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Use of epistemological lenses on the ambiguity of reflective practice: What is it to reflect on experience?

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Abstract

This chapter attempts to challenge the stigmatic ambiguity of the reflective practice by discussing the characteristics of 'reflection' in connection with 'experience'. Identifying that reflection is an act directed to experience, the author approaches the essential features of reflective practice by explicating the notion of 'experience.' The discussion takes two steps. First, various definitions of reflection from different fields are compared based on such categories as context, sources of reflection, purposes and methods, then five characteristic features of reflection are extracted. With these features of reflection in scope, the second step examines the range of the concept of experience focusing on its depth, broadness and dynamics. Analyses were made from such angles as experiential, phenomenological, critical, cultural, narrative and processual perspectives. What emerged through the discussion are as follows: 1) Reflection is directed toward experience, 2) reflective practice is a process of making sense of an experience, 3) experience is a complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic process which is always open to new understanding, 4) the complexity and multi-dimensional feature of experience may be a reason of versatile definitions and theoretical ambiguity of reflective practice., 5) due to this complexity and multi-dimensionality of experience, practitioner-researchers are expected of articulating his/her own epistemological framework to view experience, 6) use of versatile available theories will help achieving richer accounts of experience, 7) we need to be aware of the use of multiple perspectives to approach experience through reflective practice. Thus existence of versatile definition should not be thought problematic so long as we know how we view the experience.

Key words: reflective practice, experience, phenomenology, narrative, practitioner-researcher

1. Introduction

As an instructor of a language teacher development program, I come across stories of my student-teachers who are engaged in the context of teaching English in Japan. I require them to maintain a journal of their daily experiences and post one to the web once a week. All the participants including me give feedback to each other. Posted journals are often emotional and confusing reflecting the harsh realities of their classrooms. They are about conflicts with students who had lost motivation in studying English long ago and are acting out in frustration, those who come to the class without doing their homework and sleep in the class, and those who cannot read a simple word like “the” or “airplane” after 5 years of learning English. For data-oriented researchers such individual issues are just too messy to be put into a research formula, and as a result they are rarely taken up as research themes. It is obvious that positivistic views of experience do not properly respond to numerous inquiries from the classroom.

Research from a hard science paradigm, naturally, finds little space to fill in those voids with appropriate accounts. Voices inside practitioners’ heads also murmur, “Are there any ways available to approach teachers' experiences in the classroom? Is there any way to bring back research from academics and put it in the hands of teachers so that they can grow for themselves by answering their own inquiries?”

Problems we encounter are not found in the laboratory but at the crossroads of learner’s past and present, the classroom and the community and the here-and-now interaction between teachers and students. They are buried in descriptive records awaiting analysis. What is being awaited is a research framework for practitioners.

In an attempt to respond to these questions, I take up reflective practice as a possible approach for practitioners to respond to the realities in the classroom and examine how it opens paths to better understandings in teaching and learning.

Reflective practice, systematic practice of reflecting on one’s experiences as a means of practitioner research, however, is not free from criticism. Most of its criticism is about its ambiguity as a concept: “conceptual confusion surrounding reflective practice” (Kinsella, 2009), “vague slogan” (McLaughlin, 1999) and subsequent

unsureness of practitioners to know whether their practices are properly done, and amongst of all this, unsureness about what it is to 'reflect' (Rodgers, 2002; Finlay, 2008; Burton, 2009). Where to set goals also varies. There are definitions that stress reflection as an intervention aiming at personal or professional change (Taggart and Wilson, 1998; Farrel[1], 2004). As Farrel's comment on his use of personal change in his definition shows, part of the ambiguity issue may be attributed to the indefinability of goals of reflection in that nobody knows what change may happen or what new understanding one reaches. With these stigmatic ambiguities and lack of common understanding in scope, we might have to go back to the reasons underlying this ambiguity and know what it is that makes the creation of an understandable definition difficult. Or if it is even possible after all? What is needed now is to examine the broadness and depth of the concept of 'reflection' rather than seek for one clear-cut definition with which everybody can agree.

What I aim to do in this chapter are 1) to approach this fundamental concept of what it is to reflect by shining a light upon some of its key concepts by comparing definitions of reflection from different professional contexts, 2) to discuss varieties of perspectives the reflective practitioners can take focusing on their core concepts and 3) to carve out a holistic image of reflective practice by probing its ideational broadness and depth.

2. Experience as a core notion of reflective practice

2.1 Comparison of definitions on reflection

I would like to begin my discussion by introducing some of the given definitions of reflection and explore common features embedded in them. Five of the definitions on reflection I introduce here are selected from different professional contexts. The quotes are a bit lengthy, but were thought to be necessary as a minimum as accounts of reflection. All of them are definitions by practitioner-researchers who have been working in the field. The closeness of these researchers to the field is also a reason of selection as sources for comparison. It was hypothesized that the versatility of

[1] Referring to Taggart and Wilson (1998), Farrel (2004) presents a following definition: "Putting these concepts together in one definition, reflective practice is a systematic and structured process in which we look at concrete aspects of teaching and learning with the overall goal of personal change and more effective practice. By change, I do not only mean behavioral adaptations toward teaching methods. Hopefully, we change as a result of the awareness brought about by engaging in reflections" (p. 27).

definition is due partly to the difference of practice in each field and the depth and broadness of the concepts of reflection has this versatility as its landscape.
As known researchers and educators of Action Research, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, the 3rd edition) introduced the following definition of reflection.

