



Reflection and Perception in Professional Practice

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Abstract

*For the last decade, reflection has been a major theme in discussions about professional skillfulness and the development of the competence of practitioners such as nurses and teachers. The intellectual pattern that has structured ambitions in relation to reflection is found mainly in Schön's (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner* and the epistemological turn suggested there. In this text, however, I focus on a dimension that is often forgotten when professional practitioners are conceived of as being reflective, namely, perception. From the framework of Merleau-Ponty, I argue that Schön's theoretical account is highly problematic and that perception is the key to shaping practitioners' skillfulness.*

Introduction

In the last decade reflection has been a major theme in discussions about professional skillfulness and the development of the competence of practitioners such as nurses and teachers. The intellectual pattern that has structured ambitions in relation to reflection is found mainly in Schön's (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner* and the epistemological turn suggested there. This turn was influenced by Dewey (1938/1998) as well as by Ryle (1949) and Polanyi (1967). In this famous text (as well as in the sequel *Educating the Professional Practitioner*; Schön, 1987), Schön argued for a way of recognizing the skillfulness of practitioners' competence that was different from the traditional way in which this competence was recognized. Schön called for close analysis of practitioners' work and social practice, and stressed the importance of including communication between participants as well as their artifact use in these analyses (Schön, 1983).

Schön's texts (1983, 1987) were very successful. In North America, they became standard reading for

teacher educators soon after their publication (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988) and today Schön's concept of 'reflection-in-action' generates 817 000 hits when googled. In addition to being brought into discussions concerning practitioners' competence, reflection and tacit knowledge (Erlandson, 2005, 2006; Newman, 1999), Schön's epistemological project has also influenced official doctrines concerning practitioner skillfulness. For example, Geerincx, Maschelin and Simons (2010) pointed out that in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) reports, there is a link between Schön's epistemology of reflection and the recognition of the professional competence of practitioners as an important factor for economic growth. Despite this popularity, Schön's theories have been criticized over the years in relation to their scientific and philosophical aspirations. As Canning (2008) pointed out, this critique mainly concerns three major topics: First, the vagueness of the conceptual structure in Schön's theories; second, the possibilities for implementing these theories; and third, the social and political implications interwoven in the theories about the reflective practitioner.

In addition to Schönien perspectives, phenomenological approaches (van Manen, 1977, 1995), critical perspectives (Beach, 2005; Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and postmodern reasoning have also been extended into this area of research (Bleakley, 2000; Cavallaro Johnson, 2002). In addition, action-related research has played quite an important role in this field. Ziechner's practice-oriented views on reflection and practitioners' work are an early example of action-related research (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991). Within the caring sciences, Ekeberg (2007) has focused on didactics in relation to the learning process and Ghaye and colleagues (2008) from the Institute of Reflective Practice have argued for reflection as a strategy for doing both research and educational practice.

Today, Schön's texts *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987) are well known to almost every researcher in teacher education and nursery education. Grimmitt (1988) once argued that it is almost impossible to understand the problems and discussions on reflection without being familiar with the intellectual properties of Dewey. I think he was right. However, what was then applicable to Dewey's famous *How We Think* (1911/1997) is applicable to Schön's famous texts today. In a way, the field of reflective practice is theoretically interwoven with the legacy of Schön (whether for good or bad) and without proper understanding of Schön's proposal, qualified research on reflection in teacher and nursery education is hard to produce.

In this text I look at a dimension that is often forgotten when professional practitioners are conceived of as being reflective and this is the dimension of perception. I have mainly used Merleau-Ponty's theoretical framework (Merleau-Ponty, 1942/1963, 1964/1968, 1945/2002), focusing on his seminal work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2002). However, my use of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is not at all rigorously phenomenological. Indeed, I avoid phenomenological language as much as possible, and try to show Merleau-Ponty's point of view in a more straightforward linguistic form. From the framework established by Merleau-Ponty, I argue that Schön's theoretical account is highly problematic and that perception is the key to shaping practitioners' skillfulness.

Schön's Reflective Practitioner

Schön's Reflection Project

The Reflective Practitioner revolves around practitioners' competence. However, this theme is not a new one for Schön. As early as 1954, in his doctoral thesis entitled *Rationality in the Practical Decision-Process* (Schön, 1954, cited in Newman, 1999),

Schön explored similar themes. Later in his career, together with Argyris and Schön (1974), he launched the concept of 'theory-in-use'. Schön's fame, or rather the fame of his theories about practitioners' competence, is however largely built on the concept 'reflection-in-action', which he elaborated in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and developed in the sequel *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987).

