Learning to Love the Swamp: Reshaping Education for Public Service

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Presidential Address[1]

Peggy McIntosh, Associate Director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, has written several articles I admire. One I particularly treasure and often send to friends and colleagues is called "Feeling Like a Fraud." It comes in two parts [McIntosh, 1985, 1989]. In the second she describes the feelings leading up to her presentation. She says she had been eagerly looking forward to the talk for months. Her earlier paper had been well received, and she was pleased to develop her thinking in the company of people whose work she valued. She wrote page after page of new ideas. However, she found herself unable to organize her ideas or her pages. The day of the lecture approached, and she could not get clear on her outline. She began, fittingly enough, to feel like a fraud.

Rather than despair, she explains further ". . . the trick . . . is to try to hold onto the very feelings that are giving you the most trouble, and trust them to lead you to some new ground, some new way of seeing or being" [McIntosh, 1989, p. 2]. Dr. McIntosh decided it was the outline form itself that was giving her the most trouble. She preferred a list. She wanted to talk about several different encounters with her topic and track her several efforts at acting on her learning. She describes herself as realizing that for her the notion of an outline carried a ranking of ideas she did not feel; starting with "any one . . . as the most important distorted [her] sense of the whole matter" [McIntosh, 1989, p. 2].

The parallels are clear for me. I too once looked forward to this presidential address, although as it got closer the anticipatory pleasure faded, replaced with anxiety. I tried to reassure myself, as did McIntosh in her world, that my earlier appearances at APPAM and places like it had been generally well received. I too am among people whose work I admire and value. And like McIntosh, as the months passed, I wrote page after page and got nowhere, or at least nowhere I wanted to be.

McIntosh cautions us, in her article on fraudulence, not to give up too

quickly on our feelings. Holding on to them and working them through, she asserts, may lead to some of our best work. I decided to follow McIntosh's lead. I stayed with—and stewed with—my ideas about preparing people for public service in an effort to pull together what I thought I knew and what I was working on figuring out. Peggy McIntosh has an ability to speak a particular kind of truth. She uses her own experience to illuminate less well-lit aspects of the landscape. I will do that as well as I track my encounters and efforts to act on my learning.

My topic for this APPAM presidential address is "Learning to Love the 'Swamp': Rethinking Education for Public Service." For those of you unfamiliar with Don Schön's work, the "swamp" is his metaphor for the important, complex, and messy problems that resist technical analysis. The swamp exists in contrast to Schön's "high, hard ground," where the problems are also real, but less important to both individuals and the wider society. The appeal of "high ground" problems is that they either are—or are framed to be—amenable to technical understanding [Schön, 1987].

To begin, I want to argue that the world of public service has more swamp than high ground. Many of the tough problems that lure us to public service and test our leadership once we are there are "swamp" problems: achieving justice or economic or social equity or even health care reform; undoing the effects of racism; ensuring that all children are raised and educated so that they are whole and capable and have hope for the future—these are just some of the important, complex, and messy problems that resist solution through technical means alone. Effective leadership of and in the swamp cannot by definition be based only on the application of clear rules developed on and for the high ground, although sometimes this is what is needed.

To be effective in public leadership people need the capacity to lead and manage in the "swamp." There are no rules for this, no set techniques that guarantee the right answer. In the past year working with the inaugural class of the Annie E. Casey Foundation Children and Family Fellowship program (discussed further below), we came to think of the core of leadership as "making sense out of the mess."[2] Intimate contact with the reality of the swamp and the ability to reflect on and learn from your own and others' experience are, in my experience, what it takes to make such sense. Wilfred H. Drath and Charles J. Palus at the Center for Creative Leadership turn a more elegant phrase when they offer a definition of leadership as a process of "meaning-making in a community of practice" [Drath and Palus, 1994]. Ronnie Heifetz, in his new book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, defines leadership as "mobilizing people to tackle tough problems" [Heifetz, 1994]. Whichever of these views of leadership you take, and I think each is powerful and more on point than the others that rely simply on notions of influence [Bass, 1990; Rost, 1991], the pressing question is how we can educate and prepare people for leadership of this sort.

To do this requires three things. We must first take this sort of reflective, "swamp" learning seriously. Second, we must develop new ways—perhaps with the help of other disciplines—to investigate and frame theories of public management for the swamp. Finally, we must invent more ways to teach

[2] For this phrase and the struggle that went into it, I credit and acknowledge the inaugural class of Casey Foundation Children and Family Fellows, in particular B. J. Walker, who came up with the phrase and articulated the dilemma.

reflective practice and prepare people to learn systematically from their own experience so that they might better navigate the messy realities of day-to-day public management.

I will use this article to explore these three directions. Before I begin, however, I need to describe what I mean when I talk about reflection and learning from experience.

REFLECTION AND LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: WHAT DO I MEAN?

