



## Preface to **The Reflective Spin**

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In spite of the many advances made in our understanding of educational processes in the last fifty years, and in particular the contributions made by the social sciences to such understanding, an enduring problem continues to confront educators, that of developing adequate models for professional education. The necessity for well grounded theories based on the knowledge represented by the social sciences and on the insights, stories and understandings of those individuals and groups in professions has now become urgent. As the century and millennium draw to a close, complex problems such as environment degradation, poverty, malignant diseases, vicious prejudice as represented by “ethnic cleansings” face societies and states around a shrinking globe. It was earlier expected that the professions with their claim to expert knowledge would be equal to these challenges but many are sceptical of such claims. In profession after profession the consequences of an over abundance of knowledge accompanied by a lack of wisdom are apparent. Centres for professional preparation, and universities are but one site, faced with a crucial issue. Many would accept that it is their responsibility to instill in their students both a capacity, and if possible, a disposition to reflect on their experience and learning. However,

universities are faced with dynamic change, even turbulence. Capacity for change management and strengthening the organization's ability to learn will be crucial.

This volume represents a modest but impressive effort to tackle the major issue of professional education and the potential for reflective practice within that education. The case studies represented in this volume are the product of a fruitful 3-year Nanyang Technological University–Massachusetts Institute of Technology collaboration inspired by the seminal work of Donald Schon. It represents in twenty chapters the experiences of teachers of professionals who have wrestled with the issues involved in developing educational processes that would create contexts, conditions and opportunities for reflection. What distinguishes the volume is the credible effort to take account of and acknowledge the significance of difference, of norms, values and traditions that colour and shape understanding. The writers and the cases and experiences they talk about do not remain at the level of technique. Importantly, these accounts move the reader to a consideration not only of the purpose of reflection and reflective practice but also of its potential for empowering the individual, and through him/her the collegial communities he/she work with.

The editors, Chen Ai Yen and John Van Maanen are to be congratulated on their devotion to a project which has been long and sometimes taxing. The result, for our benefit, is this handsome volume. That this is a volume bursting with energy and ideas is seen in Schein's use of his Foreword to advance the idea of dialogue, or reflection in a group. I am confident that this book will contribute to the dialogue just begun.