

Grounds and Perspectives of Critical Reflection - An Educational and Philosophical Inquiry

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Abstract

Expanding the learner's capacity for inquiry and reflective thinking is one of the most important tasks of modern education. Thinking reflectively about our own thoughts and practices, about education of children and adults and their personal development, has led us to believe in the value of guided reflective inquiry as an educational method. Current definitions of reflection in education assume that the concept itself has a solid base and its dynamic efficiency is self-evident.

By disclosing major definitions of reflection in different philosophical systems, i.e., J. Locke, I. Kant, J.G. Fichte, G.F. Hegel, E. Husserl, E. Cassirer, it is apparent that reflection reveals the boundaries of knowledge, anything beyond the limits of the subject and its conditions. Searching for the roots of reflection's problem means hoping to find epistemic justification for it. Such justification may be reached by finding the epistemic foundation of critical reflection. Reflective thinking should transform into a critical strategy and later into a tool of interpretation of reality.

We are all familiar with that ubiquitous retort favored by children: "Who says?!" We confront it in every process of education. Anything I say can be challenged by "Who says?!" If I want to win at this game I must find an efficacious authority, the last and affirmative one. I will "win" as long as I can come up with authority for whatever it was that I last said. Am I allowed any say in substantiating the truth of my own statements, or is this against the rules of the game?

As soon as I am reduced to answering "Because I say so" I know for sure I have lost the battle, for this is a mere affirmation of myself and not a response anchored in a legitimate authority. If I analyze my need for an "absolute authority," then I must find a certain method to help me assert my truths and beliefs. Every analysis needs a method, which seemingly requires a fixed point of origin. It is the need to clarify and ascertain everything from the beginning that obliges us to look for a certain authority or solid base. Searching for such an authority for the "truth" may be expressed by recourse to "meta-language," "meta-power" or "meta-Being." Carrying out research in order to find "something" that lies outside the normal application of reasoning means that we hope to construct a certain method or tool, one that will help us to fulfill our need for truth and certainty.

In the game “Who says?!” the child compels the teacher to search for the certainty of an epistemological system, which need not be grounded on any authority but rather on his self-knowledge, reached through critical reflection. It is the teacher’s duty to reflect on his own “say” as well as to guide the child toward such a process. While it is quite impossible to reflect upon each and every belief we possess or statement we make, clearly such an epistemic accounting should be a methodological obligation – to seek sufficient evidence for the beliefs underlying our definitions and examinations. Teachers have a duty to reflect critically upon the evidence that they have for important beliefs when confronted by counter-evidence or when they have no evidence at all. Critical reflection precludes beliefs that are either ungrounded or contrary to the evidence. Searching for the root of this “game” means hoping to find epistemic justification for it (Metschl, 1989). Such justification may be reached by finding the epistemic foundation of critical reflection. Understanding the nature of reflection in epistemology as well as its practical application in the fields of education and teaching remains a vague process. Introducing the concept of reflection into teacher education programs exposes its problematic ground. Current definitions of reflection in education, such as Bengtsson (1995), differentiate between the definition of reflection as self-reflection and the definition of reflection as thinking - assuming that the concept itself has a solid base and its dynamic efficiency is self-evident. Through reflection “man discovers him/herself as a person, his or her mental activities, but also the existential aspects of his or her life” (Bengtsson, 1995, p. 27). Using phenomenological intentionality, Bengtsson exposed the process, which the teacher should go through, from his original position, creating a certain “distance” from reality and then gaining some knowledge about something. Reflection “is subjected to thorough consideration, that thought dwells a longer period of time on an object to get a better and deeper understanding of it”(Bengtsson, 1995, p. 27).

Expanding the learner's capacity for inquiry and reflective thinking is one of the most important tasks of modern education. “The important thing in the history of modern knowing is the reinforcement of these active doings by means of instruments ... devised for the purposes of disclosing relations not otherwise apparent” (Dewey, 1988, p. 70). Thinking reflectively about our own thoughts and practices, about education of children and adults and their personal development, has led us to believe in the value of guided reflective inquiry as an educational method.