"Reflective practice" and "learning from experience" are phrases freighted with meaning. Each has a full set of literature behind it, and yet somehow, each is still somewhat opaque. Neither conveys a clear message as to what it would look like in action. When I use these phrases I am talking about learning—in the midst of rapidly changing and constantly challenging situations—to be self-aware, to understand oneself personally and in role; to be conscious of the impact of the self on others, and others on self; to develop a "theory of action" in a particular situation that is testable and adjustable [Argyris, 1977]; and finally, to build theory from across one's own practice, theory that is generalizable and available for testing by others. Drath and Palus frame the capacities required of meaning-making leaders in related ways: "(1) the capacity to understand oneself as both an individual and as a socially embedded being; (2) the capacity to understand systems in general and as mutually related and interacting and continually changing; (3) the capacity to take the perspective of another; and (4) the capacity to engage in dialogue" [Drath and Palus, 1994, p. 23].

The concept of reflective practice has much to do with theories, developed over the years, on learning in general. James Coleman, a sociologist in the fields of learning and education, describes experiential learning as inductive, where one goes from the particular to the general. In inductive learning, we begin with "action in a particular situation and the observance of the effects of that action, move to the understanding of these effects in a particular instance, then to understanding the general principle, and finally to application through action in a new circumstance within the range of generalization" [Coleman, 1974]. Another learning theorist, David Kolb, has also described experiential learning as a four-stage process: (1) concrete experience; (2) observations and reflections; (3) formation of abstract concepts and generalizations; and (4) testing applications of concepts in new situations [Kolb, 1984].

Reflective practice follows those steps. It begins with concrete experience mediated through observation and reflection, which becomes the source for formation of abstract theory that can be tested in a new situation.

FROM THE PARTICULAR TO THE GENERAL

One way to make these ideas perhaps a little more real—at least for those of you who learn from stories—is to share some of my own reflective evolution. My first job out of law school was at The Legal Aid Society. It was there that I began to notice that there were patterns of practice, that different people took up their work differently, and that these patterns mattered. I remember

I was different than a lot of lawyers at Legal Aid. They loved to try cases. I preferred referring my young clients for help and using those referrals to get cases dismissed. The truth as I know it now, and even then, is also that I was petrified to try cases. I think the truth is that my preference for relying on dismissals through referrals to winning cases at trial was dually motivated. I cared about helping my clients, not just in the short run. But I was also scared, and I trusted myself in one arena more than another. I describe this reality now to acknowledge the importance of self-knowledge. Leaders need as big a repertoire of skills as they can amass, but it will inevitably be limited by our own shortcomings. Knowing what those deficits are and compensating for them—which in some part is what I was doing with my social service referrals—is a key asset of a leader. Too many people fail at leadership because they do not understand who they are, how to manage themselves, and how and when to compensate for what they can't do [McCall and Lombardo, 1983].

Noticing patterns of practice, understanding myself in role, understanding myself at all—these are among the skills of reflection that helped me make sense of my early experience and increased my effectiveness. I know I also learned then to tailor my approach to the needs of the person with whom I was interacting and that I was aware of myself in my role: as a Legal Aid lawyer, representing poor people others had given up on; as a young and inexperienced and female lawyer; as an actor in a larger system that could be manipulated and improved. It was only much later, with perspective as a manager, that I could look back and see that when I was at Legal Aid I was also actually functioning as a "front-line" worker.

From Legal Aid, I moved over to the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Criminal Justice in New York City. There, I negotiated a set of consent decrees for the Department of Correction around the conditions of confinement at the city jails. While I was briefing the new Commissioner of Correction on these decrees, he invited me to help implement them. During the next three years as a Deputy Commissioner, I tried, and succeeded only sometimes.

Those were odd years, and I was always the odd person out so I had lots of opportunities to learn about role demands and strains. I was young, female, civilian, and on the program side in an seniority-driven, male-dominated, paramilitary, and security-focused operation. I got to observe up close how little happened when the boss ordered something done. I learned all the ways middle managers and front line staff were key. And I began to appreciate how much tougher it was to implement change than to prescribe it.

From the Department of Correction, I became Commissioner of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), where I served seven years. Those years were full of lessons learned, many of which I have written about elsewhere [Gilmore and Schall, 1986; Krantz and Schall, 1989; Schall and Feely, 1992; Schall, 1994]. Most particularly, I remember two things: learning again about the power of role and learning from the creation and development of the agency's executive staff.

The power of role is one of those lessons I keep having to learn over and over, most often in the context of people's feelings toward authority. I learned at DJJ that the role of Commissioner evoked strong feelings in people, often complicated by early experiences staff had had with authority figures, only sometimes positive ones. The point is I learned to distinguish the feelings, whether positive or negative, that came to me in my role from the ones that

were directed to me as a person, even a person taking up a role. The distinction was freeing. It let me tolerate being hated, which I often say is the job of a manager, and it let me survive being praised for work that was collective.