1) Reflection recalls action as it has been recorded in observation, but it is also active. Reflection seeks to make sense of processes, problems, issues and constraints made manifest in strategic action. It takes account of the variety of perspectives possible in the social situation and comprehends the issues and circumstances in which they arise. Reflection is usually aided by discussion among participants. Through discourse, group reflection leads to the reconstruction of the meaning of the social situation and provides the basis for the revised plan. Reflection has evaluative aspect – it asks action researchers to weigh their experiences – to judge whether effects (and issues which arose) were desirable, and suggest ways of proceeding. But there is also a sense in which reflection is descriptive – it allows reconnaissance, building a more vivid picture of life and work in the situation, constraints on action and more importantly, of what might now be possible, for the group, and for its individual members as actors committed to group goals. (pp. 13-14)

Second is Johns (2009)' description on reflection in his popular textbook (4th edition) for training nurses as a way of thinking deeply and carefully about self within the context of one's practice. He defines reflection as follows.

2) I currently formally describe reflection as 'Being mindful of self, either within or after *experience*, as if a mirror in which the practitioner can view and focus self within the context of a particular *experience*, in order to confront, understand and move towards resolving contradiction between one's vision and actual practice. Through the conflict of contradiction, commitment to realize one's vision, and understanding why things are as they are, the practitioner can gain new insight into self and be empowered to respond more

congruently in future situations within a reflexive spiral towards developing practical wisdom and realizing one's vision as praxis. The practitioner may require guidance to overcome resistance or to be empowered to act on understanding.' (p. 2)

The third is the one by Bolton (2014, the 4th edition), also from nursing education context.

3) Reflection is in-depth review of events, either alone – say, in a journal – or with critical support with a supervisor or group. The reflector attempts to work out what happened, what they thought or felt about it, who was involved, when and where, what these others might have experienced and thought and felt about it from their own perspective. Most significantly, the reflector considers WHY?, and studies significant theory and texts from the wider sphere. It is to bring experiences into focus from as many angles as possible: people, place, relationships, timing, chronology, casualty, connections, the social and political context, and so on. Seemingly innocent ideas might prove to be key; seemingly vital details may be irrelevant, or lead to insight about something unnoticed at the time, pinpointing perhaps when the seemingly innocent detail was missed. (p. 7)
Reflective practice can enable discovery of who and what we are, why we act as we do, and how we can be much more effective. (p. 10)

Fourth is Dawson and Kelin's (2014, 1st edition) definition. They position the use of reflection in their teaching of drama and theatrical arts context.

4) Reflection is central to learning in a variety of ways. When a Teaching Artist works with participants to collaboratively shape her process through a discussion of common goals and desired impact, she learns. As he unpacks an *experience* to understand what happened, examining *it* from as many perspectives as possible, he learns. When a Teaching Artist considers how to apply the *experience* to a repeated or new action, she learns. Greater than thinking simply about what she is

> doing, more than ending a session with "What did you learn today?", reflection requires investigation and interrogation. For learning to truly be beneficial it should stem from intentional dialogue with self or others throughout a process. Then, the learner can consciously and purposefully apply the past to present to new situations or *experiences*. Through this inquiry process, a Teaching Artist develops an awareness of the available choices in any situation and begins to recognize how to achieve the results he most desires. This is called Reflective practice. (pp. 28-29)

Fifth is the definition by Rodgers (2002) based on her redefining work of John Dewey's thoughts on reflection. She introduces it as Dewey's four criteria for reflection.

5) 1 Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
   2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
   3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
   4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.

Table 1. Comparison of definition of reflection across professional contexts

	Kemmis & McTaggart (1988)	Johns (2009)	Bolton (2014)	Dawson & Kelin (2014)	Rodgers (2002)
Context (Where)	Educational research, curriculum	Nursing	Nursing	Drama & theater arts	Education/ Language teaching
Sources of reflection (On what)	Recorded action in observation	Self and *experience*.	*Events: What happened, what they thought or felt, who, when.*	*Experience*.	*Experience.*
Purposes/ goals (Why)	To make sense of processes. To evaluate experiences to know the effects and ways of proceeding. To build more vivid picture of life and work in the situation, constraints on action and of what might be possible.	To realize one's vision and understanding why things are as they are. → to gain new insight into self. Develop practical wisdom and one's vision as praxis.	To know who and what we are, why we act as we do, and how we can be much more effective.	Development of awareness of the choices in situations and recognize how to achieve the designed results.	To move a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. To make continuity of learning possible, and ensure the progress of the individual and ultimately, society.
Methods (How)	Take account of a variety of perspectives in the social situations and comprehend the issues and circumstances in which they arise. Aided by group reflection. Descriptive.	Through conflict of contradiction, commitment to realize one's vision and understanding why things are as they are. *Guidance is necessary for reflection*.	By bringing experiences into focus from as many angles as possible: Journal writing, *critical support with a supervisor or group*. Study theory and texts from wider space.	*Collaborative work or the process*: intentional dialogue with self or others. Unpack experience, examine from different perspectives, apply experience to action and apply past to present.	Systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry. *Reflection needs to happen in community*, in interaction with others. Importance of attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.

