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Inviting Intuitive Understandings in Teaching and Professional Practices: Is Intuition Relationally and Culturally Neutral?

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Review Essay:

Terry Atkinson & Guy Claxton (Eds.) (2000). The Intuitive Practitioner: On the Value of Not Always Knowing What One is Doing. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 278 + ix pages, ISBN 0335-20362-0 (paperback), £18.99

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Abstract: To analyze the construct of intuition, Terry ATKINSON and Guy CLAXTON draw from the research, teaching experiences, and theoretical expertise of faculty at the University of Bristol, UK. The fourteen chapters by the faculty at Bristol explore the often slippery notion of "intuition" and its impact in professional practice, which is generally (and there are exceptions) defined as a cognitive psychological strategy rather than a relational and cultural exchange. The last chapter is a critical summary by ERAUT who assesses the book as an outsider to Bristol. The book reads like a final report of discussions and research by the authors within a university context rather than a cohesive theoretical summary by a sole author. The result is inspiring as a review of overlapping ideas that inform the reader of the relevance of intuition in educational and professional settings within the context of educational reforms during the last decade in several countries. It will not be compelling reading for professionals attempting to learn a set of activities that would aid them in learning how to incorporate "intuitive practices" or for researchers searching for ways of clearly formalizing intuition as a well-defined theoretical construct that can be analyzed in various cultural contexts and/or institutional situations.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of the book is to address "what professionals do, and how they learn to do it" (p.1), and focuses primarily on the work of teachers and briefly on the medical and business professions. How does learning occur as practitioners engage the challenges of their professional work? How do practitioners and teachers incorporate their work experiences into a form of understanding? To respond to these questions, most of the authors conceptualize intuition as a psychological process, in a few cases, some of the authors define intuition within a cultural psychological or discursive framework. Intuition is defined in the book primarily from the perspective of cognitive psychology. Intuition, as some of the authors suggest though, is also a process that involves how professionals engage emotionally and socially with the challenges that people who seek their expertise encounter. [1]

The editors' explicit goals for the book are to:

> "explore the relationship between articulate/rational. explicit and inarticulate/intuitive/implicit ways of knowing and learning in the context of adult professional practice and development; to question the current tendency to interpret 'reflection' solely in terms of articulation, and to reassert the value of other forms of reflection; to illustrate the working relationship between reason and intuition on a variety of case studies in distinctive educational and professional settings, and to make links and comparisons between them; to extract and highlight practical lessons which this reassessment of intuition has for the initial and continuing professional development of educators and others" (ATKINSON & CLAXTON, pp.1f). [2]

The editors suggest that the book is a sequel to *Liberating the Learner* (CLAXTON, ATKINSON, OSBORN, & WALLACE, 1996) in which the impact of tacit knowledge on learning was explored by some of the same authors. The introduction (ATKINSON), chapter one (CLAXTON), chapter two (FURLONG), and the final chapter (ERAUT) define and review the difficulties in construing intuition as an unequivocal or non-ambiguous term. FURLONG contextualizes intuition within the crisis in professionalism which leads in turn to value the different "ways of knowing that have been ignored and silenced" (p.21). To resolve the crisis, FURLONG concludes that among the most frequent responses has been to emphasize reflexive practice (see SCHON, 1983, 1987), which frames professional intervention as a form of art and, consequently, is a place where intuition can likely be located. A second response has been to bring back a focus on a profession with a base grounded on systematic research or what in other professions is often called evidence-based practices. A third tactic runs counter to a positivist approach. Critical theory requires partnerships in which the players participate in an "ideal speech situation." The lack of credibility of the reflective movement, which can sustain more easily an intuitive framework, is for FURLONG a result of the lack of clarity of what the reflective process means given that it is so "personal and so situationally specific" (p.29). As a result, FURLONG suggests, intuition needs to be placed within a rational and critical

discourse that does not substitute empirically-based and critically informed practices. [3]

2. My Biased Location

What may others find useful in this book? What kind of insights can be found in the book that helps to describe some of the dilemmas that professionals and others may confront? How is the teaching of intuition or its use in practice conceptualized? As an educator of therapists, as a qualitative researcher, and as a clinical consultant, the idea of exploring intuition in a systematic way was an appealing stimulus to choose this book for review. I wanted to read more about how the reflective process is defined and taught so that I could better reflect on my own educational, research, and clinical consulting practices. As an educator, I wanted to find more of the practices that inspire some of the questions. As a practitioner, I found myself lost in the definitional conundrum that the term itself presents. As a researcher, I found it interesting to think about intuition as a process that embraces various other processes that professionals employ. It was a difficult read, first, as I struggled with trying to read the book "intuitively" as well as analytically. The process was painful because the authors often forced me to categorize my thinking and to stay within a traditional/modern although integrative approach to intuition. Did I want a host of phrases and lessons on how to be more intuitive like many new age texts do? This was not the case. I found the book as a whole placed my intuitive experience on hold, as if reading about intuition was very serious stuff with little fun derived from it. My "intuitive self" wanted to abandon the book although my more "rational self" wanted to complete the work. I decided to approach my reading as a research project, as an ethnography of a world I knew little about. As a result I realized that there was something I was learning from my own approach to an academic text that seemed carefully crafted to convince the more traditional bearers of modern academic standards that INTUITION with capitol letters is a valid subject of study, although very difficult to validate in the more traditional ways educators and researchers decide what is valid and relevant in the "science" of their work. [4]