The executive staff and its development were also rich sources for learning. At first, this six-member group spent its time clarifying policies and solving operational problems. We had more than our share of these problems, and we made some progress. Still, we realized something was missing. The richer, more informative discussions took place *after* the meetings. Only once we adjourned did the real conversation start—news about a disturbance at Spofford, the large secure detention facility we ran, or some issue with staff. Once, the contrast was so apparent—the "good stuff" surfaced only after the meeting was over—we sat down and started our meeting all over again. To bring this important information regularly into the room, we added a standing item on the agenda. What was the "tone," what did it feel like, at Spofford? Although important, Spofford, however, was only a part of our organization and the "tone" question didn't quite capture all we were after. We changed the question, finally, to "What's going on in the organization from which we can learn?" This became the organizing theme around which we ran the executive staff meetings for the next five years. We intended this question to bring in the critical bits and pieces of organizational life and to use the executive staff as a forum to make sense of them. Although we didn't know to call it that at the time, we were creating a "reflective" organization, a "learning organization" in Peter Senge's terms [Senge, 1990].

Two years ago, I entered academia convinced of the importance of "reflective practice" and the need to create "reflective organizations" because I had seen them work. Throughout my career, this commitment to reflection has kept me sane, enabled me to achieve significantly, given me ways of bringing others along, and let me make critical links to other worlds I value. It has allowed me to create a larger vision and still keep my feet on the ground. At best, when I am reflecting and learning from my experience, I am feeling whole: centered, capable, aspiring, achieving, connected.

WHY SHOULD WE TAKE REFLECTIVE, SWAMP LEARNING SERIOUSLY?

Schön describes the "varied topography of professional practice" with both the high ground and the swamp [Schön, 1987, p. 3]. Practitioners have a choice according to Schön. They can stay on the high ground where they can solve the less important problems according to "prevailing standards of rigor" or they can descend, in his terms, into the swamp "of important problems and nonrigorous inquiry" [Schön, 1983, p. 42; Schön, 1987, p. 3]. In fact, for leaders in public service there isn't or shouldn't be a real choice. Effective public leaders must master both kinds of terrain. They must be able to solve the "high ground" technical problems that present themselves. And they must be able to navigate their way and lead others through the swamp and its mucked reality. The swamp doesn't beckon from a distance. It's a large part of public life. What distinguishes our best public leaders, however, is that's not all they do. The best cannot only work in the swamp, but can make sense of it for themselves and others [Drath and Palus, 1994; Heifetz, 1994].

So how exactly do leaders and their organizations make meaning from the

swamp? Technical rationality and science are not particularly helpful here. Competence in the swamp is more a clinical matter. It derives less from applying scientific laws of behavior or technical models developed for the high ground and more from a deeper understanding of the situation at hand and its relationship to other similar situations [Hirschhorn, 1991; Schein, 1987]. As in psychology or anthropology, a clinical perspective in public management begins with an intense involvement with and reflection on a particular situation. Of course, leaders do not work simply on their own. They are generally responsible for organizations or parts of organizations, whose task it is to manage or solve a social problem. A leader's primary task in the swamp, therefore, is to help her or his organization become sufficiently reflective, so that the organization can make meaning from the mess with which they are confronted.

I've referred to "reflective organizations" earlier, but would like to deal with them more explicitly here. An organization with a reflective capacity is one in which people can think about what they are doing, pool their thoughts and feelings in the service of learning about the organizations, and then use this learning in the way they manage themselves in their roles [Krantz and Schall, 1989]. This reflective capacity involves an interpretive stance toward one's experience in an organization. From this perspective, one hears anecdotes, not as facts but as clues and sees one's own experience as yielding information about the larger social system. This allows members of an organization to develop hypotheses, act and make midcourse corrections as the learning continues. Learning as you go inevitably precludes a master work-plan approach, which although comforting, often interferes with opportunity to learn from the unexpected.

This is an anxiety-confronting rather than anxiety-evading approach. In acknowledging and confronting work-related anxieties, staff have greater personal resources available for working, in part because the energies used to defend against troubling aspects of organizational life are then freed for other purposes. The intense anxieties associated both with change [Jacques, 1955; Menzies, 1961] and with tasks in human service organizations [Menzies, 1979; Trist, 1974; Miller and Gwynne, 1972] render the reflective stance painful, yet even the more important.

As with any task, the necessary conditions must be present for the reflective organization to develop. At DJJ, for example, we set aside time specifically for reflection and established structures or fora, including the executive staff meeting, suitable to support this kind of work.[3] Many of the implicit dynamics influencing the organization were enacted in the executive staff meeting and we learned, with the help of a consultant, to interpret and learn from those dynamics in the here and now of the meeting. Our experience was that attending to those dynamics not only did not interfere with the work, but actually freed up energy for it to proceed.

Reflective organizations are places where people can bring themselves fully to work. Being fully present at work is a remarkable and powerful experience, all the more so if one contrasts it experientially with its opposite, disconnection or alienation [Blauner, 1964]. William Kahn, at Boston University's

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[3] We encouraged this kind of reflection at DJJ in various groups. In addition to the executive staff, we created a strategy group to develop our long-term agenda and members of the executive staff used this approach in running their own staff meetings.