Some definitions of “reflective teaching” and “reflective supervision” refer to the basic tool of reflection, used by intentional phenomenology, for “helping them [the children] to build on what they already know, helping them discover what they already know but cannot say, helping them coordinate their spontaneous knowing-in-action with the privileged knowledge of the school” (Schön, 1988). Describing and demonstrating reflective teaching focuses on educational practice and involvement. It should lead to “reflection-in-action,” which is a practical tool for every domain of educational life: teaching, coaching, school bureaucracy, parents’ groups, academic researchers, etc., and at a “higher” stage it should evolve into “reflection-on-action,” i.e., reflecting on our own deeds and thoughts, as a stage after “reflection-in-action.”

The game of “Who says?!” engenders skeptical implications that should be addressed and solved by exposing the core structure of reflection and examining the consequences of implementation. “Who says that I will get a solid base to my knowledge through reflection?” “Who says that my knowledge will find its way to my experience

and then to my understanding of reality through different reflective processes?” “Who says that critical reflection could be used as an effective tool by everybody?”

Reflection is not a physical act (i.e., reflection in a mirror or even a Hall of Mirrors), nor is it “thinking hard or deep about something”; it is not just a subjective introspection, nor is it directed only towards natural individuals (Reuter, 1989). In the optical context, to reflect means light breaks at something and after that radiates back from that point or plane, i.e., shows itself in a reflection of something (Heidegger, 1988, p. 159).

After disclosing some definitions of reflection, it is reasonable to ask what shows itself through reflection? Searching for the subject of reflection begs further questions – Is there any similarity between optical reflection and mental reflection? Can knowledge “see” or “have knowledge of itself”? If so, then any such knowledge would certainly seem to be different from knowledge of “other things,” which raises questions about the bearer of knowledge and his original conductor of the reflection: The Subject.

Reflection reveals the boundaries of knowledge, anything beyond the limits of the subject and its conditions. Although reflection requires proceeding in accordance with an authentic recognition of the resources and powers that are genuinely available transcendent to it, it is hard to provide a solid base and justification for these demands, required by human knowledge. The subject cannot avoid its own questions and “illegitimately” demands to transcend its own limits in its search for resources and powers.

Reflection cannot recapitulate subjectivity or recover the sense of subjectivity of language in which reflection names the being of the self. Yet, reflective acts themselves challenge subjectivity and its reality. Every act leads toward transgression of the subject’s proper limits of its possibility and legitimate jurisdiction. The ultimate foundation of the subject could be revealed through the reflection’s acts, upon which genuine knowledge, truth, rationality, morality, and objective reality can be secured. Revealing the basic foundations of knowledge through the application of reflection can lead to the answer to the question, “Who says?!” The path of our reflections will take us through the process of reflection from certain individual problems to general or basic problems of knowledge. Through reflection, individuals may develop universal experience and knowledge, as well as achieving what they are supposed or want to be.

Searching for the source of human ideas, John Locke’s answer was that ideas come from experience. Locke attempted to reduce all ideas to simple elements of experience, but he distinguished between sensation and reflection as sources of experience, sensation providing the material for knowledge of the external world, and reflection on material for knowledge of the mind. So, experience itself takes two forms: “sensation,” which is an observation of externally sensible objects, and “reflection,” which is internal observation of the operations of one’s own mind (Locke, 1975, II, I, pp. 2-8). Beginning with private data and reflection, we work outwards to knowledge of external and internal realities. Focusing on reflection, Locke defined it as an introspective awareness of the activities of the mind as it busies itself with the ideas it contains: comparing, remembering, repeating, uniting, believing, etc. There are also simple ideas of reflection, which are ideas of the mind’s operations upon its other ideas (Locke, 1975, II. VI. p. 1). Our mind has no other object than its ideas. and therefore knowledge can be

nothing but “the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas” (Locke, 1975, IV. ii. p. 2). Locke noticed that the limit of human knowledge is designated by its own ideas. No one can extend his own ideas. Reflection is concerned with the inner constitution and the nature of things, so that its limits are designated by the ignorance that arises from lack of ideas.

For Locke’s empiricist theory, the idea of an authoritative source in experience is crucial. Everything should base its fundament on experience. Therefore, beliefs formed by experience, through reflection which is internal observation or sensation as external observation, have an authority or validity which they would lack if they were derived from other sources, such as dreams, fantasies, hearsay, visions or teachings of one or another dogma.