Schön did not explore the epistemological question regarding the nature of knowledge. Instead, he turned to professional practices, where people are able to perform very specific and (often) highly advanced tasks, and instead asked questions such as: How do people become skillful (or in Schön's terminology 'reflective') practitioners? What characterizes skillful ('reflective') practitioners? Schön argued that the knowledge that structures and which is dignified by the universities (technical rationality) does not sufficiently describe the knowledge on which some professions' skillfulness relies. The work of, for example, nurses, teachers, architects and therapists is formulated on tacit knowledge, which is a non-verbalized, situated knowledge. Schön called this practice-oriented professional knowledge that a practitioner acquires during her/his schooling in a specific line of work 'knowing-in-action'. Knowing-in-action is one of the basic foundations for his 'reflection-in-action, which is the central concept that describes the action-oriented thinking that Schön claimed characterizes the work of practitioners. In Schön's theories, the reflection concept(s) become(s) the conceptual hub for describing, analyzing and intertwining practitioners' practical knowing, doing and thinking.

Schön's text *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) is structured around examples from professional practice. The claims Schön made on behalf of reflection typically take their point of departure from these examples and are brought back to these examples. The best-known example is from an architect's studio and revolves around the architecture student, Petra, and her teacher Quist (Schön himself returned to this example in the sequel *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, 1987). Earlier, Schön (1983) described how Petra successively acquires an ability to solve architectural problems and how she develops a convergence of meaning with Quist about these problems by communicating with Quist and solving the problems together with him. Schön pointed out that the communication between Petra and Quist involves the use of tools and that it is therefore hardly meaningful to analyze only the spoken words when discussing the interaction between them (Erlandson & Beach, 2008; Schön, 1983).

As Kindsella (2009) pointed out, Polanyi and, to an even greater extent, Ryle, seem to have had a strong

influence on Schön's theories about the reflective practitioner. However, Dewey was undoubtedly the most influential for Schön and it was from him that Schön inherited his philosophical strategy. Like Dewey, Schön tried to generate new ways to conceive of a complex world by bringing different topics together while emphasizing the primacy of situated learning, where action, language and thinking are intertwined. Schön himself admitted his debt to Dewey in an essay from 1992, entitled *The Theory of Inquiry: Dewey's Legacy to Education*.¹ Schön wrote:

When I was a graduate student at Harvard in the 1950s, my friend, Chester, urged me to read Dewey. But when I tried to do so, I found him muddy, and unintelligible. Later on ... I saw that Dewey's was a generative muddiness: he was trying to say new things that were bound to seem muddy to anyone trained as I had been in the logical empiricism fashionable at the time (Schön, 1992, p. 123).

In the same way as Dewey (1911/1997, 1938/1998), Schön tried to work his way out of the dominant traditions by inventing new ways of acknowledging practitioners' knowing and skillfulness. The price he paid for his philosophical strategy was a lack of clarity. *The Reflective Practitioner* has (correctly in my view) often been accused of conceptual muddiness, which, as Geerinck et al. (2010) pointed out, makes it hard to analyze the claims Schön makes, or even to determine which claims he actually makes.²

Reflection-in-action – A Troublesome Theoretical Account

If the vagueness in Schön's theories constitutes a main line of criticism aimed at Schön's texts, another main line involves Foucaultian tools and focuses on the social implications of the reflective practitioner as a discursive enterprise. To the best of my recollection, the first paper published in this discussion was entitled 'The Body Disciplined' (Erlandson, 2005) and established a discursive axis between the reflection idiom and the political steering of the teacher (see also Foucault, 1942/1991). Geerinck et al.'s (2010) critique followed a similar path, pointing out that even in the OECD's (2005) reports the idiom

¹ See Dewey (1911/1997, 1938/1998) and Tiles (1988) but also Burke (1998) for a discussion of the debate between Dewey and Russell on truth and action.

