THE NEED FOR REFLEXIVITY
IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

ANN L. CUNLIFFE
University of New Mexico

JONG S. JUN
California State University, Hayward

In this article, the authors argue the need to go beyond the idea of reflective public adminis-
tration to reflexive public administration. They explore the meaning of reflexivity, in particu-
lar self- and critical reflexivity, and suggest that reflexive practice is crucial to public admin-
istration because it can lead to more critical, responsible, and ethical actions. This can
provide a basis for organizational transformation. The article concludes by offering a num-
ber of resources for teaching self- and critical reflexivity.

Reflexivity has been debated across a variety of disciplines, including
philosophy, the natural sciences, anthropology, history, sociology, and
psychology (e.g., Ashmore, 1989; Clifford, 1986; Foucault, 1970;
Gouldner, 1970; Heidegger, 1966; Latour, 1988). A number of scholars
have also discussed its importance to the field of public administration
(e.g., Adams & Balfour, 1998; Farmer, 1995; Harmon, 1995; Jun, 1994).
Yet in spite of, or perhaps because of, this wide-ranging debate, scholarly
efforts to date have not demonstrated adequate recognition of reflexive
inquiry in public administration, perhaps, because there is often confusion
over the meaning of *reflexivity*, over how we can be reflexive, and why
it is so difficult to engage in reflexive acts—especially in bureaucratic
organizations. The purpose of this article is to explore how two forms of
reflexivity—self-reflexivity and critical reflexivity—are key to the prac-
tice of public administration.

In expounding these two forms of reflexivity, we draw from two different intellectual traditions: humanistic and critical. The central thread of both forms of reflexivity is the need to question our natural and often taken-for-granted attitudes such as our prejudice, bias, thought, and habits. As Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living" and each individual must constantly and vigilantly examine all aspects of life using the powers of reason that we have available to us. Thus, it is important for public administrators to become reflexive practitioners—to work out their relationship to other individuals (including employees and citizens), to understand their role in a diverse and complex society, and to understand the need for organizational members to act in more critical, responsive, and ethical ways. We suggest that as a means of assessing and changing traditional ways of doing public administration, an administrator must engage in self-reflexivity—a rigorous critique of habitual practices, and in critical reflexivity—questioning and complexifying his or her thinking and experience (Chia, 1996). We explore these issues further in our discussion of self- and critical reflexivity.

We begin by defining reflexivity and go on to outline and discuss the differences between self- and critical reflexivity. We then examine the need for reflexivity in the discipline and practice of public administration and, finally, offer suggestions for teaching reflexivity to students of public administration.

DEFINING REFLEXIVITY

As a way of refining our interpretation of reflexivity, we wish to contrast the notions of *reflection* and *reflexivity*. These terms are often used synonymously but carry very different ontological and epistemological assumptions and consequently generate rather different intellectual and social practice. Reflection is traditionally defined as a mirror image—an objectivist ontology based on the idea that there is an original reality we can think about and separate ourselves from. The idea of reflective public administration gained popularity with Schön's (1983) work on the reflective practitioner. He viewed reflection as a means of examining situational requirements, of connecting the theoretical ideas of a professional with the conditions of the environment, the theoretical designs of a professional with a client, and the rational plans of an administrative organization with the community. This process involves *reflecting-in-action* as professionals construct an understanding by drawing on cumulative

personal and organizational knowledge and engaging in a reflective conversation with the situation. Reflecting-in-action incorporates an experimental logic of exploration, move testing and hypothesis testing (Schön, 1983, p. 147), as a means of creating a better match between the professional's strategies and situational and client conditions. However, we suggest that although reflection can form a basis for more effective problem solving by developing a "new theory of the unique case" (p. 68), it does not require an administrator to question the ends, means, and relevance of administrative practice. To do so means engaging in reflexivity, which can be defined as an unsettling of the "basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality" (Pollner, 1991, p. 370). This unsettling is key because it helps surface the assumptions underlying administrative practice, provides a means for thinking more critically about the impact of such practice, and can lead to the construction of new organizational and social realities.