To probe commonalities and differences between the above definitions, I sort them with four criteria: Context (where), sources of reflection (on what), purposes/goals (why) and methods (how). (See table 1).

What appears as common features among reflection across the fields are 1) reflection is a means to research the practice grounded in contexts, 2) reflection is an act *directed toward experience*, 3) the foremost purpose of reflection is in the understanding of an experience, 4) reflection is a continual process and open for change, 5) reflection is a dialogic and collaborative work.

This multi-faceted feature of reflection poses a valuable implication to the discussion of experience in the next step. Learning that reflection is a dynamic social act directed toward experience which is grounded in context, then reflective practitioners need versatile epistemological lenses to view experience from different angles with different stances. What we would like to know now is how experience can be viewed, in other words, how we can approach experience and what epistemological lenses are available to us.

2.2 Experience

Now I would like to shift my focus to 'experience' because that is what the act of reflection is sourced from and directed to and it receives the practitioner's attention. Without experience, no practitioner can initiate his/her practice of reflection. In contrast to the need of considering reflection in the relation of experience, we find ourselves knowing too little about it. Noye (2009) criticizes past empiricist philosophers' work saying

> When it comes to the concept of 'experience,' we have been given only very poor content in the philosophical context. Empiricist philosophers in particular have been recognizing experience as mere 'perceptual cognition' in a moment or 'the reception of perceptual affordance'. What critically lacks here is understanding [experience] on the temporal extendedness and the contextual sphere of experience that makes experience 'experience' and also the recognition of the linguistic aspect that performs a crucial role in

> constituting experience. (p. 81, originally written in Japanese and was translated by the author)

I haven't come across any better criticism on the philosophers' work on the take of experience than this. We are practitioners living deeply in experience. Experiences we reflect on are real and are experienced bodily in context. If experience needs to be looked at from different angles, we want to know what angles are available. We just want to know more about experience trying to find answers to such simple questions as what 'experience' is and how it is to be looked at.

Thus, pinning down 'experience' as a focused key word, analysis of reflection is going to be made integrating further its expansive dimensions. With this scheme in mind, I set my basic stance toward reflective practice as "an approach to experience" and discuss reflective practice from the point of 'how' we can look at 'what' of experiences.

Based on the implications from the comparison in the previous section, theoretical frames to examine experience were sought from a range of discussions on reflection by Dewey (1933/ 1938), Shön (1983), Manen (1990) and the literature of other areas: philosophy, anthropology and clinical psychology in particular. Chosen theoretical frames are the ones with which to examine the multi-faceted features of experience. They are positivism, experientialism, critical perspective, culture, narrative and process.

3. Perspectives to view experiences

3.1 Experiences from Positivistic paradigm

In the beginning I need to start with the view of experiences from the positivist paradigm quoting the definition of Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003, cited in Wiersma and Jurs, 2005) as an example.

> The epistemological doctrine that physical and social reality is independent of those who observe it, and that observation of this reality, if unbiased, constitute scientific knowledge. (p. 83)

What is observed in this view are hypothesizing of one true reality that is free from the contextual effects and the significance of establishing scientific knowledge in it. This view was developed through the 19th century along with the rise of experimental psychology attributing its basic stance to that of 17th century philosopher, Rene Descartes.

In this perspective, "reality is seen as external and objective, summarized as time- and context-free generalizations which can be taken as causal laws" (Kohonen et al, 2001, p. 12). Naturally the goals of positivistic research is in the explanation of phenomena with the cause-and-effect relationship using time- and context-free variables. No part of subjective comments can be counted in since they cannot be reduced to operationalized variables. Shön (1983) refers to this critical epistemological difference as follows:

> Practical knowledge exists, but it does not fit neatly into Positivist categories. We cannot readily treat it as a form of descriptive knowledge of the world, nor can we reduce it to the analytic schemas of logic and mathematics. (p. 33)

As a result positivism allows no space for subjective personal experiences to take a role of useful resources for analyzing human behavior. Further, positivists' strong belief in the final goal of generalizing the findings in a form of law has removed space for social contexts or history to be an important part of resourceful 'experience' given their context-dependency.

3.2 Experiences from experiential learning perspective

3.2.1 Experience as a source of learning

John Dewey's greatest contribution to the education with his revolutionary idea of progressive education, which I believe lies in his introduction of 'experience' as a source of learning. He states, "I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience" (1938, p.25) and claims the necessity of a philosophy of education based on a philosophy of experience. This is the basic tenet of experiential learning advocating the immense possibility of experience as a source of learning.

Along with the rising concern on human action in the field of other areas, it is this rediscovery of experience as a source of learning that has opened ways to various types of practices and research: the most distinguished example of all is Action Research. Under this proposition, experience is not anything purely objective or generalizable but is something that can be discussed in terms of the meaning for subjective selves. The role of reflection stands as an act of making sense of experiences (Rodgers, 2002).

