but also contributed to their own growth and development.

**Lara:** *Like I said before, if you close your eyes and you don't want to hear or accept anything from anyone, you're really handicapping yourself in a sense... you're really doing yourself harm. (II)*

The minor influential knot okay to make mistakes reflected interactions in the supervision group that exhibited an acceptance of fallibility, yet avoided blame and excessive sensitivity to mistakes. Risk-taking relies on a demonstrated climate of trust in which exemplars verify a lack of punishment for "failed" risks. An interesting pattern emerged regarding the development of this value. The first instance involved me, as the supervisor, making an error. It is possible that the fallibility of the "designated expert," created the initial exemplar that "mistakes happen" even when one is experienced.

**Opal:** ...she said she was not motivated to participate yet, which was...

**Rosemary:** I can't imagine that being easy for her to say.

**Opal:** Well, you know what? It came out very easily... there were no cues to say that she was uncomfortable... (DS)

This value encouraged the recall abilities of the participants since it required the novice to search her memory for salient characteristics to either support or dispute the assertion. In examining all 65 of these codings in context, it appears to have created a norm in this supervision group that gave members permission to make creative hunches, since there were no negative consequences. There were essentially two meta-messages to this value: we all have intuitions about what is going on as we make meaning of our experiences; and we only know if something is fruitful if we express it and examine it. Practice learning is about what works and fits, and what does not. This permission to be fallible had a profound effect on the novices, and how they were able to risk and craft the supervision group into a learning community.

**Ann:** We [the supervision group] were open to learning and open to each other's feedback and, none of us thought that we knew anything or everything. We were there to learn. And we all wanted to.

**Lara:** Do you think also, ah, we weren't afraid to make mistakes?

**Ann:** Um-hum.

**Lara:** And not being stressed out about it. (GI)

The final knot in this strand is actually a double one that reflects the dialectical tug between the values of mutuality-plurality. Mutuality expressed sentiments of reciprocity and affiliation in the relationships and experiences between participants.

**Catherine:** ...to say two words in the team would be a shock for her. The only thing she said was, "I don't want to do it. I don't want to do the chairperson thing, so I pass. I don't like to speak."

**Ann:** I have two like that.

**Lara:** I have two like that, too. (DS)

On the other hand, *plurality* attempted to express differences and contrasts.

**Ann:** I get the feeling when I listen to everybody giving their perspectives [in the supervision group]... it's, "Oh, yes!" because it's a different bent, because we all have different ways of observing.

**Lara:** Right.

**Ann:** Or we all tune into different aspects, perhaps?

**Catherine:** That's true. (DS)

When scrutinizing all 65 of these instances, this value continuum seemed to have a foundational function. It may have established and cemented connections and relationships in this supervision group, highlighting commonalities, yet affirming differences. This ability to negotiate these two contrapuntal tensions allowed for the creation of complexity within the system. Complexity allowed the novices to build richer deeper networks of exemplars on which to draw in the future and to gain a profound insight into group processes.

**Catherine** [About her experiences in the supervision group]: *Sharing our experiences... Seeing how much they're similar or different... getting other people's feedback and questions. It's such an amazing opportunity to be able to ask three other people what they thought of something that happened.* (II)

*Disclosing the self.* The final value strand, disclosing the self, promoted the revelation of the intrapersonal world of the participant to others in the supervision group. This strand was composed of one major knot and one double knot that reflected another dialectical tension. The most prolific was the knot honesty/transparency, which attempted to communicate that the speaker was being genuinely self-revealing. The focus of these statements tended to be candid expressions of discomfort or strong emotion.

**Ann:** *I was nervous. I really was. I was very afraid of what was going to happen.* (DS)

It provided the opportunity to disclose recognition of personal shortcomings or uncertainty about the meaning of events. Catherine admitted to not seeing the full extent of the impact of her intervention.

**Catherine:** *But I guess I didn't realize how much... the can of worms it would open.* (DS)

In analyzing the 86 occurrences of this code, this value seemed to have functioned as a contextual ground for meaning making. Participants of the supervision group seemed to feel free to disclose whatever was on their minds, regardless of the "image" it might project or the vulnerability it might reveal, in an effort to improve practice. This value was balanced by the value of care. One can reveal a lot based on the belief that others will treat the information, and the self, with care.

**Lara:** *So you know at the same time, they [the supervision group] helped me by making me feel good but I wanted to do the same in return... but of course without sacrificing honesty.* (II)

The novices appeared to trust that whatever was extended was something that their peers in the supervision group thought, believed to be true, and was a true reflection of their experiences.

The double knot in the strand reflects a dialectical pull common to novices, the tension between lack of confidence and self-confidence. Lack of confidence expressed sentiments of uncertainty, tentativeness or doubt about actions, abilities, or expertise.