School of Management, has explicated what he calls "psychological presence . . . what it means to be fully present as a person occupying a particular organizational role such that one's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are accessible within the context of role performances" [Kahn, 1992, p. 322]. He identifies four dimensions to psychological presence: attention, connection, integration, and focus. When these elements are present, the result is a "personal accessibility to work" where a person is contributing both ideas and effort; to others as manifested by openness and empathy; and to the self, where there should be both growth and learning. Along with Kahn, Kenwyn Smith and David Berg argue that it is when "people are present that the conditions of trust and safety are created that allow difficult conversations to be engaged and worked through, such that individuals learn and grow and their systems become 'unstuck'" [Smith and Berg, 1987, p. 87]. They continue:

The long-term implication of such presence is that people who are present and authentic in their roles help to create shared understandings of their systems that are equally authentic and responsive to change and growth. This process is what allows social systems ranging from couples and families (Minuchin, 1974) to groups (Smith and Berg, 1987) and large organizations (Schein, 1987; Shapiro & Carr, 1991) to become unstuck and move toward new and productive ways of working. When individuals are open to change and connecting to work and others, are focused and attentive and complete rather than fragmented, their systems adopt the same characteristics, collectively. Individual and systemic wholeness, in these respects, are intertwined and complementary. [Kahn, 1992, p. 331]

Reflective practice is vital for the swamp. It enables people to be present and it helps them and their organizations make meaning from what are generally complex, multidimensional experiences. It helps them do what they are mandated to do: confront and resolve public problems.

HOW CAN WE DEVELOP NEW WAYS TO INVESTIGATE AND FRAME THEORIES FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN THE SWAMP?

Today, public service education is ill-prepared to consider and transmit many of the ideas surrounding "reflective practice." For the most part, we're educating students for the high ground. This is necessary, but we also need to be educating students to reflect on their own work. We need to prepare them for the swamp.

Schön has developed a provocative critique of professional education. He argues that "what aspiring practitioners need most to learn, professional schools seem least able to teach" [Schön, 1987, p. 8]. Citing the earlier work of Edgar Schein [Schein, 1973], Schön describes the underlying premise of education in most professional schools as the presentation of the relevant basic science, then some exploration of the associated applied science, then a practicum of some sort in which students are supposed to learn to apply research-based knowledge to a particular problem in the real world. This order implies a "hierarchy of knowledge" and concomitantly of status. The closer one is to basic science, the higher one's academic status.

This state of affairs brings Schön to a theory of education. He draws clearly the limits of teaching research-based knowledge: "professional knowledge is

mismatched to the changing character of the situations of practice—the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice" [Schön, 1983, p. 14]. He rejects the notion that the basic process of education is teaching people to apply theory to practice. For him, and for me, the world is more complicated than the theory of professional education allows.

Schön cites numerous examples of educators and practitioners dissatisfied with professional curricula that do not and cannot prepare students for competence in the "indeterminate zones" of professional practice. He argues that the fundamental relationship between what he calls "practice competence" and professional knowledge needs to be turned upside down. He wants us to start not by asking how to make better use of research-based knowledge, but by asking what we can learn from a close study of professional excellence, what he calls "artistry," a certain kind of knowing that allows people to manage in those indeterminate zones of practice.

After almost 15 years around the world of public policy education, if I date the beginning from my three weeks in the State and Local Executive Education program at the Kennedy School, what I find striking is the relative lack of scholarly attention given to these issues. This issue was raised at APPAM in 1990, in an article that traced the development of public policy education [Altshuler, 1990]. Policy schools were created to teach policy analysis, and only later incorporated an interest in public management. Altshuler suggested four years ago that the next phase for policy schools involved grappling with the importance of preparing people for leadership. He acknowledged that the early interest in policy analysis was in large part driven by a belief that it was "much more feasible to impart analytic than human interactive skills in academic settings" [Altshuler, 1990, p. 3]. It's a real dilemma. We're teaching what we know how to teach, and what we (or most of us) learned. But if that is not all students need to know, we are doing them—and the public they will serve—a real disservice. Interactive skills are tough to teach, but necessary to have. We need to figure out how to teach them. As far as I can tell, most of our schools have not yet moved beyond policy analysis and public management to tackle the difficult task of preparing people to actually exercise leadership.

Some scholars are concerned that the balance has already shifted too far in schools of public policy to seeing management as an "art" rather than a "science" [Lynn, 1994]. They demand "strong intellectual foundations" on which to base teaching and advice about management. They see the field in intellectual disarray and worry about the increasing influence of practitioners in shaping the direction of schools of public policy. They reject judging public management scholarship on the basis of its relevancy and value to practitioners. Lynn, for one, seeks "conceptual clarity and analytic rigor" in public management scholarship. He wants "scholarship that contributes to conceptual clarification and precision and to rules for best practice in particularly conceptually ordered contexts, . . ." [Lynn, 1994, p. 253]. He suggests we look toward explanatory heuristics in the disciplines as a source of these new ideas.