To refine the distinction between reflection and reflexivity, we draw on Heidegger's (1966) differentiation of calculative thinking and meditative thinking. He suggested calculative thinking (reflection) is a "going toward" objects (p. 88) or willing something into truth by representing it as we think it is. This means an objective observer reflecting on a situation to understand what is really going on and to develop theories to explain that reality. In this way, calculative thinking aims at closure and categorization as a means of understanding objects and situations—a form of thinking that does not question the assumptions underlying actions. Heidegger suggested that meditative thinking (reflexivity) is concerned with understanding the grounds of our thinking by opening ourselves to the hidden nature of truth. This does not mean developing an accurate description of reality, rather emptying ourselves of acceptable ways of thinking and opening ourselves to other possibilities. In particular, it means engaging in the reflexive act of questioning the basis of our thinking, surfacing the taken-for-granted rules underlying organizational decisions, and examining critically our own practices and ways of relating with others.

Heidegger's (1966) work is a good example of reflexive thinking and writing. He argued that understanding the grounds of our thinking embraces opening and movement, and he enacted this movement by writing metaphorically. For example, Heidegger (1966) used the metaphor of *region* and offered dialogue between a scientist, scholar, and teacher as a way of avoiding definitive language and truth claims:

Scholar: Thus we are and we are not.
Scientist: Again this restless to and fro between yes and no.
Scholar: We are suspended as it were between the two.
Teacher: Yet our stand in this betweeness is waiting. (p. 75)

This dialogue illustrates the nature of reflexive thinking—of recognizing ambivalence in our lives, suspending calculative thinking, and waiting for (opening ourselves to) other possibilities. Reflexivity, therefore, goes beyond calculative problem solving toward exploring tensions and recognizing the ephemeral nature of our identities and our social experience. It also draws on social constructionist assumptions to question and explore how we contribute to the construction of social and organizational realities, how we relate with others, and how we construct our ways of being in the world. By doing so, we can become more creative, responsive, and open to different ways of thinking and acting.

Within the social sciences, reflexive writings are explicitly or implicitly grounded in either humanistic (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Gergen, 1994; Gouldner, 1970; Harmon, 1995; Pollner, 1991; Watson, 1994) or critical traditions (e.g., Cooper, 1990; Farmer, 1995; McSwite, 1997). Humanistic approaches to reflexivity draw from phenomenological and social constructionist assumptions and the need for conscious participants to turn their mind to their thought and experiences. Self-reflexivity is grounded in existential seriousness (Kiros, 1998) as we question our ways of being and acting in the world, explore our ways of making sense of our lived experience, and examine whether we act responsibly and ethically (Harmon, 1995). Critical approaches to reflexivity draw from critical theory, poststructural, and postmodern commitments to open debate on the philosophical and ideological suppositions underlying texts and to problematize language, truth claims, and universal explanations. Thus, critical reflexivity means unsettling the assumptions underlying theoretical, moral, and ideological positions as a basis for thinking more critically about academic, organizational, and social policies and practice. Our premise is that both approaches to reflexivity are important to public administration because they complement each other: Self-reflexivity and individual ethical action form the basis for understanding our own role in the construction of social and organizational life, critical reflexivity a basis for examining taken for granted assumptions, who may be excluded or marginalized by policy and practice, and the responsibility for ethical action at the organizational and societal levels.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY: AN EXISTENTIAL TURN

Self-reflexivity embraces subjectivity by placing people firmly in the construction of social reality and the creation of meaning. We define *self-reflexivity* as the conscious act of an existential self, wherein we examine our values and ourselves by exercising critical consciousness. It is a process that depends on the idea of a transforming self, continuously emerging and changing as we interact with others and our environment. Self-reflexivity goes deeper than reflecting on an event or a situation; it is a dialogue with self about our fundamental assumptions, values, and ways of interacting. In this dialogue, we question our core beliefs and our understanding of particular events. Self-reflexivity is, therefore, an act of reason turned inward, in a radical way, toward the foundation of consciousness and the presuppositional foundation of social order (Jun, 1997, p. 151). Through this radical process of critiquing our beliefs and ideologies we become responsive to others and open to the possibilities for new ways of acting. As long as we are willing to exist as transforming selves, we recognize the need for change within relationships, in organizational cultures and practices, and in public discourse.