**Lara:** *...you see, I don't know if I'm really supposed to do this.* (DS)

Self-confidence concerned statements that suggested trusting one's efforts and abilities, and represented agency and competency.



**Opal:** *I'm doing it. That's it, that's all. I'm not going to go there, because usually I'm so wrapped up in anxiety... And I'm just not going there. I'm too big for that now.* (DS)

When investigating all 103 occurrences of this code, it appears as if this value continuum had an interesting interactive function. On one hand, lack of confidence seemed to open up shadowed places by spotlighting areas of uncertainty or undeveloped dimensions within the identity of the novice. This generated opportunities for members of the supervision group to live the values of support, care, or openness to feedback. On the other hand, self-confidence seemed to keep the novices motivated to continue and contribute; it appeared to give them a sense of forward movement and accomplishment. Both seemed to balance each other out, and negotiating this tension contributed energy into this supervision group system.

*Support from triangulated data.* The values that guided the social interactions within this supervision group were identified by the participants in both the individual and group interviews as necessary conditions for them to learn and develop competency and reflective practice. The values seemed to institute tacit rules that governed the interactions that propelled them forward.

**Catherine:** *Trust that people [in the supervision group] won't judge me; trust that I won't be perceived as bossy or I won't be perceived as trying to control things... I think if there's a certain amount of trust and especially if the context is right.* (II)

The fact that the novices felt free enough to disclose their lack of confidence, their honesty in disclosing difficult material, and their ability to openly disagree and accept feedback are signs that trust was indeed a quality of the supervision group system.

**Lara:** *...being willing to accept diverse ideas and... I do want to be respected and listened to, obviously.* (II)

The lived values-in-action served to shape and direct the responses of the novices in a certain direction, leading to a path of risk and development of reflective practice.

**Opal:** *Well I need an atmosphere of acceptance, of trust definitely, of openness... I think that if I'm in a group situation, all I need is one nod of encouragement or somebody to look at me that gives me acceptance, and I'm off.* (II)

### Code Proximity Relationships

When examining processes in human interaction, it is important to examine their interplay. In an effort to unfold a pattern, the proximal relationships of the codes within the reflection and values strings were scrutinized. Using functions within the software program HyperResearch 2.0, a series of connections were developed. These connections were labeled either "equals" (code 1 exactly matches code 2) or "overlaps" (code 1 intersects code 2). A minimum number of 10 connects was set *a priori* for positing an association. Table II illustrates the association patterns and their strength.

Table 2: Association Table of Values with Reflection Strands and Their Strength (10 or more associations)

Values	Reflective Practice	Self-monitoring
caring / sensitivity / empathy	---	25 moderate
helpfulness	25 moderate	10 weak
supportiveness / empowerment	38 strong	30 strong
listening / questioning for clarity	---	20 moderate
openness to disagreement / feedback	25 moderate	16 low
honesty / transparency	18 low	35 strong
self-reliance / self-confidence	24 moderate	17 low
lack of confidence	17 low	14 low

Strength of association was determined *a priori* using the following criteria:

- 10–13 connects – a weak association;
- 14–19 connects – a low association;
- 20–29 connects – a moderate association; and
- 30 or more connects – a strong association.

The strongest associations were between the value of supportiveness/empowerment and both reflective strands. There was also a strong association between the value of honesty/transparency and self-monitoring. More moderate associates were:

- reflective practice with helpfulness, openness to disagreement/feedback, and self-confidence; and
- self-monitoring with caring/sensitivity/empathy and listening/questioning for clarity.

In all of the instances, the codes overlapped; in 80% of the cases, the values code preceded the reflective skill, suggesting that the value acted as a tacit rule for the social interaction, which supported the skill. This inquiry suggests that values play an important supportive function in the context of developing reflective practice.

## DISCUSSION

The statements coded as reflective practice demonstrated the capacity of the participants to reflect in action (while doing something) and on action (after having done it) with the goal of improving practice. The patterns evident within this inquiry point to the likelihood that these reflective practice skills can be a kind of distributed social cognition. Cognition is not just a product of one head, but also is a product of several heads in interaction with one another. We in relationship actively mold

and influence each other's reasoning processes (reflective practice and self-monitoring), building epistemology on the basis of what we are told by others (Resnick, 1991); therefore, we are not bound by the limitations of any one person's cognitive capacity or experience. Distributed social cognition, then, is an effort to give meaning to the persons and tasks with which we are interacting and to make sense of the processes with which we are engaged (Perret-Clermont, Perret, & Bell, 1991). Through the format of public reflection, each member of the team would shape each other's interpretive and reflective processes (Resnick, 1991) with their verbal contributions, since discussion had a transactive property (Teasley, 1997). Each individual used her conversational "turn" to share personal insights about her practice (an intrapersonal process) or engage in collective and collaborative reflective practice (an interpersonal process). Connections and extensions were made within the dialogic interchange based on the wealth of resources and perspectives to create expanded networks of cognition. As well, public reflection also allowed increased access (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to how facilitators think, decide, and translate into action their conceptions of appropriate practice.