I want rigor too and conceptual clarity if it is to be had. And I am very much in favor of a sound grounding in analytic skills. I believe, however, that for the next step towards improving our understanding of public manage-

ment and leadership in the swamp, we might more usefully look less to economics and more to psychology and even anthropology.

Earlier, I have cited Kahn's work on "presence" as an element of what I've described as reflective practice. Kahn also suggests a psychologically framed research agenda that probes organizational life. He points to the need for research on how organizations "create or do not create conditions that offset the internal and external demands that their members experience to absent themselves in the course of task performances" [Kahn, 1992, p. 343].

Psychological presence is about depth: how much of who people are becomes accessible to their work. To get at depth requires ways of making people accessible within the research process itself, such that they collaborate in that process of uncovering and examining their experiences and behaviors in particular situations. [Kahn, 1992, p. 344]

For Kahn the research strategy that follows includes the following components:

- Case studies of person–role relationships that allow exploration of three types of variance: between different situations in one person–role relationship; different person–role relationships in the same organization; and different person–role relationships across organizations. Kahn presses the point that the key is to use case studies in "ways that allow for disconfirming and testing alternative interpretations" [Kahn, 1992, p. 344].
- Analyses that proceed across levels, including the individual, job, interpersonal group, intergroup, and organizational (we might also add systemic and societal to the list). Kahn would have hypotheses formulated at each level of analysis, then juxtapose them so that they "complement rather than compete" with one another [Kahn, 1992, p. 345]. The goal would be to build theory and design interventions at these different and complementary levels of analysis.
- Qualitative data such as clinically oriented interviews that can be combined with objective data about the organization to "map the connections" [Kahn, 1992, p. 345]. He sees quantitative data about the organization to "map the connections" [Kahn, 1992, p. 345]. He sees quantitative data used to test the "hypothesized relations deriving from the qualitative, theory-building research."

Following Kahn's approach would add both richness and rigor to the kind of case studies we currently find in our curricula and classrooms.

In anthropology, Clifford Geertz describes another method of inquiry from which we might also learn. He describes the ethnographer as faced with "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render [Geertz, 1973, p. 10]. Surely, there is a parallel here to the task of the public manager or leader. Geertz says that it is the ethnographer's job to do "thick description." That is, she or he must develop a nuanced, complex, in-concept explication of actions, not just the recording of the action or physical

phenomenon itself. Analysis in an anthropological sense is "sorting out the structures of signification" [Geertz, 1973, p. 9] and determining their "social ground and import" [Geertz, 1973, p. 9]. It is the job of ethnographers (like public managers and public management scholars) once again to make meaning from the mess.

Geertz goes on to describe ethnography as microscopic and particular. Like public management case studies at their best, ethnographies "present the sociological mind with bodied stuff on which to feed" [Geertz, 1973, p. 23]. "It is with the kind of material produced . . . that the mega-concepts with which contemporary social science is afflicted . . . can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and correctly *about* [the mega-concepts], but what is more important, creatively and imaginatively *with* them" [Geertz, 1973, p. 23].

Finally, Geertz talks about the difficulty of developing these mega-concepts for his field. The problem as he sees it is that theoretical formulations are so connected to the interpretations they "govern" that they don't make much sense apart from them. "Stated independently of their applications, they seem either commonplace or vacant" [Geertz, 1973, p. 25]. This echoes many of the criticisms made about case studies and practitioner-driven research in our field. In public management, perhaps, one answer is to think differently about theory. In the swamp, as in ethnographic field work, the "essential task of theory building . . . is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases, but to generalize within them" [Geertz, 1973, p. 26]. For public managers and public management scholars, this "thick description" means developing theories of action that help them make meaning from the complex realities of their organizations and then take or prescribe effective, strategic action.

I've delved into Kahn's and Geertz's ideas in some detail as a way of arguing that swamp research need not be soft or free-form, but that we might ground this work in the traditions of other disciplines—notably psychology and anthropology—and produce research that is incisive, useful, *and* intellectually rigorous.

WHAT MIGHT A NEW VISION FOR PUBLIC SERVICE EDUCATION LOOK LIKE?

In the last section, I have suggested promising directions for research in public management that take into account the messy reality, the swampiness of public life. I would like to turn here to describing what graduate level and midcareer education for the swamp might look like. I will do this by first examining some of the work others have done. Then, I will review my own teaching efforts and work.

At the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, Ronnie Heifetz has been teaching leadership classes for more than a decade [Heifetz et al. 1989] in an effort to "push outward the envelope of what can be taught" [Heifetz, 1994, p. 537]. He acknowledges that others see leadership skills as largely unteachable but proceeds to argue the case [Heifetz et al., 1989, p. 537*fff*]. Heifetz uses the "here and now" experience of the class itself to engage students in reflecting on the exercise of their and others' leadership. He offers various frameworks for students to consider, often from social psychology.