Reflection, in its various forms of exposition, plays a major role in Kant’s philosophical thought, either as a methodological tool or as structure. The subject of Kantian thought is the enlightened, autonomous individual, who chooses and sets goals for himself and develops appropriate means to those ends. It is Kant’s idea that only the autonomous individual, who freely searches and investigates the entire world in and around himself, must find his anchor inside himself, without appealing to external authorities (whether they be human or divine). Autonomy is not inherent from birth: human beings are free from birth, but not autonomous. It is the duty of every human being who lives freely, by subjecting himself to laws of his own creation, to find out through reflective activity that his values and dignity lie in his innate capacity for freedom of thought and action.

Reflective acts lead every human being towards being a reflective subject, where telos and his highest achievement, according to Kant, is autonomy. Every human being exists as an end in himself and in any case is not a means for anybody, anything or any idea. “Now I maintain that man and every rational being in general exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be used arbitrarily by this or that will; instead in all his actions, whether they are addressed to himself or to other rational beings, he must always be considered at the same time as an end” (Kant, 1949, p. 203). Kant maintained that every subject is always free in the sense that our actions are not causally determined by the world around us, i.e., the subject has a free will. Having a free will or being free does not mean that the subject is by definition autonomous; quite the opposite: the subject possesses a basic dual structure, which Kant called it “heteronomy.”

Kant used a didactic method to illustrate his ideas about free will, reflective thinking and reaching autonomy. Similar to child, who possesses free will but still is not mature, he is not a fully autonomous person, the subject needs to be guided towards autonomy, to be taught, which kind of acts he should undertake and how he should know when he has reached the desired status of “autonomous being.” Normally, parents direct and assist the child towards these goals. The child will remain immature or undeveloped if he does not achieve maturity, i.e., autonomy. Kant exposed his own point of view about autonomy in his famous essay entitled “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784), (Kant, 1959), which was a part of a long debate about this issue in his time. It was Kant’s idea that enlightenment should lead every human being towards autonomy. To remain “childish” or in a “childish condition” means a dependent, immature and unreflecting subject, the opposite of how an enlightened subject should be: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is

the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without further guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [Dare to know!] 'Have courage to use your own understanding!' — that is the motto of enlightenment" (Kant, 1959, p. 41).

Kant suggested that although the content of experience must be discovered through experience itself, the mind imposes form and order on all its experiences, and this form and order can be discovered a priori, that is, by reflection alone. Kant's dichotomy – between our conceptually constructed, already elaborated world ("objectivity"), and the contingency from which concepts extract it ("subjectivity") – underlies his definition of reflection. In that sense "to reflect" is to describe a state of mind, a notion, a process, so that reflection is a metaphysical entity. Metaphysical reflection is a methodological analysis of human knowledge: it is the mental process of discovering and structuring our subjective conditions, which help us to affirm our concepts. "Reflection (reflexio) does not concern itself with objects themselves with a view to deriving concepts from them directly, but is that state of mind in which we first set ourselves to discover the subjective conditions under which [alone] we are able to arrive at concepts. It is the consciousness of the relation of given representations to our different sources of knowledge; and only by way of such consciousness can the relation of the sources of knowledge to one another be rightly determined" (Kant, 1973, B- 316). Reflection does not include any obvious reference to real experience; it reveals our concepts in a totally a priori way. We know how the world is and must be by a priori reflection, which is a tool of our pure reason, and not by any reference to experience. Metaphysical reflection asserts a firm foundation to our knowledge, which assumes that reason is sufficient in itself to produce not only subjective knowledge, but objective knowledge as well.

Metaphysical reflection shakes our conceptual shackles, but never revolts against rational restraint in general, only against specific categorial confinements. It affirms that each individual subject has privileged access to his own mental phenomena as well as constituting its individual concepts. Yet, metaphysical reflection rejects any routine or traditional way of thinking about the world, while it seeks after new, better or at least different alternatives to the given reality and its concepts. The normal reflective process, which begins as an individual vision or tendency, ends up as a commonly accepted worldview, grounded on something fundamental, which is the structure of our subjectivity. Metaphysical reflection ensures the concept of individuality that points beyond mere singularity, to the intersubjectivity, which the subject is, and wants to be.

Metaphysical reflection as a methodological analysis of human knowledge also searches for the sources of knowledge. One major way to achieve such methodological analysis is by using certain procedures known as "regression." Methodological regression exposes clearly that what I "know" in concrete terms is no more "myself" than my thoughts, my deeds or my pen and every act I have performed with them. I may know the contents of my mind, the various storage vessels and boundaries I employ to order my consciousness, but I cannot know what it is that contains and delineates it as a whole. I know what is "in" my mind, even making an inventory of it, but I never "exhaust" my mind, because there is always the last, unconditioned step that at that very moment enables me to survey the conditioned remainder. So, if we talk about something that is by definition "unconditioned" it cannot fall into the realm of the knowable.