The book suffers from the difficulties of describing intuition within a discourse that excludes all which can not be categorized within a neatly defined categorical framework. ERAUT suggests that we cease "to focus entirely on the written text and trying to create models to represent either the author's underlying intentions or your own preferred conceptual framework for the topic" (p.257). [5]

As a reviewer without any personal knowledge of the authors I was left with no other option than just the text at hand. Thus my review attempts to highlight what my own understanding brings forward while keeping a focus on what the book has to share with readers. [6]

3. Anatomies of Intuition

CLAXTON in a revealing title, attempts to map the "anatomy of intuition." Despite the modernist title, the chapter outlines effectively some of the discourses that support the construction of intuition as part of the professional toolbox. Intuition as a family of ways of knowing which "are less articulate and explicit than normal reasoning and discourse" (p.49) include:

> "*expertise*, the unreflective execution of intricate skilled performance; *implicit learning*, the acquisition of such expertise by non-conscious or non conceptual means; *judgement*, making accurate decisions and categorizations without, at the time, being able to explain or justify them; *sensitivity*, a heightened attentiveness, both conscious and non-conscious to details of a situation; *creativity*, the use of incubation and reverie to enhance problem-solving; and *rumination*, the process of 'chewing the cud' of experience in order to extract its meanings and its implications" (p.40; emphasis in the original). [7]

Atkinson adds to this multi-dimensional assessment of intuition with the hypothesis that trusting our own judgment is intrinsically linked to how our intuitive understandings are affected by self-efficacy and to how we were nurtured and supported while growing up. Confidence in our own intuitive responses can be seen throughout our lives, reflected in our capacity to continuously develop our intuitive capacities in a self-reinforcing process. [8]

4. Teaching, Mentoring, and Pedagogical Challenges and the Dangerous Discourse of Intuition

The "knowledge required to teach includes content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and local knowledge—knowledge of the context and of the learners" (ATKINSON, p.70). Intuition, in this perspective, is defined as one component of the dyad of "conscious analytical thinking" (p.74) and the "less conscious and intuitive processes" (p.82). Similarly, JOHN in his contribution *Awareness and Intuition* asks readers to evaluate what "student teachers think about and do during their interactive teaching" (p.84) and what of those processes are intuitive. For these authors, intuition is a phenomenon that is not only available to practitioners but also to researchers. For instance, an ethnographer or a cognitive psychologist would be able to study "the nature of student teachers' thinking during lessons (p.87). ATKINSON describes some of the dimensions within which the observations would fit like perceptions, deliberations, anticipations, content, feelings, and so on. His own research concludes that "novice teachers quickly learn to rely on their own resourcefulness and are adept at crafting their intuitive ideas into practice" (p.103). Intuition is at the core of the mentoring process. [9]

Mentoring involves sharing implicit and explicit forms of knowledge. It requires mentors to continuously assess what is appropriate to say based on a developmental assessment of those mentored. However, we know little about how mentors learn how to mentor. Intuition is therefore a useful construct to observe during the course of mentoring conversations. LAZARUS starts from the

assumption that "mentors are usually selected because of their experience and ability, not necessarily because they can articulate knowledge" (p.109). How do mentors balance between providing specific practical knowledge and a good grounding in theoretical understanding to protégées or supervisees? This compelling assumption and question is at the core of not only the teaching profession but also other professional endeavors such as counseling, medicine, and law. LAZARUS provides some specific advice about how mentors can develop the skills necessary to help them work through the challenge of this question. [10]

English language teacher education researchers GILPIN and CLIPIN make explicit, like most of the authors in this book, their carefully crafted integrative posture: "the claims for intuition do not deny the need for knowledge" (p.125). Similarly, GREGORY suggests that we should deconstruct intuition's association with mystical ideas and BRAWN writes, "the dataset on which decisions are made thus comes from formal and informal means" (p.157). The call for integrating the taken for granted rationality of formal inquiry and intuition (a form of rationality that is excluded) suggest that knowledge is defined as the accepted rational discourse or the one that we arrive at as the result of positivist empirical data driven processes. Intuitive knowledge is, I believe, legitimate insofar as it is adequately proven with the usual rigor of positivist scientific reasoning. The integrative call seems to be formulated not to scare the bearers of the dominant standards for measurement. Intuition seems like a valid process to consider at every pedagogical turn, it is however an inclusion that calls for conditions that often places it between parentheses, as if placing it at the center would be dangerous. [11]