These frameworks are not the direct material of the class, however. Rather, their power and relevance are tested against the students' own experience "past (from their own cases), present (as evidence unfolds in the classroom), and future (when back on the job)" [Heifetz et al., 1989, p. 544]. "Much of the learning takes place by analyzing the live dynamics of the large lecture group (80 to 130 students) as well as the small seminar groups (8 to 11 students) in which students present their own cases" [Heifetz et al. 1989, p. 544]. Heifetz is clear that he teaches the way he does because it is useful to students and is consistent with what he is trying to teach. People learn best by experience, Heifetz argues, a contention well supported by the literature on adult learning and learning in general. To make what he calls "experiential evidence," useful requires "giving people either the conceptual tools to organize the evidence or tools to develop such tools" [Heifetz et al., 1989, p. 544]. It is to that end that Heifetz offers both external frameworks and the questions he poses in class.

Heifetz' approach does push the envelope in several ways. It involves large groups and focuses them on the "here and now" experience of the classroom. His teaching is engaging and transforming for many students, both masters level and in executive education programs. His work remains relatively walled off, however. Most of the rest of the faculty at the Kennedy School and elsewhere continue to teach as they have taught, although there are efforts to be more multidisciplinary. Heifetz is specially trained as a psychiatrist (and a musician), which may deter others from feeling able to do the kind of work he does, but still the challenge remains.

Argyris and Schön [1974, 1978] also have a well-developed theories about teaching reflective practice designed to build professional "artistry." Unfortunately, for me at least, their approach is sometimes dense and also idiosyncratic; it relies on an expertise that is not easily translated or reproduced. Just as many of us view art as something esoteric, something "we cannot do," their approach can stand in the way of the rest of us getting to the place where we can take on what is a necessary and doable task. We need multiple models, opportunities to learn how to teach in new ways, and the incentives to tackle what clearly seems daunting.

I want to add my voice here and, as I said earlier, track my encounters with this task of preparing people to lead in the swamp. At this time, I am involved in two efforts. One, at the Wagner School, is geared to our student body, which consists of both full- and part-time students, some young and some midcareer. The other, on behalf of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is targeted to an elite group of ten, midcareer Children and Family Fellows selected each year from a pool of nominees. The context is quite different for these two pieces of work, but the themes are remarkably consistent.

In 1992, I was recruited to the Wagner School to manage our clinical initiative funded by the Ford Foundation.[4] The clinical initiative was originally an effort to create new ways for students to learn from practitioners as well as from academics, from experience in public and nonprofit organizations as well as from lectures, readings, and the classroom. The Wagner School at NYU has three programs (health policy and management, public administration, and urban planning) and three specializations (management, policy, and finance). The clinical initiative, along with initiatives on diversity/

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[4] Howard Newman, then dean, had written the proposal for the clinical initiative.

multiculturalism and international affairs, is designed to cut across the school and these other divisions.

Initially, it was as if we envisioned two types of learning—classroom learning and work-based learning. The task, as we first saw it, was to strengthen the work-based component and deliver a better balance between the two. More recently, we have stepped back and begun to see this conceptualization of clinical education as unproductive. It buys into the damaging notion that practitioners are too busy doing to think, and that thinking is the exclusive domain of the academy. The truth is that the best practitioners are always thinking, are always engaged in a reflective dialogue with their work [Tompkins, 1994]. At the Wagner School, therefore, we are moving to a concept of clinical education that sees learning as iteratively connected to both work and school. Students move back and forth between both spheres, learning in both places, integrating both kinds of knowledge, and testing the learnings of one realm with the learnings of the other.

To ground this perspective, we have created a three-tier framework for clinical education at the Wagner School. It begins with *exploration*. If learning involves going back and forth between the classroom and the workplace, students who come to graduate school with little or limited relevant professional experience are at a disadvantage. They have no context within which to assess what they learn in class. Exploration helps build this context and allows students to investigate roles and institutions in a given field in public service. It is a way for them to deepen their base of experience. We have developed a number of ways for students to "explore." For example, students who enroll in our health policy and management program with little health care experience are encouraged to participate in a noncredit, week-long health care immersion course we offered for the first time this January. Mentoring programs and internships also provide this critically needed context. The achievement for us is not just the addition of some of these elements, but the shift in perspective that acknowledges the need for experience and context.

The second aspect of our clinical program we call *exercise*. Here, we use the safe environment of the classroom for students to practice the skills they are developing. Although we have just begun much of this work, at best this kind of "exercise" should be highly interactive and involves lots of feedback. Cases and simulations are part of this kind of learning, of course, particularly to the extent they actually put students in role and push them to enact the strategy they casually recommend or allow students to experience the gap between what they advise and what they do [O'Hare, 1993]. Research confirms that whether a violinist or an athlete—and presumably a public servant—practice makes perfect, or at least a whole lot better [Goleman, 1994].

Finally, we are reformulating the *experience* component of our program. We are working to encourage faculty to provide more opportunities for students to bring their own experience to bear in the regular classroom and have created at least one new course for senior people in health care—"Strategic Leadership in Health Care"[5]—to do just that. It is not just undigested stories either faculty or other students want to hear, of course. In addition and consistent with the notion that students need tools to understand, frame, and make sense of their own and others' experiences, I have created a new course,

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[5] This course was created and is taught by my colleague Professor Anthony Kovner.