Searching for an “unconditioned” structure of reflection leads towards non-perplexing insight, referring to transcendental reflection, that enables every possible objective act of reflection: “We may therefore say that logical reflection is a mere act of comparison; for since we take no account whatsoever of the faculty of knowledge to which the given representations belong, the representations must be treated as being, so far as their place in the mind is concerned, all of the same order. Transcendental reflection, on the other hand, since it bears on the objects themselves, contains the ground of the possibility of the objective comparison of representations with each other, and is therefore altogether different from the former type of reflection” (Kant, 1787, 1973a, B318-319). Transcendental reflection is an intrinsically unitary complex structure, which builds up our transcendental knowledge (Kant, 1787, 1973a, B25). The subject matter of transcendental knowledge is the human mode of knowing objects a priori, i.e., relating to concepts that determine objects.

Kant’s absolute introspection ends up with nothing more than “the simple representation ‘I’ that is in itself entirely empty of content, and of which one cannot even say that it is a concept. It is merely a consciousness that accompanies all concepts” (Kant, 1787, 1973a, B404). Understanding is not purely a matter of the timeless calculus of combination and judgment, but rather is possible because of a feeling or intuition. According to Kant’s theory, we shall not abandon all mention of transcendental conditions, but we can approach them negatively, by showing, from within, how they condition and delimit the realm where predicates operate. Through reflection knowledge is always exposed in a particular form or structure. Reflection leads towards subjectivization of the universal experience and knowledge into unique and singular forms of the self and later to self-consciousness. It is inescapably and intrinsically anchored in time and space, grounded on science as well as the subjective conditions of every human being. The self that is presented by reflection is purely noumenal – it is the extensionless point of freedom.

In his analysis of “reflective judgment” Kant asserted that the human mind seeks to find unknown universals for given particulars rather than to apply given particulars to universals, because only the particular experience is given, so that the universal must be found. Human transcendental concepts of nature must be furnished by pure a priori understanding, which “touch[es] the general possibility of nature” (Kant, 1790, 1973b, p. 13). Kant indicated that every “determinant judgment” must be under “universal transcendental laws”, so that nature is adapted to human cognitive needs, being dependent on our active projection of the unity of nature. “The reflective judgment, which is compelled to ascend from the particular in nature to the universal, stands, therefore, in need of a principle. This principle it cannot borrow from experience, because what it has to do is to establish just the unity of all empirical principles under higher, though likewise empirical, principles, and thence the possibility of the systematic subordination of higher and lower. In such a transcendental principle, therefore, the reflective judgment can only give as a law from and to itself. It cannot derive it from any other quarter (as it would then be a determinant judgment). Nor can it prescribe it to nature, for reflection on the laws of nature adjusts itself to nature, and not nature to the conditions according to which we strive to obtain a concept of it - a concept that is quite contingent in respect of these conditions” (Kant, 1790, 1973b, p. 14).

In Kantian theory, reflective judgment is an expression of human autonomy and evidence that nature is adapted to human cognitive needs in a contingent as well as in a reasonable form. Reflective judgment helps us to apprehend our forms in imagination and enables free play between imagination and understanding. The apprehension of forms in “the imagination can never take place without the reflective judgment, even when it has no intention of so doing, comparing them at least with its faculty of referring intuitions to concepts” (Kant, 1790, 1973b, p. 26). Kant contended that all human beings possess free play between imagination and understanding, which could sometimes be a response to the object itself and at other times could transcend concepts. Reflective judgments involve the attainment of an aim, sustaining the laws of freedom, and causing us pleasure in feeling a harmonious relationship. Even the definition of pleasure in Kantian aesthetic theory is “nothing but the conformity of the object to the cognitive faculties brought into play in the reflective judgment” (Kant, 1790, 1973b, p. 30).

Even if the subject could remain immature, irresponsible and dependent on others, he is still “self-imposed,” which means he is responsible for his own immature condition and for being an unfree, autonomous person. The subject can blame only himself for his deeds and thoughts, either if he becomes an autonomous being, i.e., reaching his highest telos, or if he remains merely heteronomous, i.e., remaining an unfree, dependent person. Mostly, the subject is insecure in his command of man’s feelings, including his feelings towards authority, which make him unable to overcome his ignorance of the sources of his command. Being an autonomous subject means becoming an enlightened individual, one who acts rationally and thereby, by his acts of freedom, maximizes the quantity of freedom in the world. The unenlightened self is without reflection, without inner perception or self-apprehension, in a primary mode, before all reflections and before projecting any reflectional method.

