

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: JUNE, 2015

Though he is by no means its “onlie begetter”, the notion of “reflective practice” is often associated with Donald Schon, whose *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) brought the concept to wide attention. There is, as yet, no single, common definition of “reflective practice”. The available treatments are often conditioned by the professional circumstances in view. It is interesting in this regard that, whilst it is generally suggested that “reflective practice” would benefit almost any professional in the discharge of her/his particular duties, much of the literature relates to nursing and to teaching.

However defined in detail by any given author, for most, “reflective practice” involves the practitioner appraising – as thoroughly, and as objectively, as possible - her/his performance in some definite and concrete professional circumstances. Thus, it might be a teacher appraising her/himself on the teaching of a specific lesson or a principal doing likewise in respect, say, of her/his contribution to a meeting of a board of management. The circumstances are myriad but the process always entails self-appraisal, self-evaluation, self-assessment. This is always for the purpose of improving, enhancing, professional service. It is, thus, a practical constituent of on-going professional development, of life-long learning, initiated and guided by that sense of one’s own professional responsibility, which is deemed a defining mark of professions rightly so called.

“Reflective practice” contributes hugely to professional “Know-How”. It must also, though, contribute to professional “Know-Why”. Those of us who serve a Catholic school, in whatever capacity, must decide why we are where we are, why we are what we are, why we do what we do, why we do it the way we do it, in the specific context of a faith-based community. We must, most fundamentally, establish whether, and to what extent, our contribution to faith-based education is itself faith-based. We must reflect on our professional practice to see whether or not in our daily work we actually help or hinder the school in its generic mission to form Christ in the young.

This, of course, is the nub of it. When all is said and done – and, maybe, better, before anything is said or done – our professional commitment to and in Catholic education is, primarily and definitively, not to an institution of whatever kind, not to any legal or other provisions, structures or procedures, absolutely essential as all those are. First, last and always, our primary and definitive commitment as baptised Christians and as Catholic educators must be to Christ.

To the proverbial Martian visitor it would surely be inconceivable and inexplicable that Catholic educators would not reflect on their professional practice *sub specie eternitatis*, in the light of eternity, in the context of, and with reference to, their faith and their functions specifically as Catholic. To reflect on professional “Know-How” and never on “Know-Why”, to self-appraise our work as teachers but never as Catholic teachers, must leave us less informed, less developed, less effective, than we should be in respect of what we would probably assert was our *raison d’etre*. Some definite time this summer, let us go with the Lord apart into a quiet place to reflect in all honesty, in the light of his face, on our discharge of our duties specifically as Catholic educators. Let us take real time, planned time, to reflect on our commitment and on our competence as disciples of the Lord, mandated to “teach” those committed to our professional care, to “disciple-ise” them, to help them, with God’s grace, to be themselves followers of Jesus. Let this be now our summer job!