"Reflective Practice: Learning from Work," which explicitly teaches students how to begin to reflect on themselves and on their work. Each student who takes the course is required to be in an internship or working. But the focus of the course is not on the organization, but rather on the students' experience of themselves at work. We[6] offer a range of frameworks and perspectives, some from other disciplines and some from experience, that help students immerse themselves in and attend to the experience of work. We encourage students to begin a life-long habit of reflecting on themselves at work that we hope will result in both full engagement and the distance necessary (Heifetz refers to this as "going to the balcony") to make sense of what is happening. In the course, we introduce students to the distinction between person (what you bring to work) and role (what the job or task brings with it). We have students examine how, both at work and in the here and now of the classroom, they take up or are reluctant to take up their various roles. We offer Kolb's framework on learning styles [Kolb, 1984] as a way of encouraging students to take a first step back and begin a process of self-assessment. We extend that self-assessment by having students solicit "role messages," as developed by colleagues at the Center for Applied Research, from others with whom they interact at work on behaviors that help or hinder effective performance or new behaviors the responder would like to encourage in the intern/staff member at work. We have students read about the nature of authority and then critically analyze their own and others' exercise of it. Students are working to develop the skills and perspective to understand themselves and their impact on others. We study both the theory and the reality of the psychological aspects of organizations and self, and the interaction of the two at work.

We also teach a simple set of questions devised to help students frame their stories and move toward developing lessons learned from their experience. Too often in the classroom, students uncritically unload something that happened, without trying to make sense of it or consider how it could be useful to others. Of course, some practitioners do this as well. We train students to be more disciplined. We have them work through these questions as they bring in some aspect of their experience from work: (1) What prompts you to tell the story? (In other words, what just happened that made you think of this particular story?) (2) What's the moral of your story? What is the specific point you're trying to convey? (3) What is the generalized lesson of the story you or others might abstract? And (4) How could you test this generalizable lesson? This focusing process allows students to begin to make meaning from the "mess" of their experience at work. The appeal of this approach is its relative simplicity. It does not depend on a master teacher or require only gifted or senior level learners.

The last "experience" component of our clinical initiative is the final project. We now require students, under faculty supervision, to complete a project for real-life clients. Unfortunately, many of these "real-life" projects are still by their nature predigested, manageable pieces of work. Too often, they are decontextualized, high-ground projects. Although in the best of all possible

[6] I created this course with the help of Heather Weston, then a graduate student at the Wagner School and now executive assistant to the dean, and taught it first with Ms. Weston and Robin Stevens, an adjunct professor at Wagner and Vice President, Materiel, at the New York City Transit Authority.

worlds, we might actually put students into swampier situations or construct ways of teaching that accompany their real swamp work, "placing" students in "swamp" projects may be oxymoronic. "Projects" are already framed, organized, thought through enough to hand off. This is not how one encounters the swamp. Yet, thinking back on my days as a practitioner, I understand the field's reluctance to allow students to come in and muck around. The toughest, swampiest work is often at the heart of the agency's most critical challenges and depends on intimate knowledge, trust built up over time, and sensitive communication. A student concerned with getting in and out without much engagement wouldn't fit and might easily do damage.

What we need to do, at the least, is to acknowledge that these final, experiential projects both at NYU and at other schools are often high ground. We should not pretend to students that they are otherwise and mislead them into thinking that the real world of public service comes already divided into projects. Barring a swamp placement, we must teach reflective practice even in the context of a high ground project. For example, we might encourage students assigned to an organization for a particular project to engage staff there about the ongoing nature of the other, swampier work. Or, we might create seminars for those in similar fields or roles that allow working midcareer students to deconstruct their ongoing experience in the swamp. If we mean to prepare students for the rough and tumble of the public sector, we have to tackle these difficult issues.

In addition to the clinical initiative, now supported by our current dean Robert Berne, the other piece of work I have been engaged in has been developing seminars for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Children and Family Fellowship. The Fellowship program accepted its first class of fellows for the 1993–1994 years. The Foundation chose to make a sizeable investment in leadership development because it had seen a gap between the need for leadership to change the systems that serve disadvantaged children and families and the capacity of current leadership. It invented a program not quite like any of the others existing. It is national, where many are community-based. It is full time for 11 months and thus geared to people ready to make major changes in their lives. It aims to both broaden fellows' visions of what can be done and increase their capacity to achieve change. It is largely experiential, not academic, and although it is prepared to individualize the placements and other support for a fellow, it is group based. It is targeted to children and family systems, not leadership in general. It uses a nomination process to identify emerging leaders. A fellow's year is designed around a learning plan. In general, fellows spend three five- or six-week periods in residency and select two organizations or sites with which to do a field placement.

