

Designing for, with, and by Reflective Practitioners

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Donald Schön's thinking has influenced my research, teaching, and consulting since I first met him now more than twenty years ago. I was then a young researcher having just finished reading "The Reflective Practitioner". I traveled to Oslo to interview him during his visit there. He refused to let me interview him, but suggested instead to conduct an experiment through which I would learn about his approach. He arranged for me to interview three of his hosts about their ideas for new computer support to run their institution. He recorded the interview and stopped four times to conduct his now well known debriefing sessions.

It was the strongest learning experienced I ever had. He helped me become aware of the assumptions and pre-constructed figures of thought that guided my interviewing and thus my evolving local theory of the institution and the three people's perception of its computer needs. Ten years later we had him over to conduct a PhD course based on his thinking and the responses we got from many of the participants were as enthusiastic as my own.

My teaching and especially my supervision of projects owe much to Schön's line of thinking. Paying attention to the evolving categories and local theories developed by the students and assisting them in revealing and making active use of these is indeed a powerful teaching device.

Further, the idea of organizing activities through which practitioners are prompted to reflect on their own and others behavior as well as on their own and others conceptual constructs were instrumental in my coming up with the Prompted Reflection technique for understanding complex work (Kensing, 1998).

Last, but not least, when designing and disseminating the MUST method – a method for professional IT design (Kensing, Simonsen and Bødker, 1998a; Bødker, Kensing and Simonsen, 2004) – a Schönian approach was very helpful in many ways. When working as designers in more or less participatory projects we were designing *for* and *with* reflective practitioners (Kensing, Simonsen, and Bødker, 1998b; Bødker and Kensing, 1994; Simonsen and Kensing, 1997). When engaged in coaching IT designers using our method we were dealing with design *by* reflective practitioners (Kensing, 1999; Bødker, Kensing, and Simonsen, 2002).

Currently I am engaged in setting up a laboratory for the study and development of innovative design competence at the IT University of Copenhagen. The lab will be a 70 m² room equipped with video and a repertoire of gradually evolving tangible design materials. We plan to conduct the first session in the lab when we move to our new building May 2004.

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