3.2.2 Experience as an object of 'reflection' as a verb

'Reflection on experience' implicates the relation between reflection and experience: Experience is the object of the verb 'reflect'. In other words, reflection is directed to experience. Without this connection between reflection and experience, reflection becomes no different from mere thinking and we fall in the trap of looking back with no specific focuses or attention. I would like to further discuss the theoretical background behind this connection with a view to identify its significance.

Based on the interpretation of John Dewey's work, Rodgers (2002) put "a process of making meaning of experiences" as one of the basic features of reflection. She articulates the role of reflection lies in connecting education and experiences. Dewey(1938) says "experience and experiment are not self-explanatory ideas. Rather, their meaning is part of the problem to be explored" (p. 25). I interpret this as not any one of experiences stands by itself and its meanings do not unfold without the mediation of reflection. Experience needs examination. To focus on its role in practice, reflection is a means to examine and make meaning of experiences directed to experiences for further understanding. With this structural formulation that reflection is directed toward experience, it becomes possible to pin down the range of reflection and give it a clearer definition.

In a similar vein, Kohonen et al. (2001) connected the value of experience with reflection as means of learning. They defined experiential learning as "learning from actual experience through reflection."

Putting these together, experiential learning as a form of pedagogy stands on experience as a source of learning, and reflection works as the sole means to make

meaning of experiences. Behind this lies the structural formulation that reflection is directed toward experience.

Although not specifically from experientialism, the Phenomenological perspective provides powerful reasoning for this relationship. Referring to Husserl's philosophy, Lindolf and Taylor (2002) state "Human consciousness is a fundamentally intentional activity, in the sense that intentions are always directed to objects" (p. 33). Considering that reflection is genuinely the work of consciousness which is given to something and putting 'experience' in the position of object in the sentence, reflection is identified as a conscious work on experience. This way experience is combined with reflection.

3.2.3 Experience as continuity and interaction

Besides the idea of experience as a resource of learning, three other orientations of experiences are entailed from Dewey (1938). First is the dynamic characteristics for growth. Terming every experience as 'a moving force', Dewey states that the value of experience can be judged only on what the ground of what it moves toward and into (p. 38). This means experience is not anything fixed or fixable but something that continues growing and it is us, the educators, who are to facilitate the process of growth. This dynamism he sees in experience is what reflective practitioner puts feet on. The critical awareness that I am participating in the process of growing experience determines my role as a practitioner.

Dewey's (1938) two interesting principles of experience: 'continuity' and 'interaction' can be explained as two dimensions of the moving force (p. 44). Continuity, according to Dewey, is 'longitudinal' and emphasizes the need of experiences to get connected with each other for further experience. Continuity implicates that experience has a time domain as its essential quality and its meaning needs to be considered with historical context in view. Thus, experience as 'continuous process' is open to past, present and the future.

Another dimension of experience Dewey (1938) presented was 'interaction', which he says 'lateral.' With this lateral view, experience has earned the notion of social and situational context as well as spatial. Particularly emphasized in it is 'the social

set-up' of the situation in which a person is engaged (p. 45). In this line experience is not something that stays inside the individual or out of the context but is something dialogical with self and others and interacting with the environment. With 'environment' Dewey means "whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had" (p. 44). To him, that individuals live in a world means they live in a series of situation, and 'in' means that "interaction is going on between an individual and objects and other persons" and the conceptions of situation and interaction are inseparable from each other (p. 43). This idea of situating individuals in the social context are in line with that of Socio-constructionism and also with that of Phenomenological perspectives; Husserl's concept of 'life world' in particular. It is not quite clear how close Dewey got to with these ideas[2], but these concepts seem to share the same vein although grown from different roots.

These dynamic, temporal, spatial, and socio-cultural dimensions of experience add how experience as a source of learning has a complex quality to it.

3.3 Experience from the phenomenological perspective

3.3.1 Phenomenological views

Phenomenology is a unique philosophy of the 20th century whose theoretical basis was made by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. With the unfamiliarity of this thought in the field of practitioner research, I would like to seek its relevance to reflective practice by shedding lights on its key concepts from definitions.

Taylor (2012) gives a simple account on Phenomenology in the forward of Merleau-Ponty's seminal Phenomenology of Perception.

> Phenomenology is an attempt to describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding from a first person point of view, in contrast to the reflective, third person perspective that tends to dominate scientific knowledge and common sense. (p. viii)

[2] Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl (1859~1938), Lev Vygotsky(1896-1934), John Dewey (1859-1952)

From the above account we learn phenomenology is a study of human experience from a subjective point of view, which presents a contrastive difference between researchers on phenomenology and those on the natural science paradigm. Viewing experiences from a subjective perspective, then, what do phenomenological researchers want to achieve? The following is provided by Manen (1990), phenomenological educationist.

> Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, "What is this or that kind of experience like?" (p. 9)

What strikes us in terms of the goal of research is that phenomenology's goal is in 'understanding' of the nature or the meaning of experience and it doesn't necessarily pursue actions or solutions. Crucially important here, however, is not a simple dependence on subjective statement. To approach experience from a phenomenological perspective we need to know whose experience it is and how it was experienced.