Our interpretation of self-reflexivity draws on humanistic perspectives to assume that when an individual engages in action, he or she is not only critically conscious of the act but also is capable of thinking about, and questioning, his or her "means and ends of action" (Lash, 1993, p. 202) and our ways of being. Heidegger (1962) explored this notion of reflexive being, or *Dasein*, in *Being and Time* (1962). He considered the Being of Dasein to be different from the being of all others, in that "in its Being this being is concerned *about* its very Being" (p. 53). He suggested this way of Being, and also phenomena, are often covered up—concealed, distorted, or not yet discovered. The basic task of phenomenology is to interrogate and understand Dasein as a means of achieving clarity about its existence, concealments, and the possibilities of itself. Heidegger called this understanding of life and its possibilities *existenzial* (existential).

Self-reflexivity, which Heidegger (1962) terms *destructuring*, is a crucial part of Dasein because it helps an individual surface and see beyond the limitations of presupposed assumptions and frameworks to overcome them. As Kiros (1998) pointed out, "[T]he existentially serious individual is painfully aware of the existential fact and comports his/her entire desire toward the realization of their self-imposed goal" (p. 185). In recognizing the limitations of self-imposed goals and routine practice, we open up the possibility for change.

When linked with social constructionism, the idea that realities, identities, and knowledge are constructed between us as a dialectical social practice (Cunliffe, 2001; Law, 1994; Shotter & Cunliffe, 2002; Weick, 1995), self-reflexivity becomes an ontological issue. It not only unsettles our notions of reality, agency, and ways of being and relating but also becomes a socio-ontological resource as we begin to recognize the impact of our own practices and ways of relating on the process of constructing realities. In doing so, we begin to recognize our ability to change those realities. Thus, the self-reflexive individual does not simply work in an organization: routine work, and problem solving are not enough. Instead, she or he is existentially serious about her or his role in the organization and explores ways of overcoming paradoxical aspects such as stability and flexibility, control and autonomy, power and powerlessness, voice and silence, and domination and empowerment—and this is where critical-reflexivity offers a way of thinking about the paradoxical aspects of life.

CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY: A POSTMODERN TURN

Postmodern and poststructuralist approaches to reflexivity focus on a critique of language, knowledge, ideology, and power. They draw mainly on the work of Derrida (e.g., 1973, 1976) and Foucault (e.g., 1970, 1972) and incorporate deconstructive methods to question the ability of authors and text to capture a single, truthful, and accurate reality. Language, theory, signifiers (iconic and linguistic symbols), and signified (the original object or concept) are all deconstructed to reveal the fractures, contradictions, assumptions, and lack of original meaning (Lawson, 1985, pp. 92-102). Deconstructionists challenge single and absolute ideologies, truth claims, and hegemonic practices to highlight paradoxes or absurdities. To do so, they use otherness or oppositional logic.

Derrida (1973) claimed that Western thought is based on oppositional logic: good versus evil, male versus female, organization versus disorganization. In speaking of one term (the present term), for example *organization*, we implicitly draw on its opposite (the absent term), *disorganization*. In doing so, we privilege the present over the absent and repress the opposite absent term—for example, organization is good, disorganization is bad and needs to be eliminated (Cooper, 1989). Derrida (1973) proposed that we should not privilege one term over the other because they construct each other through a fundamental tension: Organization and disorganization are entwined, and each may emerge or suppress the other

at any time. Instead, we should focus on the interplay, or *différance*, between the two opposites: the "restless to and fro" identified by Heidegger (1966). Différance also incorporates deferring; we express the meaning of words through other words, which also have their own meaning. Meaning is deferred as we become more distant from the original we are trying to define. Consequently, if meaning is not fixed, we cannot make truth claims only surface différance or the process of otherness incorporated in any text. Reflexive deconstructive analysis is the means by which we may reveal what is and is not. As we see, this has implications for intellectual and organizational practice because in privileging presence, we often justify institutions and their practices and fail to question the impact of our truth claims on others.

Foucault's archaeological period (1970, 1972) can also be connected with critical-reflexivity. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault (1972) aimed to rid knowledge from its focus on presence (an already existing reality) by studying the "interplay of constantly recurring absence" (p. 25). He did so by revealing how knowledge is shaped by unconscious rules and practices, suggesting we need to reveal these rules and their influence by questioning the assumptions underlying how we theorize, experience. and talk about the world. He also equated knowledge and power, suggesting that society is maintained through techniques of power and discipline exercised by its institutions. Within these institutions, power relationships influence what is so-called good knowledge and normal practice. In this way, knowledge is normalized and normalizes society. We need only look at the systems and practices within organizations to see how this operates. We are hired based on normalized selection criteria and competitive examination scores; we hold jobs categorized by position classifications, evaluated and rewarded through normalized performance criteria, trained to be good (normalized) performers (Townley, 1994). These organizational practices are often seen to be independent, democratic, and neutral processes but are, in fact, governed by hegemonic forces because they involve spontaneous consent to dominant ideologies (Gramsci, 1971). As managers and employees, we do not question whether these normalized practices privilege some and marginalize others.