Just as societies create cultures, so do social systems. Since cognitive systems are social systems (Resnick, 1991), values become integral in regulating the interactions within the social system, thereby being an additional shaper of cognition. Values that promote cooperation and collaboration are crucial for the competent communication necessary for building social cognition (Siegal, 1991). Values in this context served to form and nudge the conversation in a mutually beneficial way. The values inherent within this supervision group regulated interpersonal interactions, creating warm, close relationships, which provided the stability necessary to establish a creative ecology (Barron, 1995); collectively the novices "created" increased competency. These values went on to contribute to the formulation of supervision group norms fostering reflective practice. Values acted as a means to create freedom to risk and as a constraint to dominance bounding the social reflective interaction in a safe emotional context.

Tension is common in creative partnerships, and this may account for the expression and impact of the dialectics seen in the double knots of mutuality-plurality and competency. Argumentation creates constructive tension, which in turn motivates a questioning of assumptions (Runco, 1999). This tension within the supervision group was the power of the knot openness to disagreement/feedback. The tension within the group of novices emerged from balancing and exploring the energies necessary to negotiate these paradoxical poles, and the participants transformed this energy into reflective practice. The caring environment seen in this inquiry created a climate more conducive to skilled reflection. It also negated many of the blocks to collaborative learning: misinterpreting; arguing; putting down; being cynical, judgmental, dominating, competitive, disapproving or distant; blaming; and "taking the ball away from others" (Leff, Thousand, & Nevin, 1994). The construction of the emotional space in an interactional learning environment is just as important, if not more so, than other external contextual variables. Collaborative activities can elicit intense emotions. Therefore, this supervision group's caring created a supportive web of relationships, emotionally scaffolding a safety zone (John-Steiner, 2000).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Since this inquiry occurred in a particular time and place, under particular circumstances with unique individuals (Wolcott, 1990), the emergent themes and dynamics should be viewed as atypical. However, limited transferability may be warranted. Working hypotheses (Donmoyer, 1990) regarding the setting of supervision group value norms could be formulated and carried over to new situations by supervisors working in other contexts with different participants.

### **Reflective Practice: Socially Shared and Value Supported**

An important concept to emerge from the analysis of reflective practice in this naturalistic learning setting is the notion that reflective practice can be socially distributed. Therefore, those who supervise novice facilitators could conduct group supervision, capitalizing on the power of collective public reflection to promote the modeling and acquisition reflective practice skills.

However, the supportive function of a particular values climate allowed for this process to emerge and be established and maintained. Values such as supportiveness/empowerment, honesty/transparency, helpfulness, openness to disagreement/feedback, self-confidence, caring/sensitivity/empathy, and listening/questioning for clarity, sustained 2multivocality (Resnick, 1991). This was engineered by listening receptively to each other's narrative constructions, and by engaging in collaborative examinations of events and meanings. Multivocality fostered multisubjectivity<sup>2</sup>. This feature took root and flourished as an outgrowth of the values climate in a supervision group system that appreciated and prized collaboration. Multisubjectivity synthesized the novices' thinking into a kind of cognitive pluralism (John-Steiner & Meehan, 2000). Therefore, supervisors need to pay particular attention to the climate of the group, and the values embedded within it. They can take steps to role model these values by: asking questions to promote exploration and reflection; making explicit statements of support; sharing their own dilemmas and uncertainties even as experts; explicitly solicit and support divergent perceptions or understandings; and creating a climate of care while challenging the members of the group to think more reflectively about their practice.

Schön (1983) refers to reflective practice as the ability to integrate professional experience with theoretical formulations to produce solutions to problem situations. He contends that it is a skill that cannot be taught, but can be coached. Coaching in professional education and in the workplace is supported by a culture that embodies the values of support, empathy, autonomy, transparency, helpfulness, challenge, feedback, trust, caring and concern, and listening (Stowell, 1988). Individuals involved in professional supervision can take a more mindful approach to the construction of the instructional environment, explicitly shaping the learning culture into one that promotes positive social encounters, inquiry, and collaboration by modeling the values that support such endeavors.

## Endnotes

- 1 All names, with the exception of the author, are pseudonyms.
- 2 Multisubjectivity becomes the collectively created and shared understanding constructed by a group of individuals who are working on a task with differential levels of comprehension and expertise.

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