² To make the terminological confusion worse, Dewey is also incoherent when it comes to the use of terms. For example, in the discussions about reflection in *How We Think*, Dewey (1911/1997) sometimes uses the terms 'reflection', 'reflective thinking' and 'inquiry' synonymously and sometimes not.

about the reflective teacher has become a major way of conceiving of the work and profession of teachers. By means of reflection, teachers' work will be beneficial for the European society. In addition, a third line of criticism, which I concentrate on in this article, focuses on the ontological and epistemological difficulties intertwined in Schön's concept of reflection-in-action.

The suspicion that there is something not quite right with Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action was raised soon after *The Reflective Practitioner* was first published. For example, in Grimmer and Erickson's anthology from 1988, many objections aimed at the validity of Schön's different reflections concepts were raised. For my purposes in this text, the most philosophically relevant critique of the concept of reflection-in-action was initiated by Newman in 1999 and later developed by Erlandson (2005, 2006; Erlandson & Beach, 2008). This critique concerns the problem of behaviour/action and control in Schön's analysis of practice and reflection, and points out that Schön, via the concept of reflection-in-action, employed a Cartesian thought-matrix (Erlandson, 2005, 2006; Erlandson & Beach, 2008; Newman, 1999).

The critique is convincing but fairly complex. The first part of the argumentation states that in several examples that Schön used to demonstrate what he means by reflection-in-action, and how reflection-in-action actually works in action, he indicated that reflection-in-action (in a broad sense) has the structure of something internal (a mind or a consciousness) steering something external (the body or/and bodily behaviour). Newman (1999) showed, via an analysis of Schön's examples and Schön's interpretations of these examples that Schön in his discussions about reflection-in-action becomes involved in Wittgenstein's 'private language' argumentation and is contradicted by it (Newman, 1999; Wittgenstein, 1953/1997). Now, one might raise the objection that it is doubtful whether Wittgenstein's reasoning is applicable to Schön's reasoning. However, in the second part of the argumentation, Erlandson showed in an analysis of Schön's discussions and exemplifications, and of Newman's reinterpretations and analysis of Schön's reasoning, that even if one does not agree with Newman when it comes to whether or not the 'private language' discussion is applicable to Schön's reasoning, it is still the case that Newman has detected an axis of control in Schön's reasoning or, to put it differently, a control-matrix (Erlandson, 2005, 2006). This control-matrix points toward a Cartesian universe.

However, even if Schön has been criticized over the years and even if his theoretical account can be

questioned, Schön's concept of reflection-in-action still generates more than 52 000 000 hits on google and his views on reflection, practice, and reflective practice remain dominant. There are several reasons for this continued dominance. First, Schön's (1983) discussions in *The Reflective Practitioner* are indeed both interesting and illuminating. Second, his account has been interpreted by countless policymakers over many years and has been integrated into policy doctrines about teaching, teacher education and teacher professionalism since the late 1980s (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Erlandson, 2006). A third reason for the continuing dominance of the doctrine of the 'reflective practitioner' is simply that there have not been many competing philosophical views in education in subsequent years that still consider questions similar to Schön's and that have also had a potential applicability for analyzing the professional practice of teachers (and/or nurses). Below, I try to present a view that can solve some of the difficulties apparent in Schön's account, and that can also serve the purpose of establishing a framework for ambitions to outline new ways of recognizing and dealing with professional practice. For this purpose, I turn to Merleau-Ponty.

Reflection as a Roundabout Way *Reciprocity – An Organization Responding to the World*

In this text I can only present a small part of the argumentation for the 'lived body', as Merleau-Ponty's suggestion might be called, in contrast to the 'apparatus body' (my term) that he criticizes. One aspect that I think is critical in order gain a firm grip on Merleau-Ponty's suggestions is the idea of the movement behind being-in-the-world (*être au monde*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). Merleau-Ponty's best example of *être au monde* is effective, although not particularly tasteful: if an insect has a healthy leg removed it compensates for the limb's movements, but this is not the case if a leg is merely tied. In the latter case, a free limb does not replace the tied one because "the current of activity which flows towards the world still passes through it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 90). The insect is not a machine and therefore it is not a question of just replacing one part with another. Instead, the activity that interweaves the body with the world is interrupted. The insect's instinct in this scenario is actually ineffective. An apparatus mode of reaction would have been to replace the dysfunctional limb with another one, and, in fact, this would also have been more effective. However, the insect responds as a lived body, as a mode of organization with the limb (and the current of activity) still intact and directed to the world.