Kant’s enlightened reality would be reached through his reflectional system that would transform heteronomous reality into an autonomous one, so that it would be recognizable to those of us living in unenlightened reality. Such an enlightened reality would be an ideal stage, where through reaching a reflective autonomous individuality, the world would be one of free individuals who respect and promote not only their own freedom but that of others as well; it would be a radically different world. It was Kant’s highest moral imperative to recognize, to strive for and to reach the goal of enlightenment, a goal that should guide all human actions.

Following Kant’s absolute introspection we would not find any “complete world” waiting for us to be “known,” but rather the subject, rift with contradictions, inconsistent truths, coexisting and bound within finite circumstances. Through reflection the subject presents and after that represents himself as “I think”, “I will”, “I judge”, “I show.” Reflection in this sense is self-apprehension, i.e., the way in which the self is unveiled to itself. The representation of the subject and its determinations must be remembered in order to be known. Without a concept of the identity of the cognitive subject, the structure of experience cannot be analyzed (Strawson, 1966, p. 117). The subject of experience can be regarded as an item in experience and not only a logical device, and at the same time it is an absolutely unconditioned, necessary entity and thus not a conditioned object of experience. Reflection is the mechanism through which two sets of abilities need to be brought together: the capacity of self-ascription of experiences and the capacity to grasp the objectivity of the world.

If the subject is a conditioned empirical entity, then every impulse or feeling will change its essence. The identity of the subject exposes itself in the experience, as well as through the different phases of memory. Having a consistent memory is a fundamental condition of the subject, which is a rational entity. Rationality can systematically remember what it has learned, which basically is similar to one of the major aspects of the nature of identity. While a non-rational being is directly identical to whatever state it is in, a rational one knows it has moved and is able to apply predicates like “truth” by virtue of that cognizance and that cognizance only. Being a rational person involves the systematic reflective capacity to find out, with respect to any belief, whether or not it is being held on good grounds. The subject is the original ground of the unity of the manifold representations and what is represented has been reached through reflections’ processes, which must be thought with them. Reflection is not simply apprehension of what is thought and represented, rather presents the thinking subject along with it. Hegel’s subject is entrenched on alienation of natural Being and individual rising to universality; thus he correspondingly understands the person as “self.” Reaching subjectivity means the definiteness of the universal (Hegel, 1967). The subject exhibits itself as an active entity, in its internal activity or processuality, i.e., the subject becomes an “inter-subjective” activity that develops in culture, history and science. The self-educating subjectivity becomes the highest universality, concrete Being of the universal, an individualization of its content. It is the role of reflective education to guide a subject towards universal experience and knowledge, while any subject is never born, as he has to be. Through reflection, subjectivization of the universal experience and knowledge reach unique and singular forms of the self and self-consciousness.

Through reflective logic, the foundation of reason reveals itself to be rooted in dialogical and inter-subjective knowledge. Reason represents the central unifying point for universal thought and only reason can lead to absolute certainty. Although the concept of rational autonomy is implied by the belief in universal reason, there is a need for a teleological theory, which should explain how universal reason leads precisely to rational autonomy (Cassirer, 1955, p. 5). According to Hegel’s definition, reason is reality, and that alone is truly real which is reasonable. The self-realization of reason is fulfilled through the process of recognition of reason, by which is meant the unity of thinking and being. Hegel’s process of argumentation leads to the conclusion that dialogue is the most fundamental form of rational activity, because only through it can the “empty subject” learn that there are boundaries and that it itself is constituted by its ability to cross them. Hegel’s “master-slave dialectic” illuminates the basic striving deeds of consciousness in order to reach rational autonomy (Hegel, 1967, pp. 228-40).