Wiersma and Jurs (2005) describes phenomenology in their book on qualitative research method, referring to its unique way of viewing experiences,

> Phenomenology is the study of phenomenon; it stresses the careful description of phenomena from the perspective of those experiencing the phenomena. …If behavior is being observed, the phenomenologist does not simply note that a certain behavior has occurred, but attempts to understand what the behavior means to the persons being studied, and this emphasizes the subjective aspects of the behavior. (p. 243)

They go further,

> There is little importance placed on what the educator thinks is going on; the importance is on understanding what the students are experiencing from their perspectives. (p. 243)

> The phenomenological approach emphasizes that the meaning of reality is, in essence, in the "eyes and minds of the beholders," the way the individuals being studied perceive their experiences. (p. 243)

Thus, we find that the subjective viewpoint in phenomenology is not the simple first-person statement of the researcher but is a statement attempting to describe the reality of individuals in focus.

Although quite limited in relation to identifying what it exactly is, what emerges out of above definitions are: 1) It is a study of experience and 2) aims at understanding the meaning of reality of/for the subject, and 3) it is an attempt to describe how the experience was experienced by the person in focus.

Thus, the meaning Phenomenology has for reflective practice is invaluable in that it is first of all a philosophy for our experience in life: lived experience in its terms, and its primary focus is on how a phenomenon was experienced by a person and projected on the consciousness of the person in focus. Here, I would like to go further and introduce possible theoretical lenses from phenomenological perspective to view and describe experience.

3.3.2 Phenomenological reduction as a tool to view experience

Abstract notion that it is, phenomenological reduction is originally Hussearl's idea and is also called 'epoche' or 'bracketing.' Manen (1990) values it as a way of practice to come to the essential structure of something. Referring to Merleau-Ponty, he lists four distinguishable types of reduction.

1) Reduction involves the awakening of a profound sense of wonder and amazement at the mysteriousness of the belief in the world.
2) One needs to overcome one's subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations that would prevent one from coming to terms with phenomenon or experience as it is lived through.
3) One needs to strip away the theories or scientific conceptions and thematizations which overlay the phenomenon one wish to study, and which prevents one from seeing the phenomenon in a non-abstracting manner.

4) In the eidetic reduction one needs to see past or through the particularity of lived experience toward the universal, essence or eidos that lies on the other side of the concreteness of lived meaning.
(p. 185)

From the above, phenomenological reduction is understood as a fundamental and primary method for us to look at experience. By putting a bracket on known theories and knowledge we come to be able to view experience as it is. This can be said a sort of 'unlearning practice' to free us from any judgmental viewing of experiences in the world. When practitioners observe and describe experience, how to unleash us from own pre-given beliefs is a great challenge, and this stance of unlearning ourselves from known knowledge will help us stay away from judgmental evaluation leading us to genuine observation and description of experiences.

3.3.3 Lived experience and the lifeworld

Phenomenology shows us a unique take on experience in our life. 'Lifeworld,' originally the notion of Hussearl (1970a) along with phenomenological reduction, is explained by Manen (1990) as the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations. It is also the world as "already there," "pre-given," the world as experienced in the "natural, primordial attitude" (p. 182). Merleau-Ponty (2014) refers to the world in his view and described it as follows: "The world is not what I think, but what I live (p. lxxxiv).

Combining above discussions, these experiences in phenomenology are not anything of decontextualized objective facts but of those experienced and understood by the subjective-self who lived the event in the moment right there. Naturally, an event is experienced and understood differently from person to person. Crucially important is whether or not we take a stance in describing a person's experience in the way it was experienced. This I think is what makes the description of one's experience so challenging. Much more important here may be whether or not we are sincerely concerned about our/others' experiences and keep attending to the experience aiming at even a bit of better understanding.

How then can we approach this ambiguous and intangible notion of 'lived experiences? Manen (1990) lists four existential themes as guides for reflection in the research process: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality) (pp. 101-102). This means that we live in the lifeworld interacting spatially, bodily, temporarily and relationally with other social beings, and this vision opens us alternative new dimensions to approach experiences. Our life is grounded in this world and one's lived meaning can be approached by attending to how the person perceives, understands and experiences the world in terms of space, body, time and relations.

As a language teacher I think of the relationship between learners and their languages in the community (including dialects) and the possible meaning of the second language to them. A learner sitting with an uninterested face in front of me is an individual cultural and historical being. He may be here with too many negative experiences with English learning. With his Chinese background he may have a different body feel about the sound and the rhythm of English. He may still have genuine interest in learning English, but the English taught in my class may not be appealing to his needs or purposes. I wonder how my teaching is being experienced by this boy. If students' learning experiences with my class are all different I would like to know about his experience of my teaching.