I was engaged, through the Wagner School, to design a series of seminars for the fellows. The seminars are organized around learning, at the individual, organizational, systemic, and societal levels. During the course of the year, fellows meet in seminars and come together, grounded not only in their own experience before the fellowship where they have actively been working on changing the systems that serve children and families, but also with fresh insights into the efforts of others as seen in their field placements. The seminars provide frameworks for fellows to consider as they attempt to make sense of what they are learning and also offer the space and support to try to create new theory as well as new behaviors. The first class of fellows did

in fact construct their own social theory based on four tenets: race matters; power needs to shift to the ground; leadership is a collective, not an individual experience; and reform requires complex, relational approaches, not just technical fixes.[7] They came to believe that although the technical information they gained (e.g., new financing strategies) was important and the networking and the support vital, their most powerful learning emerged from their collective struggle to make sense of what they saw.

We devoted a great deal of effort in the first year to the personal development of each fellow. The focus was on increasing their capacity to use themselves effectively in the service of the kind of systemic change they were seeking. Issues of anger, of power, of competition, of racism, of fear all came up throughout the year. Armed with extensive feedback from a specially designed multirater instrument and a significant amount of self-evaluation and self-revealing, we attended individually, in pairs, and within the whole group to examine and support behavioral change.

My work on the Casey Fellows program and on the clinical initiative is my effort to make sense out of the mess of leadership development. It is still a work in progress. I see myself joining others who are attempting to enlarge the scope of public service education. Analytic skills are important as are management tools. What seems so obviously missing is the personal and social, the psychological and cultural aspects of effective leadership. The problems we face are not yielding to traditional approaches. We are in desperate need of leadership able to confront the mess and make sense of it for themselves and with others. The best and the brightest for the 1990s and beyond will not be those who bring packaged solutions to clear problems but rather those who can learn themselves and help others learn how to make meaning in the face of chaos. The problems are too tough for us to ignore the value added by enlarging our approach to educating leaders. How we do this will no doubt vary. Just as the learning is personal, so will be the teaching strategies. Whatever the approach, I believe we need more of the following in our approaches:

- more context
- more experiential opportunities with frameworks
- more here and now
- more personal
- more behavioral
- more swamplike
- more collectively oriented, less heroic
- more interactive
- more valuing what people bring in
- more acknowledging the tough stuff

LEARNING TO LOVE THE SWAMP

This brings me back to Peggy McIntosh's advice to hold onto the feelings that are giving you the most trouble. I locate my own difficulty as having

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[7] This analysis was taken from a document written by the first class of Casey Fellows after the end of their fellowship year in a letter to Doug Nelson, Executive Director of the Casey Foundation.

trouble creating and staying comfortably in the middle ground. I generally do not have difficulty describing and making sense of my experience and have written with relative ease and I trust some usefulness when I speak in that voice. I am no longer simply a "practitioner" though. I am an academic, or at least in the academy, a full professor, in fact, with a chair and on a tenure track. I am struggling to find my ground as an academic. I suspect it must be ground I have trod. I want it to meet the test of my environment: I want to be rigorous, theory contributing. I am working to connect my learnings with the learnings of others, however derived. But often when I switch voice I feel less authentic and also less valuable. I am used to my value coming from my powers of reflection and observation, from telling the truth as I see it, from calling attention to what has been overlooked. I am hoping to carve out some middle ground, for myself and others, a place in the academy not for some second class kind of academic, but for people like me who have lived the lives we are preparing our students for and who can make a first-rate contribution to both the research and the teaching sides of the academy.

To make this possible, more of us will have to learn to love the swamp. Perhaps poetry offers a useful perspective, although it is clearly art not science. A poet in a swamp would not simply call it a swamp, but would point us at aspects—beautiful and horrible—of that particular swamp, would help us appreciate that swamp and most importantly any others with which we would come in contact. Even if a swamp is mostly water and marsh, there are lilies and lichens, tadpoles, and trees. Listen to Pulitzer prize winning poet Mary Oliver as she describes

"Crossing the Swamp"

> Here is the endless
>   wet thick
>   cosmos, the center
>   of everything—the nugget
> of dense sap, branching
>   vines, the dark burred
>   faintly belching
>   bogs. Here
> is *swamp*, here
>   is struggle,
>   closure—
>   pathless, seamless,
> peerless mud. My bones
>   knock together at the pale
>   joints, trying
>   for foothold, fingerhold,
> mindhold over
>   such slick crossings, deep
>   hipholes, hummocks
>   that sink silently
> into the black, slack
>   earthsoup. I feel
>   not wet so much as
>   painted and glittered
> with the fat grassy

> mires, the rich
>   and succulent marrows
>   of earth—a poor
>
> dry stick given
>   one more chance by the whims
>   of swamp water—a bough
>   that still, after all these years,
>   could take root,
>   sprout, branch out, bud—
>   make of its life a breathing
>   palace of leaves. [Oliver, 1992]

The swamp of public service is always alive, teeming with new growth. It requires new and continuing engagement of people prepared to call its name, describe its wonders, and wrest meaning from its confusion. It requires leaders and we must learn to prepare them differently.

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