Hegel’s “master-slave dialectic” reveals that self-consciousness could not exist without the mutual recognition of, and by, another self-conscious being, because neither could exist without the other, yet they must both already exist in order for the recognition to take place. Asserting that self-consciousness is attained through the recognition of, and by, another person does not mean that the other could not still be the self (Pippin, 1989). Reflection is regarded by Hegel as an elevation of thinking to the position of speculation, i.e., as a destruction of structures. Hegel used reflection as a synonym for understanding and when it moved within its limits, then it is regarded as finite. It is the telos of speculative logic to carry out a destructive process, which will guarantee a reasonable insight into the basic structure of reality. The need of human consciousness to integrate all aspects of reality into its understanding of the world, as a coherent unity, is reached through a dialectic process of reflection.

A reflective self is a self-determined person who refers willingly to himself, and he thinks of freedom as a case of self-reference. By using the power of reflection, it is possible to understand that if a person is to see his own reflection in a mirror, or any other reflective surface, then as long as the self does not recognize the reflection as an image of its own self, this reflection acts as the necessary other while in reality still being the self. This dialectic is centered on the issue of recognition that the “subject” needs dialogue because only in a contest of this sort can it wrest knowledge from opinion. If I do not try out my assertions on someone else and win, I will have no certainty or in Hegelian terms I will feel fully autonomous and human only to the extent that someone I recognize as autonomous and human recognizes me.

Rational subjects need each other not as objects of desire or exploitation, but as a test for truth. Without differences of opinion, there can be no knowledge. Rational subjects “know themselves” by crossing the boundary of what they know, and they can only know anything at all as a result of the inter-subjective dialectic or dialogue they conduct. Reflection of a rational subject is the knowledge that the mind has of itself and its operations (Habermas, 1992).

Every rational being gains self-awareness by “negating” itself in the sense that it posits itself as an object, removing itself from the immediacy of being solely the knowing subject. Thus, a splitting or reduplication of self occurs: The person is still there as a subject, even though positing himself as an object. Representing a subject as an object, and later the object as a system, means that the reflection of the subject and the object through a discrete and finite set of elements and relations creates a new reality. The subject who becomes an object of the real world possesses an infinite complexity and an infinite diversity of its properties. A task of the reflection is to overcome such contradictions and to single out from the infinite complexity of a subject, who becomes an object, such a formation that gives knowledge about it with attributes of explanation and forecast.

The subject interprets and decodes profound meanings that stand for obvious, superficial ones. This activity of reflection is a part of the process of accumulation of knowledge. The internal spiritual world of the subject is the world of ideas and images, which cannot be excluded from the sense-giving and sense-conceiving activity of the subject himself. One thus needs to transform oneself to gain access to the truth and meanings in the interpreting activity. The derivative of such reflection is self-consciousness. By negating its own immediacy, “consciousness comes to know itself” as others know it (Hegel, 1967, pp. 228-40). Taking leave of his own egocentricity, an individual sees himself as one subject among others, and so should his special subjectivity be regarded. Self-consciousness reached through a reflective process is not only of the subject itself, but also of reasoning-related capabilities and limitations of human beings in general.

It is a fallacy, however, to view reflection as an “instrument” or as a “prescription” leading towards an assertion about “reality,” “the world,” “the truth” or “the laws of thought.” Reflection is gazing, armed with something akin to common-sense realism - some knowledge about the world and the self in it. This simple description of “reality” or “the world” is not the same as the activity we call “describing” – for it fails to encompass the manner in which the description and the world interact as parts of the

same process. In common-sense realism, increasing knowledge consists of one's description of what it is. Hegel wanted to put an end to the philosophy of subjective certainty through a reflective process, which should lead towards a suitable interpretation of self-consciousness phenomenon. Acts of reflection enable the subject to isolate its own states and activities thematically and to bring them to explicit consciousness. Reflection itself does not motivate or define the self-consciousness: it is a subject which has the character of reflective acts, acts of self-reference which remain oriented towards the subject.

Husserl's phenomenology aims to go back to both the formal or a priori epistemic knowledge and the material presupposition of knowledge and thus to constitute the whole reality and everything in it. His term for phenomenological reflection affirms "that under the concept of reflexion must be included all modes of immanent apprehension of the essence, and on the other hand, all modes of immanent experience (*Erfahrung*)" (Husserl, 1973, p. 219). Knowledge grows discontinuously and through a series of confrontations with reality, including the unfamiliar and the other. Thus, appropriation of knowledge, internalization of the memory of our collective subjects, emerges out of following the process of construction. Being an intersubjective entity means that knowledge is no longer a result or a "discovery," rather is constructed. Reflection can be projected onto knowledge because all knowledge progresses through construction rather than discovery. Its universal methodological function is essential only if we use the phenomenological method, because, as Husserl points out, "phenomenological methods proceed entirely through acts of reflection" (Husserl, 1973, p. 215). In the phenomenological system, every variety of reflection has the character of a modification of consciousness and the different degrees of consciousness are dependent on the different degrees of reflections. "...Every variety of 'reflexion' has the character of a modification of consciousness, and indeed of such a modification as every consciousness can, in principle, experience" (Husserl, 1973, p. 219).