Considering that individual histories, their interests, excitements, anxieties and even fears are all different, Kohonen (2001) writes as follows:

> The 'use' of the learner's lived experience in teaching situations is a sign of respect for him or her as a whole person with his or her personal history; it is accepting the learner as the Other, as an independent human being, who has the full right and responsibility to build up his or her life-world and to find his or her own modes and strategies in learning. (p. 108)

On the extension of Kohonen's perspective is the take of a learner as a whole person who lives and shares this life world altogether. The perspective of looking at a learner in the life world prohibits us from looking at a learner out of context. They need to be looked at as beings whose existence is deeply rooted in the world and

history. Whether it is a teacher, a learner, a researcher or a parent, we are all existential beings in the life world interacting with each other. This is why the description of how the life was experienced becomes important.

3.3.4 Inter-subjectivity

Although possibly taken as some state in which shared understanding is constructed, it is not easy to reach a clear definition of this concept. Duranti (2010) sets the range of this notion "from acts in which one is minimally aware of the presence of an Other to acts in which one actively works at making sure that the Other and the Self are perceptually, conceptually, and practically coordinated around a particular task." Crucial implication of this statement to a reflective practitioner is the unmistakable involvement of others in our experiences. Here the need of viewing experience in terms of subjectivity in between the Other and the Self arises. The Other in this case refers not only to those in the present but to those in the past. The notion of intersubjectivity, according to Duranti, provides us with a fundamental dimension of human experience and human sociability.

Lindolf and Taylor (2002) describes intersubjectivity quoting the work of Shutz, the advocate of social phenomenology, as follows:

> Intersubjectivity is always produced in the relationships that we develop with others. In this primary "we-relations," persons mutually occupy a time and place. Their actions are geared with respect to a common system of relevance.
> …Schutz noted that we imaginatively construct these relations not only with our contemporaries (whether known or unknown) but also with our predecessors. (p. 35)

When applying the concept of intersubjectivity to the classroom context, the lived meaning of a learner's experience needs to be analyzed in relation with others: teachers, friends, family members, their community and their previous experiences in the past as well. We are the beings grounded in this world interacting with each other. We meet learners with a purpose of teaching and we think they meet us to learn from us. Regardless of our positions, teachers and students meet and share life

in the classroom. The meaning of learning/teaching life, however, can be completely different if both start talking about the reality of leaning/teaching. Co-constructive understanding of lived life does not allow one-directional viewing of experience. Rather it needs to be analyzed as socially interactive process through the interaction of our body, emotion and beliefs with open-mindedness to the past, present and the future.

3.4 Experience from the critical perspective

Now I would like to shift my focus to the notion of power and awareness. Reflection has its self-critical orientation by nature, but what is lit up here is the significance of maintaining awareness on power in reflection attending to the relationship between self and his/her social context.

Kincheloe (2008) lists Vygotsky as a central figure in the development of critical psychology and points out the connection between the social context and psychological processes of individuals. The argument of power is grounded on the understanding that we are social beings first of all. Fook (2006) articulates how individual experiences are to be looked at critically as part of reflective practice. It goes as follows.

> Individual experience may be seen as a microcosm of the social. This relies on an understanding of how knowledge and power are linked; how individuals participate in constructing knowledge (and therefore power); and how individuals act reflexively in their social worlds as agents, both constructing and responding to their environments.

Characteristic in this view of experiences is that no one is free from social or cultural influences whether it is in learning or any other forms of interaction with the environment. Also closed up in the above statement is the possibility of involvement of individuals in the formation of power and ideology. An extension of this is, not only does an individual gets exploited by power but the same individual becomes the one who executes the power. Kincheloe (2008) tells us to return to democratic principles saying, “By nature, a question about democracy is a critical question because it always involves issues of power and its distribution” (p. 117).

Regarding the connection of knowledge with power, there is Paulo Freire's famous discussion on the "banking" concept of education, in which knowledge is used as an instrument of oppression. Citing Beauvoir's words Freire (2000) wrote:

> [t]he interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them," for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated (p. 74).

The question raised here is whether we are at all aware of this permeability of power impacting on us and also our own involvement in the use of it. This, of course, is not an easy scheme at all. McNiff (2013) comments this way: "People could not comment on their experience unless they understood how that experience was shaped by their own situatedness. They could not be free until they realized they were unfree" (p. 49). To carve out the structure of power enforcement in our daily life experience we may need not only some decent sensibility but the presence of a person who listens to our voices. Richards (2003) gives the following account from the view of critical reflection with which to observe self.

> Reality, from this perspective, might be described as essentially coercive, and the process of research must therefore be seen as transformative and emancipatory: the researcher and the researched stand in a dialogic relationship in which the former seeks to bring about a change in the consciousness of the latter that will facilitate action designed to redress the unequal and oppressive structures that now have been exposed. (p. 40)

To sense the use of power in our life is quite challenging, but the application of power as a concept definitely opens a new type of understanding in our life: how our lives have been exploited, what system is prepared to keep us remain unnoticed with the problems of the reality, who is behind all these and our involvement in it. Recent emphasis of early English education in Japan, for example, has been made a big social discourse by the MEXT[3]. While voices of teaching other foreign languages are put away, Japanese students are taught English as if it were the only

3 The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

choice. Also, although it looks it is MEXT that controls this movement, the presence of such powerful business community as Keidanren[4] cannot be dismissed, either. The notion of power carves out the structure of a grand scheme of producing Japanese workers who speak English and the involvement of teachers and researchers in it.

