HKPI Knowledge Transfer Forum 2014
**7 March 2014**

Forum conducted by Prof. Bruce Barnett
"Embedding Reflection in the Principals' Capability Framework"

Synopsis

Prof. Barnett guided forum participants to explore elements of reflection, and then to become aware of their personal reflective learning tendencies. Participants then tried to apply fruits of the reflection to the Principals' Capability Framework's (PCF) domains and career stages, and examined leadership practices, personal values and career stage development.

1. Barnett presented a model of reflective thought and action as follows:
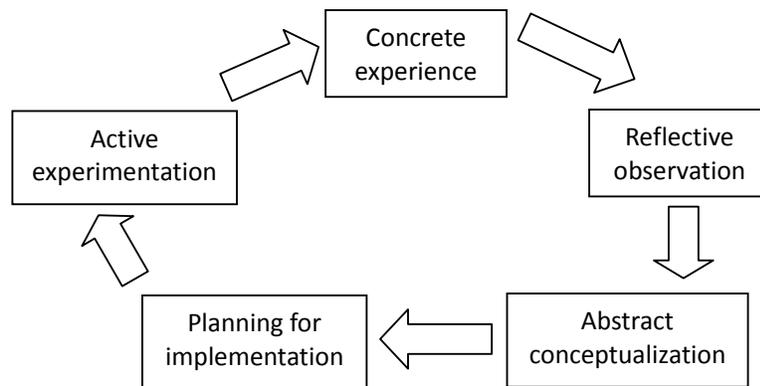
Personal reflection

The value of reflection is that it improves the quality of judgement that points towards action.   Therefore, it will be useful to add a step of "Contextualization" between "Abstract Conceptualization" and "Planning for Implementation". The reason is that, after reflecting over a "Concrete Experience" in Situation A (e.g., a school principal handling a conflict on professional matters between two teachers), the practitioner goes into "Abstract Conceptualization", in a process of generalization from the specific context Situation A to the abstract (e.g. by generating new principles about handling conflicts effectively to result in a more harmonious school culture).   However, by the time when "Planning for Implementation" comes, the context of an emerged Situation B requiring the implementation of the learnt concepts is often not the same as the context in Situation A (e.g., this time it may be a conflict between school managers, or

a conflict between personalities).   The generalization process leading to "Abstract Conceptualization" needs to be reversed through "Contextualization", by modifying or selectively applying what has been generalized from Situation A to the specific context of Situation B (e.g. What additional strategies are needed in handling personality conflicts? What principles that apply in resolving conflicts between teachers do not apply to school managers?).

2. Barnett then gave participants a testing score sheet (Appendix 1), enabling them to identify their "scores" in namely Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation.   These four "scores" represent the individual's strengths along the four norms for the Learning Style Inventory (Appendix 2), including traits such as:

- High score on Concrete Experience: relies heavily on feeling-based judgements, empathetic, "people-oriented", and learn best from examples in which one is involved.
- High score on Reflective Observation: relies heavily on careful observation, and tends to be impartial and an introvert.
- High score on Abstract Conceptualization: relies heavily on logical thinking and rational evaluation, tends to be oriented more towards things and symbols and less towards people, and frustrated by unstructured "discovery" learning approaches.
- High score on Active Experimentation: relies heavily on "doing", learn best when engaged, such as in projects, homework and discussions, and tends to be an extrovert.

Personal reflection
If "Contextualization" is an additional norm to the Learning Style Profile, this strength represents the individual's competence to de-generalize principles, "big ideas" and theories to application in specific situations.   A high score on Contextualization reflects heavy reliance on "thinking routines" and "doing routines" to bridge the Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. Examples of such "thinking routines" may include drawing post-reflection planning charts, and self-imposed reflective solitude after insight acquisition in a "Concrete Experience".   Examples of such "doing routines" may include chatting with colleagues at the frontline about recently acquired insights and getting feedback from them (e.g. how conflict management principles learnt

elsewhere have or have not worked among their circles in the school).

Individuals with high scores in Contextualization can be symbolized (picture on right, source: wikihow.com) by frequently with bringing up one foot in the air (moving in a direction guided by the conceptualization) and the other foot touching the ground (direction also guided by firm connection with contextual realities).

3. Barnett then methodologically guided participants to adopt the "What-So what-Now what" approach to reflect upon their leadership practices, using the PCF framework (www.hkpi.org.hk/images/videos/Principals_booklet.pdf).

● WHAT? Descriptors in the PCF were rephrased into self-reflective statements. Using the PCF Leadership Practices Assessment Instrument (Appendix 3), participants assessed their current practices in each of the four domains: 1) self, 2) school, 3) professional community of principals and 4) connection to local and international communities.

● SO WHAT? Participants identified which domain reflected their lowest scores.

● NOW WHAT? Participants determined leadership practices to be improved and how they would know these practices would work.

● In groups of three, participants studied two cases and reviewed the principal's practices in the cases (WHAT?), identified principal's career stage capability and educational values (SO WHAT?) and determined how the principal's practices should change to advance himself in terms of career stage and values (NOW WHAT?).

● Participants then reflected on their own leadership practices and personal values in the four domains, and their different stages of career development in the four domains.

Personal reflection
The statements in Appendix 3 represent fruits of Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualization. The two cases studied in the forum represented the step of Contextualization before Planning for Implementation and Active

Implementation. Appendix 3 is a very useful tool to link big ideas to the next contextualized scenario for implementation. With a senior EDB official present in our Forum, I naturally thought what the EDB could do to reduce systemic restraining factors that might hinder principals' career stage advancement especially in Domains 3 & 4, for example by granting official recognition of professional development programmes for principals organized by the HKPI, and decentralizing approval procedures for principals' participation in national and international networking and collaboration activities.

(contributed by Dr. John K. Tan)