Husserl's concept of reflection, in a wide sense, refers not only to the apprehensions of acts, but to every retrospection or turning away from the natural direction of viewing to the object. "Reflexion...is an expression for acts in which the stream of experience (*Erlebnis*), with all its manifold events (phases of experience, internationalities) can be grasped and analyzed in the light of its own evidence. It is...the name we give to consciousness' own method for the knowledge of consciousness generally" (Husserl, 1973, p. 219). In constitutive phenomenology the various levels of objectivity are traced from the level of sensibility to that of the ideal objectivities of understanding. The natural world in which we make our start is one where independent existence is taken for granted naively. Therefore, there is a distinction between "natural" or "naïve" reflection and "pure reflection," which is related to the performance of phenomenological reduction. The pure sphere of transcendental subjectivity can only be attained by means of phenomenological attitude, i.e., pure reflection, which requires the performance of an "epoché" (Husserl, 1973, pp. 107-116).

"Only through acts of experiencing as reflected on do we know anything of the stream of experience and of its necessary relationship to the pure Ego" (Husserl, 1973, p. 222). The ego of natural reflection reflects upon man within the limits of the natural attitude, while in the process of transcendental reflection that ego is eliminated and is replaced by an "outside" ego as reflecting agent. This process towards transcendental intersubjectivity, based on the self-consciousness, includes in itself the whole processes

and metamorphoses of the subject. The indubitable data of self-consciousness, reached through pure reflection, is regarded as an act of experience or as its correlate, that which is thought. The distinction between natural reflection and pure reflection, which evolves in transcendental reflection, indicates the leading stages of the investigation, such as identification of intentional nature of experience, its basic characteristics, the element of time and the performance of the reflection itself. Husserl's three subjects or egos are dependent on the different degrees of reflection: first, the world-immersed ego; second, the transcendental ego; and third, the ego epoché-performing observer.

Husserl's process of reflection having been outlined consciousness as a "way in" (internal) can turn itself to a "way out," i.e., to the constitutive problem of truth and reality. Truth and reality have a meaning for us because the structure of consciousness indicates the method of proceeding in which reflection is a vital component of it. Transcendental reflection asserts that all adequate evidence of reality is due to a synthesis that belongs to us, and it is in us that reality has its transcendental foundation. Husserl regards transcendental intersubjectivity as the ultimate concrete ground of all transcendent reflections and their constituted transcendent consciousness. All objective existence is established according to transcendental laws, and consequently, the aim of phenomenology is to achieve absolute knowledge of the world and the ultimate ground of its being.

Speaking and writing are reflexive activities that instill their own point of generation within themselves as perspectives, points of view or persons. Written or spoken subjectivity is located within the discourse as the subject of discourse. The point of view from which the reflection of experience is carried out is not identical to the subject of the experience. Between the reflecting subject and the subject reflected on there is neither a simple identification nor a simple disparity of perspectives, but rather complex and complicit relationships. Otherwise, the reflection would be circular: the reflection, as an activity performed by the subject, could become aware of its own results only after the processes become a fact. By reflecting on certain states of affairs, the subject does not bring it to consciousness for the first time, while this activity is directed towards some end. Considering the subject as content in reflective phenomenological analysis makes possible the appearance of an object of reflection. The subject is no longer grasped as an object of intuitive presentation, but as an object of phenomenological reflection. To this end reflection should reach certain knowledge of the subject itself and it should be able to describe itself. By reaching this end, the subject will be able to assert its certainty and its self-acquaintance results from the reflection.

The reflection's process can help us to become aware to the predisposing constituents of human understanding, by reorienting and reorganizing our pre-dispositions and qualities. It presumes that it is possible to ascribe any predicate of the subject and to distinguish anything from itself that is different from it. Self-referred knowledge of the subject is possible only through reflective acts, although it seems to be a circular model, because it started from the subject and it reaches the subject during the reflection's act and at the end. The "subject" is the same subject before reaching reflective knowledge and after it. However, it does not imply that this attained human knowledge and understanding is far from being ultimately capable of rational autonomy or that an enlightened and rational being secured the foundations of the certainty of truth. The knowing self-reference which is present in reflection is an explication, which isolates the basic facts. In Hegelian terminology reflection is a constant process of "coming-to-

itself.” The subject grasps his own organizing function and is capable of interpreting himself through reflection as well as through his actions controlled by reflection.