In sum, I argue that in-depth attention to experience through a critical perspective will light up the unknown aspects of people's lifeworld. What is expected of us is to sharpen our senses to know the complexity of power dynamics as none of us is free from this. Reflection on our experience may tell us to be open to our own possibility of getting involved in a power game as well as that of being exploited and oppressed in the structure of power.

3.5 Experience in culture

Aside from a positivistic paradigm, experience cannot be discussed without considering culture so long as we are situated and live 'in' it. The invariable role of the concept of culture for reflective practice is that none of our experience can be discussed without this ontological body of situation, the organic space in which meaning is generated. Regarding this meaning-making nature of culture, I need to quote from Geertz (1973):

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (p. 5)

We are beings living in a web of meaning we spun ourselves is a striking metaphor describing the essential role of culture to human beings. Bruner (1996) introduces an idea of culturalism and tells how our minds are shaped and situated in culture; "that mind could not exist save for culture" (p. 3). Referring further to the process of our creation of meaning he states,

4 The Federation of Economic Organizations. Mizuno (2008) pointed out the direct influence of Keidanren's suggestion to the policy of MEXT.

> Meaning making involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know "what they are about." Although meanings are "in mind," they have their origins and their significance in the culture in which they are created. (p. 3)

Considering that 'culture' exists as a ground in which our life events are generated, reflective practitioners need to be alert to its essential importance in understanding experience.

This concept of culture from an anthropological perspective is in accord with the life world in phenomenology, however, the description of experience will turn out different. While the anthropological perspective approaches experience exploring its symbolic meaning, the phenomenological perspective views in terms of how it was experienced through consciousness.

3.6 Methodological perspective: Narrative and experience

Here, I would like to discuss the relation of narrative and experience: how they are connected, referring to identifications in different fields. In the field of qualitative research narratives or stories takes a crucial role as a means of conducting research. Recognizing that reflective practice is a research method on experiences in life, narratives, or stories, become the most important approach to experience. Merriam (2009) states as follows:

> Stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us. ..Stories, also called "narrative" have become a popular source of data in qualitative research. (p.32)

Merriam's statement confirms the rationality of story as a data source for the research with a reason that narratives tells us how experience was understood by the person engaged.

There are numerous accounts that refer to the narrative as a useful means to approach experience. I would like to introduce accounts by some philosophers as they consider it a powerful means that combines self with the world.

Referring to Alexandre Kojeve, Noye (2009) writes that history exists in human memory but it exists only in the story we tell (p. 9). A simple interpretation of this is that if experience is not put into a story, history itself doesn't exist. He also says that humans are story telling animals and we halt the merciless flow of time by telling stories and live life identifying selves in the thickness of memory and description (p. 18). Merleau-Ponty (2014), saying that philosophy is a radical form of reflection, makes an interesting comment exactly on this point, the relation between philosophy and history: "Since philosophy positions itself within history, it too draws upon the world and upon constituted reason. He further says, "through reflection we become responsible for our own history, but this responsibility also comes from a decision to which we commit our lives" (p. lxxxv). This entails philosophers, particularly those of phenomenology, claim themselves situated in history and engage themselves in the meaning-making process of this life world by means of reflection.

Story, in this sense, is a constructed meaning of the world. This meaning construction process of lived world, according to Noye (2009), is the operation of transforming perceptual experience into hermeneutic experience and also is the theoretical basis that supports the act of storytelling (p. 18).

3.7 Processual perspective: dynamics of time and reflection in experience

Last is the processual feature of experience, i.e. experience-as-process perspective. The reason why experience is processual has been already discussed in previous sections.

Dewey's emphasis on continuity tells us that one experience is connected to the next experience for further learning so long as it is made open for a new meaning. In this sense, even experience as an event that is analyzed or interpreted never gets completed and thereby always open through past, present and future.

Schon's (1983) famous typification of two kinds of reflection: 'Reflection on action' and 'reflection in action', clarifies the type of reflection according to the type of task engaged. The former is a reflection on an event that has happened and is finished already in the past, and the latter is a reflection of the event in which we are now engaged. The action in the former type of reflection is that of the objectified, while the latter action is on-going, contingent and in the process. Striking with the concept of reflection in action is that Schon never limits its temporal range to 'now'. He positions experience from a more holistic viewpoint stating:

> "A practitioner's reflection-in-action may not be very rapid. It is bounded by the "action-present," the zone of time in which action can still make a difference to the situation. The action-present may stretch over minutes, hours, days, or even weeks or months, depending on the pace of activity and the situational boundaries that are characteristic of the practice (p. 62).

The statement that reflection in action is bound by action-present is striking. Although it looks as if reflection in action is framed within a short period of time, it is not. Shön's focus is not on time but on the process of action. The range of time happens to vary from a shot of moment to a duration of time as the result. The action here is a process.

As this dynamic scope on time and process in reflective practice unfolds, I would like to replace Shön's word 'action' with 'experience' to capture the processual aspect of reflection more appropriately. I suggest that use of experience connotes a broader conception including thoughts, emotions, conflicts, beliefs and all the other relevant responses of agents involved in experience. The word 'action,' meanwhile, possesses a sense of oneness and immediacy in it and does not necessarily match the notion of experience as a process that extends over a duration of time and expands its space across fields.