5. Interpreting Experiences, Fulfilling Standards, and Having Conversations

Most authors in the book have found that teachers and practitioners are using intuition on a daily basis; it is part of dealing holistically with complex situations. This finding, however, is counter to how professional development and continuing education is designed in professionally driven societies: content/techniques that are evidence-based. The development of intuitive skills is hard to implement due to the constraints imposed by the same standards that call for accountability of professionals and educators like McMAHON outlines. Besides obvious limitations of time, to what extent does the discourse of what is valid define the agenda of how these contents should be taught? For practitioners dealing with "hard sciences," the dilemmas are similar. Despite our taking for granted the idea that scientists' most important paradigmatic conceptualizations can be described as emerging as a result of intuitive processes, how do practitioners learn to work with ambiguity while incorporating the "facts"? As it is suggested in the book, taking into consideration a developmental view of those training to be teachers and professionals frame the response to this question. BRAWN believes that intuition can be fostered "by trusting the validity of ambiguity and encouraging the philosophy that there is more than one answer to certain clinical situations" (p.162). In my experience as an educator and supervisor of counseling students,

most of the work involves having students learn to listen carefully and from different perspectives to their patients or clients; a process that can be complemented by standardized ways of observation. It is tempting though for beginning therapists to listen with an eye to conclusions or of "filling the blanks" (BACIGALUPE, 1998), rather than expanding ambiguity and creating new conversational spaces. Similarly, BRAWN concludes that teachers and practitioners "need to spend time listening to, talking to and watching their clients, as well as relying on more formal test and examination evidence" (p.159). In this regard it is useful to situate their inquiry within a cultural psychology and constructivist framework, as BROWN and COLES suggest. For them, teachers articulate "purposes" (pp.169-172). These purposes are not necessarily recognized before the teachers intervene but are "only apparent in reflection after the event" (p.173). From my perspective, the design of conversations is a situational, contextual, and evolving process that requires trusting that everyone participating has some stake in defining it rather than in trusting that standardized forms of assessment which bring forth the primacy of a detached objective expert authority. [12]

6. Ways of Knowing and Forms of Practice

> "To understand ways of knowing or forms of practice which do not always appear to have an explicit rationale, we must look at embedded cultural practices, rather than at individuals" (JOHNSON, p.237).

BROADFOOT's brilliant indictment of our obsession with data and measurement plus JOHNSON's appraisal of academia as a cultural community highlight the danger in conceptualizing intuition as a psychological construct that can be captured within the web of empirically based research. Their chapters are refreshing as they challenge researchers and practitioners to employ the complexity of intuition for the purpose of subverting the role of assessment and teaching. Calls for accountability and outcome measurement are the vogue in most academic institutions and drive most managerial and financial decisions, even though teachers and students seem to be more interested in the work of teaching, research, and learning engagement. "Intuitively," the dominance of accreditation and national standards distract us from challenging the problems that we face as educators, researchers, and learners while not really being accountable to the social problems that seem to go unresolved. [13]

The Intuitive Practitioner argues compellingly for the "value of not always knowing what one is doing" in a format that reiterates the primacy of standards rather than situational and contextual needs. The focus on intuition as a "personality trait, a disposition, a skill, a state of mind, and/or problem-specific" (ERAUT, p.259) seem to place the intuitive process mostly within the realm of internal and/or psychological processes rather than the result of relational processes. The way intuition is defined may suggest that it is possible to define empirically its boundaries and elements without regard to the core of its definition which exists in the situational or social and language determined processes in which professionals and clients find themselves. Although the idea of intuition may

seem antithetical to a certain organized rationality, I find that several authors make many efforts at placing intuition within a rational cognitive paradigm that contradicts the title of the book, or as the final chapter calls it, a dispositional element in professional practice. [14]

The book fails to contextualize its subject within the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, social class, and disability. The idea of designing intuition depending upon the concerns of diverse learners seems to be of little concern. Intuition, like other psychological constructs, is defined largely as a non-contextual device that makes us all psychologically the same. I find the invisibility of the impact of inequality puzzling, not because the concept of intuition would not be relevant within those intersections, but because the authors choose to avoid them without any explanation. [15]

7. A Brief Final Note

Not being an expert on theorizing about intuition, I am nearly sure what I think intuition is. Intuition may be hard to define, but it is with me everyday in my professional, teaching, and research practices. Intuition is an organizing construct for authors and professionals who include it as a constitutive part of knowing. It is also a construct that has been adopted by professionals interested in making intuition a device that include subjects such as multiple or emotional intelligence, or as another managerial tool in business. Therapists have also found this idea compelling and have integrated it within modern (i.e., MAHRER, 1996) and post-structural frameworks (i.e., KOGAN & BROWN, 1998). The idea that intuition coexists and is possible when expertise is present brings forward a sensibility that I find very helpful when I think about the postmodern emphasis on local expertise. Intuition, in that sense, opens the door for our own voices as experts to participate in a collaborative and non-domineering way while sharing our experiences with those learning from us. Consistent with this idea, my review is not a comprehensive assessment of intuition as a concept, a process, a theoretical construct or an activity, nor an assessment of how the book fulfills a demand in the educational field. My own consultation work, professional, and educational and research skills were challenged as I read the book as I challenged the relevance of a complex construct that is set outside the intersecting domains of culture, race, gender, and class. [16]

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