Foucault (1974) suggested the real political task of critique (critical reflexivity) is to examine the practices that lead to hegemony—to surface techniques of power and discipline (e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Martin, 1990; Mumby, 1988) or explore how organization culture manipulates and controls meaning and provides a forum for competing

hegemonic stories (Boje, 1994). By engaging in critical reflexivity, the reflexive practitioner can reveal opposing and multiple perspectives and offer alternative ways of thinking about these practices. This is particularly important in bureaucracies, where rationality and such normalized practices are privileged without questioning their effects. By reflexively surfacing and questioning the processes of discipline, control, and normalization, we can create possibilities for more equitable practices and put in place the conditions for transforming human organizations, public administration, and public discourse. Critical reflexivity can lead to new possibilities for changing patterns of bureaucracy and transforming hierarchical values into new, more democratic, and socially relevant values (Jun, 1994, p. 20).

In summary, critical reflexivity offers a way of critiquing ideologies, normalized practices, and their consequences. It offers a way of reformulating and expanding the bounds of social and organizational practice by highlighting systemic control structures that reproduce themselves in our discourse and practices. In this way, we can begin to rethink how our metanarratives legitimate our "social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics and ways of thinking" (Lyotard, 1992, p. 18).

THE NEED FOR REFLEXIVITY IN SOCIAL
AND ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE

Why is reflexivity crucial to social practice and the everyday world of administration? How does an individual engage in reflexivity in her or his organizations and communities? Why should we be reflexive? When an administrator desires to be ethically responsible, to improve his or her sense of self-worth, or to change the work environment, he or she is likely to first engage in self-realization. This means attempting to understand oneself in relation to others and the organizational context. When we are able to surface and question our own connection to ourselves and to the social world, we begin to understand and even appreciate complex relationships. In doing so, we recognize we are active participants and begin to critically take circumstances into consideration rather than merely reacting to them: to shape activities in a self-confirming manner in relation to significant others. Self-reflexivity enables administrative praxis— critical, conscious, socially purposive action (Jun, 1998, p. 124).

Self-reflexive individuals become aware of the limits of their own knowledge and institutional practices as they work with clients and citizens. They critically examine the underlying assumptions of normalized

policies, programs, and regulations and try to understand why such policies might marginalize groups or make meeting clients' needs impossible. Self-reflexive individuals also recognize the need to consider "competing interests and positions of struggle" (Swartz, 1997) when formulating and applying policies and construct dialectical possibilities for meeting social needs by placing their responsibility into the larger contexts of society, citizens, and ethical action. In doing so, public administrators may be able to overcome the limits of institutional inadequacies and increase their ability to change those limits by constructing new, more collaborative, and inclusive forms of reality.

Self-reflexivity is also practiced in the social context because we live, work, and make sense of our world in relation to others and the otherness of our surroundings. We share our ideas and construct organizational realities with other organizational members through dialogue and discourse (Cunliffe, 2001). Such dialogue can be subject to "mindguards" or ways of thinking that lead us to consciously or unconsciously protect established practices and norms and prevent alternative perspectives (Janis, 1972). Thus, self-reflexivity can also be a social practice as organizational members question their assumptions, practices, and actions and their impact on the organization and the community at large. At a social level, self-reflexivity means that teams, departments, and agencies pay attention to differences of ideas and experiences and engage in dialogue that is critical, open, and questioning as a means of acting in more responsive ways (Bourdieu, 1990; Deetz, 1995b; Gouldner, 1970; Habermas, 1981).

Critical reflexivity offers a means of examining power relations in organizations—who is given the right to speak for others, who determines what can and cannot be said or done—and whether this may exclude or marginalize individuals and groups. These issues are particularly relevant in policy formulation and implementation because decisions have very real implications for the way people are able to live their lives. In making policy decisions, administrators can dehumanize people, treating them as inanimate objects to control, manipulate, and dominate because they may hold very specific so-called rational assumptions about what is good and right.