Subjectivity in phenomenology presents an insight to the experience-as-a-process perspective. From a subjective point of view, temporality cannot be discussed on the Euclidian scale. A chat for a few seconds could be deeper in meaning and more inspirational than hours of conversation. An autistic child with no words may embed

incredible amount of information in a piece of drawing[5]. One exchange of smiles may be powerful enough to dissolve years of misunderstanding between friends. To describe these experiences we may [bracket] the familiar frameworks at hand and expose ourselves in their life world exploring a hint for understanding. What accounts as crucially important here is the stance of living the process together.

4. Conclusion

With the initial formulation that reflection is directed to experience, discussion has been made first on a set of essential orientations of reflection, and second on versatile dimensions of experience applying sets of theoretical frameworks: Experiential learning perspective, phenomenological perspective, critical perspective, cultural perspective, methodological perspective using narrative and the last, processual perspective.

Examination of the characteristics of experience with these epistemological lenses carved out the complex and dynamic nature of experience. It is no way a simple act but a very dynamic, profound and powerful practice that should be grounded in our life world. Moreover, with this complexity and different facets of experience being lit up with multiple theoretical lights, it may prove the impossibility of one single-cut definition, which could be the reason for the theoretical ambiguity of reflective practice.

This, however, doesn't negate the necessity of defining reflective practice. Rather, the process of defining itself carries much more important meaning than before with its demands for meta-cognitive understanding on reflecting on experience: the responsibility of articulating the practitioner-researcher's viewpoint, in other words. Because experience has different dimensions, a practitioner-researcher may need to be well aware of his/her own perspectives and articulate what he/she is looking at and how. Depending on the purpose, it may not be enough to look at experience from one direction with one perspective. Meanwhile there are a variety of theoretical lenses available for reflective practice in view of understanding experience.

[5] Yuge (2015) discussed the impact of this moment in her master's thesis.

Acknowledging the complexity of experience and the entailed broadness and depth of reflective practice, I would like to propose six dimensions from which to approach experiences. They are life-world, socio-cultural, temporal, interactional, processual, and power (See Fig. 1).

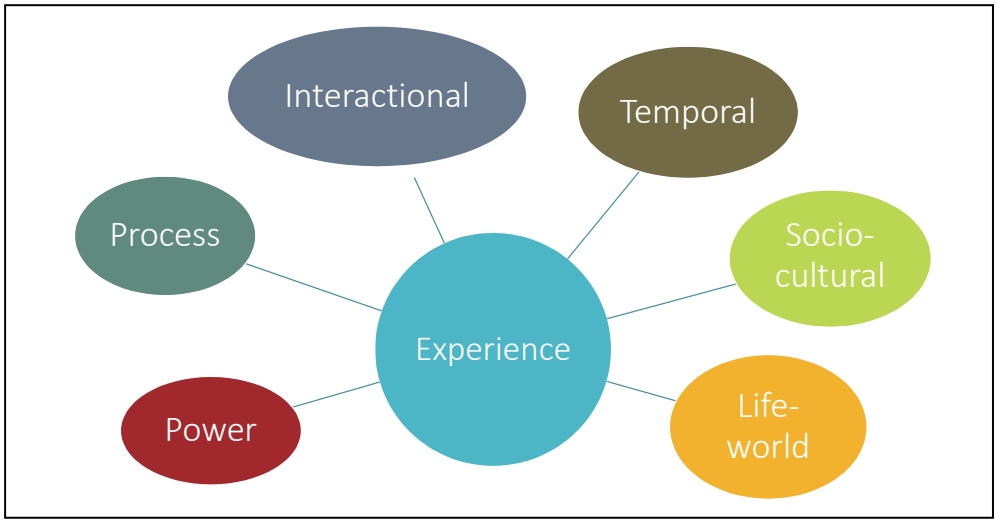

Fig. 1 Six dimensions of viewing experience

Defining reflection should now be in the hands of the practitioner-researcher who live the experience themselves, and not only that, it is their responsibility to articulate their ways of reflecting experience, asking themselves which lens they would like to choose and for what.

Conclusion of this discussion is summarized below:

1) Reflection is directed toward experience.
2) Reflective practice is a process of understanding experience.
3) Experience is a complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional process which is always open to new understanding.
4) The complexity and multi-dimensional feature of experience may be a reason of versatile definitions and theoretical ambiguity of reflective practice.
5) Due to this complexity and multi-dimensionality of experience, practitioner-researchers are expected to articulate their own epistemological frameworks to view experience.

6) Use of versatile theories will help with achieving richer accounts of experience.
7) We need to be aware of the use of multiple perspectives to approach experience through reflective practice.

Analysis on experience probably has many more doors for entry, but these six dimensions may be a good initial portal to reflect on experience with a view of expanding our understanding on lived life. Numerous experiences buried inside us or in the space between others, or in the moment right now are waiting to be heard with stories. Simply, reflective practice is a way to hear voices that are not voiced yet.

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