Reflection is not a singular process or state of mind: it can be a set of reflections, which evoke maximum personal freedom, by being anchored in the power of imagination (Fichte, 1962, I, pp. 220-1). In this set of reflections possible thoughts are reflected themselves, so that the power of imagination masters the whole process. The reflection reaches a new “object” and a new meaning at every stage, while this object becomes the “new” subject, with a new perspective, understanding and comprehension of itself and its reality. In this set of reflections, some of them reach conscious products and some of them unconscious products, which means that the subject sometimes reaches conscious and sometimes unconscious reality. Reflection is an act of freedom, and the power of imagination exalts and praises this freedom. The power of imagination enables the reflection to be a constitutive activity of the subject and unifies the objects of reflection through its synthesis.

Yet, the power of imagination does not lead reflections in any fixed direction. Even after critical reflection the subject may be unable to see the significance of the evidence that he possesses. Moreover, such evidence may be locked away in memory that the subject is unable to recall, even after prolonged critical reflection. Critical reflection may be unsuccessful because the subject fails to properly take account of evidence he possesses, evidence that disrupts the justification of the belief being reflected upon. Therefore, only by being blocked, knocking or reaching the other, is the reflection determined and a dialogical orientation reached. Reflection is a dialogical method of defining the reality by the reflecting subject, while this reality is in its turn the new base of a new reflected reality. The critical ingredient in the connection between self-consciousness and the capacity for objective thought is to be found in the connection between the capacity to represent oneself through a reflective process as one embodied entity among others and the objective representation. Then there is no ultimate or determinate reality or subject, but only directed, reflexive activity of the subject and his objective representation of it.

In keeping with Hegel’s idea that every philosophy that distinguishes between thought and Being through the subjectivity of the thinking process, as it experiences the objects, is a philosophy of reflection, we assume that most learning processes and relationships between students and teachers are grounded on the possibility of dialogic reflections – epitomized or perhaps set in motion by the “Who says?!” phenomenon. The dialogic reflection should not be imagined as going ad infinitum, tediously sifting through every imaginable case to produce a counter-example: It is simply an ascertainment of what the interlocutors are, in their present state of knowledge, prepared to agree upon. Dialogical acquisition is, therefore, matters of determining what you and I may thenceforth possibly know (Lorenzen & Lorenz, 1978).

The subject of education is a self-consciously autonomous free individual, existing in immediate reflective relations within a finite world, directly known as his own. It is the same subject who incessantly interprets, decodes profound meanings that stand behind the common, the superficial or the mythical. This activity of thinking in education is no less important than the accumulation of knowledge. The subject of education is the sense-giving and sense-conceiving activity of himself through the process of reflection. Therefore, the reflective subject needs to transform his self to gain

access to the truth and meanings in the interpreting activity. Reflection can help us to become aware of predisposing constituents of human understanding. However, interpretative preconceptions always remain in play and reflection cannot get rid of them in the name of autonomous reason, or certainty, or any all-encompassing overview.

Reflection is used in all areas of discourse. There are obviously other approaches to the philosophy of education than critical reflection. Nonetheless, a metacritique of the epistemology of learning requires a constructive and later a critical reflection upon its structure, a process which will basically secure its fundament. Reflection and reflective education have a crucial role in democratic society and civic education, precisely because of the fact that we don't believe in absolute or supernatural philosophy, in which thought and Being are one, or the One is the source of our thoughts and reality as well. Every autonomous human being should adopt a reflective attitude towards his own historical period, his society, his culture and his system of education as well as towards their interpretations. Reflective thinking should transform into a critical strategy and later into a tool of interpretation of economical-social-political reality. The reflective process involved in every domain of human reality must in turn be examined, because all reflection occurs in a cultural-historical setting. Yet, there is no endless regress, because the requirements of an objective analysis are met when the reflecting observer is considered in his relationship to his field of inquiry. Further stages of reflection would yield nothing more. The project of critical reflection should be completed to the limits of what is possible at least.

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