We can see the need for self- and critical reflexivity in various novels. For example, Kafka's (1948) novel *The Trial* depicts the possibility of human life deteriorating into a mere performance of organizational tasks that are devoid of justice, humanness, or compassion. In *The Trial*, the arrest of Joseph K. is sudden and seems to him to be unjustified. He believes that the court is an utterly aimless, absurd institution, interested in

condemning innocent victims while keeping them in ignorance of what action is being brought against them. The novel is a satiric description of a dehumanizing bureaucracy in which hierarchical order is corrupt. Bureaucrats are too insistent on the importance of their work and have too narrow in a conception of it. They believe that it is their duty to provide efficient services; they see technical rationality and accurate measurements as marks of their dedication to their profession. The reader can draw the conclusion that a lack of reflexivity turns individuals into uncritical functionaries carrying out the routine work of a rigid bureaucracy. An extreme example of this lack of reflexivity is also seen in the activities of Nazi bureaucrats, who were technically efficient, blindly loyal, and uncritical human beings (Adams & Balfour, 1998). Today most organizations in democratic societies are not like the one described by Kafka; their actions are not absurd and do not lead to pain or bloodshed. However, members, clients, and customers of large organizations are made to feel marginalized and possibly dehumanized from time to time.

We need only look at recent examples to understand the impact of normalized practice and the difficulty of being critical of that norm. The historic impeachment trial of the New Hampshire Supreme Court chief justice in summer 2000 highlighted the difficulty of moving beyond our taken-for-granted practices and becoming self-reflexive when an organizational culture dictates otherwise. The alleged actions of high court justices commenting on cases from which they were recused was justified by the claim that this was so-called normal practice—a typically unreflexive response indicating a lack of critical questioning about what is just and fair. Unethical, immoral, irresponsible, and even illegal practices (as seen in the Enron case and its relationship to the California energy crisis, WorldCom, and the FBI response to Colleen Rowley's memo) occur because self-interest, following rules and norms, being rewarded for specific actions (even though they may be illegal or unjust), and an acceptance or fear of questioning the status quo can lead to unreflexive action. It can take courage for one person to reflexively question these accepted organizational practices and bring them to the attention of others.

Reflexive public administrators are those who question the assumptions underlying the administrative and social practices that embrace the business-as-usual attitude shown in the examples above. They also self-reflexively surface the defensive strategies and behaviors (of themselves and others) that can accompany a challenge to those practices (Argyris, 1991). In so doing, they help create new possibilities for action, new ways of being and relating, while recognizing also the ethical responsibilities

associated with these new ways. Conventional views of administration as a science and administrators as technocrats making rational decisions often ignore these moral aspects because ends and means are taken for granted (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Jackall, 1988). Reflexivity draws attention to how we relate with each other ethically. This does not necessarily mean just following ethical principles and guidelines but becoming aware of how we might avoid "the suppression of alternative conceptions and possibilities" (Deetz 1995a, p. 223). In other words, we enact our social accountability and our ethical responsibility toward other citizens by making available communicative opportunities and "socio-ontological resources" (Shotter, 1993, p. 163). Self-reflexive public administrators recognize their place in creating ethical discourse, in respecting the rights of those around them to speak, and understand how their assumptions and use of words affects policies and, therefore, the social realities and identities of others. In this regard, reflexivity toward others is a civic virtue (Dagger, 1997): a basis for social practice. For an individual to become concerned with organizational or community interests, he or she must identify with others through a sense of justice, active participation in public discourse, care and compassion, and respect (Jun, 1999, pp. 224-225).

What are the problems associated with engaging in reflexive practice? At an individual level, existential questioning and critical thinking is a difficult and demanding task because it requires surfacing taken-for-granted assumptions and habitual actions. In an organization, people are accustomed to performing routine activities, which do not require a critical assessment of the purpose and need for these activities. They find themselves subject to concealed phenomena and ways of Being (Heidegger, 1966) and conscious and unconscious pressures to act within, and conform to, the status quo. In public organizations, conformity and stability are normalized practice and rationality, efficiency, and the role of administrator or manager as authoritative expert is unquestioned. This can lead to managers and administrators becoming morally neutral technicians as they are socialized into protecting the interests of self and the institution (MacIntyre, 1981). Unreflexive actions, especially when grounded in rational and hierarchical cultures, allow us to justify our decisions as so-called expert, based on rational criteria, and in the best interest of the organization. Similarly, if one's continued employment, promotion, and pay raises depends on meeting system requirements and rules, then to question existing ways of doing things can be an isolating activity. One can be accused of not being a team player, or of stirring up trouble. Becoming self-reflexive and being critical of, and changing, bureaucratic goals and

practice—can cause anxiety and stress. Such challenges need to be faced if administrators are to engage in reflexive action, and the initial step can involve asking questions so that others begin to see things differently.

In summary, by thinking more critically about our own and our organization's assumptions, values, and actions, we can develop a greater awareness of issues, of broader responsibilities, of different perspectives, of ethical action, and of how we might transform organizational and social practice. By uncovering the limitations and possibilities of our assumptions we are less prone to becoming complacent or ritualistic and better able to transform old ways of theorizing and doing public administration. This calls for a critical awareness of what has been done, what is happening, and what can be in the future: An awareness that begins with intellectual curiosity and requires reflexive thinking. Reflexivity therefore comes in between present predicaments and the exploration of new possibilities, and it explains apparent contradictions and hidden dimensions, the relationship between self and the social world, the individual and the bureaucracy.

TEACHING SELF- AND CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY

Academically, public administration draws from many disciplines to help educate students engaged, or wishing to engage, in the profession. As educators, we have an impact on the way that present and future public administrators think and act, and therefore teaching students to think reflexively is important. We can adopt a pedagogy that encourages self- and critical reflexivity by designing a curriculum that explores the relationship between the philosophy underlying reflexivity (as in this article) and practice. The classroom can provide a forum for critical reflexivity as we surface and critique the ideologies and assumptions underlying organizational, administrative, and social theory and practice. We can also encourage students to become more self-reflexive and think about how they, with others, construct realities and identities. The practicalities of teaching reflexivity have been explored in depth elsewhere (Cunliffe, 2002). In this article, we would like to highlight some of the issues involved in encouraging students to be more self- and critically reflexive in their thoughts and actions.

First, students bring expectations to our courses about what and how they will be taught. Many are accustomed to educational and organizational experiences that focus on techniques and rational methods and processes. They are therefore predisposed to want information, facts, and the

so-called right answer. They are familiar with accepting knowledge as fact and thinking objectively about something—they are unfamiliar with the notion of self-reflexivity and thinking about their own and others' ways of constructing realities and therefore their ability to change things. The first issue is, therefore, illustrating different modes of thinking about reality and knowledge. One way of doing so is to use Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigms as a means of identifying subjectivist-objectivist philosophies and methods and different ways of thinking about the nature of society. Although students initially attribute this paradigmatic thinking as an intellectual exercise relating only to the academic world, we move the discussion toward administrative and social practice by asking what the goals, values, standards, and activities of a functionalist administrator would look like compared to an interpretivist or radical humanist administrator. Most students are able to draw on examples from their own organizations. To teach the problem of unreflexive practice, Janis's *Groupthink* (1982), films and novels such as Kafka's (1948) *The Trial* and (1951) *The Castle* are useful. Berger and Luckmann's (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality* offers insights into the nature of socially constructed realities, and Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Freire, 1973) help stimulate faculty and students to think and act critically and responsively. Furthermore, action research and action science can be taught as methods of examining one's assumptions about action and change strategies through public or group reflection and discourse on organizational and community issues (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Greenwood & Morton, 1998; Stringer, 1996).

In addition to the use of stimulating books, we have used a variety of approaches in teaching students to become more reflexive. The approach often depends on whether we are asking students to engage with reflexivity as an intellectual, social, or personal practice—although there are overlaps between each. Critical essays examining case studies and current events from different paradigms and discussing possible underlying assumptions and normalizing practices, analyzing their own organizational experiences from different perspectives, and writing self-reflexive journals are all ways of helping students to think reflexively about socially and intersubjectively constructed realities and their own role in creating ethical discourse.

The process of thinking and acting in self-reflexive ways is not easy. Many students confuse reflection with reflexivity and write about what they observe or how others should act. It is therefore important to clarify the distinction and emphasize that self-reflexivity is about becoming a

self-conscious and self-questioning being. To illustrate the difficulty of thinking self-reflexively—and to illustrate how it can be achieved—we include a quote from a student journal:

> I willingly subscribed to the notion that management (and sometimes, life itself) is a "scientific, technically rational, value-free" system of theories and practices and believed that "goal achievement carries with it no implicit moral commitments and consequences" (MacIntyre, 1981). . . . Having started with such a frame of mind, the tendency to reinforce long-held objectives and values to reinvent and perpetuate the old system was always present. Therefore, fuelled by what I can now see was an inherent fear of change and an instinctive desire to protect the system of values I've subscribed to over a lengthy period, I initially looked for loopholes and weaknesses in the theories and practices to disprove them to myself. . . . I based my initial reluctance to change my old assumptions and ways by trying to convince myself that a mere exchange of schemas (a new set of values for the ones I was contemplating to modify) would not be successful, I became aware that these were defense mechanisms (Argyris, 1991) aimed at clouding the issue. Looking back, . . . I was starting with the premise that my goals were the preferred ones for all "right-thinking" individuals . . .

Thinking and acting self-reflexively means thinking subjectively from within experiences and our influence on intersubjective relations. As in the example above, this means questioning our own assumptions and writing from the first person rather than the objective (reflective) third person. It means complexifying rather than simplifying, questioning rather than answering or accepting, looking for paradoxes and contradictions rather than order and patterns, recognizing multiple perspectives rather than imposing our worldview, thinking about what lies unsaid as well as what is said. We can teach this by example as well as encouragement. When students grasp the notion and practice of self-reflexivity, they recognize their ability to change themselves and create new ways of relating. A critically reflexive stance means exposing contradictions in organizational policies and practices, exploring différance and multiple readings of texts, organizational documents, and practices. Finally, we suggest that we not just teach students about reflexivity; however, because our educational institutions—and we ourselves—are also subject to the processes of normalization and discipline, we also need to be reflexive practitioners and engage in the same degree of self-reflexivity in the way we teach.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we emphasized the fact that an individual must engage in self- and critical reflexivity if he or she is to actively construct choices in self-confirming ways rather than passively react to situational conditions or the organizational requirements of duty. Critical reflexivity helps a person rethink the rationalistic presuppositions of public administration and think in a way that meets the challenges of a situation. The reflexive questioning of social, administrative, and personal practices is key to the dialectical connection of contradictions and paradoxes that exist in our assumptions, organizational and administrative activities, and policies. A critically reflexive individual questions how the reified elements of the bureaucracy control his or her actions, how the established process contributes to the dehumanizing aspects of organizational life, and how the organization can be redesigned to make work aesthetically pleasing and qualitatively meaningful.

Perhaps the most important element in changing individuals and organizations may be an individual's ability to become self-reflexive. Self-reflexivity serves as a means of enhancing a sense of personal responsibility in relation to others (Harmon, 1995) and helps an individual to move beyond the routine and habitual act, to see how to act with intention, will, and moral responsibility. Self-reflexivity is directed not only at one's own presuppositions and actions but also one's place in the wider context: of social and organizational concerns and the ethical responsibilities of his or her professional life and work situation. As emphasized earlier, self-reflexivity should not be practiced exclusively on an individual basis: It also consists of groups of people examining their assumptions, existence in, and knowledge of the organizational world.

When combined, self- and critical reflexivity open opportunities for public administrators to understand and transform their everyday lives and reshape hierarchical organizations into new patterns of human association more relevant to the social conditions of the postmodern era. Through such understandings we may transform our social world in ways that enable individuals to make sense of themselves as beings in relation to others and of their creative and emancipatory potential in critically reexamining the assumptions, theories, and activities of public administration.

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Ann L. Cunliffe is an assistant professor in the School of Management at the University of New Mexico. She has published in the Journal of Management Studies*,* Management Learning*, the* Journal of Management Inquiry*,* Human Relations*, and others. Her research interests lie in exploring how administrators and managers construct organizational experiences, identities, and meaning through their everyday conversational practices; critiquing contemporary forms of knowledge in organization studies; and reflexive approaches to management research and learning.*

Jong S. Jun is professor emeritus of public administration at California State University, Hayward. He has published numerous books and articles on a wide range of topics, such as the social construction of public administration, democratic governance and civil society, people-oriented development, globalization, administrative theory, and the public good.