In this sense, the insect is structured by reciprocity with the world that is central for Merleau-Ponty's

thoughts about how lived bodies are organized. When we say that an animal exists, that it has a world, or that it belongs to a world, we do not mean that it has perception of the world or that it has consciousness of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) continued:

The situation which unleashes instinctive operations is not entirely articulate and determinate, its total meaning is not possessed, as is adequately shown by the mistakes and the blindness of instinct. It presents only a practical significance; it asks for only bodily recognition; it is experienced as an 'open' situation, and 'requires' the animal's movement, just as the first notes of a melody require a certain kind of resolution (p. 90)

However, human beings are not insects, and while the insect's reciprocity with the world is purely instinct-based ("an *a priori* of the species and not a personal choice"; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 90), this is not the case for human beings. Our reciprocity is also driven by consciousness (without, however, being the same as consciousness). A central concept that Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) used to describe how we are aimed at the world, or rather, at certain poles of action offered in a particular situation, is the "intentional arc" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 122). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) argued that through an intentional arc, conscious life, perceptual life, instincts and knowledge are carried, as well as at the past, future and the physical, ethical and socio-cultural situation. On the intentional arc, intelligence, sensitivity and motor activity are united, and it 'aims' the subject as an existential-organic unity to a specific purpose or a specific goal within the systems of artifacts in which s/he is involved. An example Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) used is sewing, where the bench, scissors and pieces of leather "offer themselves to the subject as poles of action" (p. 122). This intentional arc, however, does not only concern our relation to physical artifacts but also to other people.

In a clarifying example, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) emphasized the lived body as a reciprocal unity, as an organization responding to others:

When I motion my friend to come nearer, my intention is not a thought prepared within me and I do not perceive the signal in my body. I beckon across the world, I beckon over there where my friend is, the distance between us, his consent or refusal are immediately read in my gesture; there is not a perception followed by a movement, for both form a system which varies as a whole. If, for example, realizing that I am not going to be obeyed, I vary my gesture, we have here, not two distinct acts of

consciousness. What happens is that I see my partner's unwillingness, and my gesture of impatience emerges from this situation without any intervening thought. (p. 127)

In this example, the gesture exists in the world as part of a continuing meaningful relation that the 'I' has with his friend. S/he (via communication) responds to the offered 'poles of action'.

In a broader analytical mode, there are similarities between some of the claims that Schön made in his descriptions and Merleau-Ponty's framework. For example, Schön's emphasis on the 'global character' (Schön, 1983) of Quist's competence definitively points in the same direction as Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) 'intentional arc'. Schön's (1983) tendency to stress the global character of Quist's competence also shows the influence of his predecessor Dewey, who Johnsson (1996) regarded as the most prominent embodiment philosopher besides Merleau-Ponty. However, it is also true that whereas Schön (1983) placed his trust in the possibilities of reflection, Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) framework calls for a different analysis.

Projecting the Lived Body

In his analysis of the complexity of skillful human beings, Merleau-Ponty took his departure from a critique of Cartesianism and the duality between the internal/the soul/mind and the external/the body. More specifically, he challenged the two lines of explanation that are possible for defenders of Cartesian duality and defenders of 'objective thought', as Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) called the theoretical position of his main opponents. He demonstrated the devastating impact of the landscape of objective thought in philosophy and the behavioural sciences, as well as the main flaws of this position.

The starting position is something like this: If the Cartesian duality is correct (as an ontological position) then the relation between body and soul/mind has to be described either in terms of 'physiology' or in terms of 'psychology' (and possibly, and under certain conditions, as something in-between; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, pp. 77–102). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) then addressed the two lines of explanation individually and convincingly showed that neither the psychological nor the psychological explanation (even a hybrid explanation) is valid as a basis for understanding the life and function of the body (see Erlandson, 2006). Hence, Cartesian metaphysics is wrong. The life of the body cannot be understood in terms of only causality (cause and effect) but instead also needs to be understood in terms of organization. In this way, the

totality goes beyond the sum of the parts and the brain is the seat of a "process of patterning" (*mise en forme*; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 85).

A famous example that Merleau-Ponty used in his reasoning is from the medical record of Schneider, a patient mutilated in the First World War. Although doubts have been raised regarding the validity of the medical records that Merleau-Ponty relied on for his examples, it is important to note that his argument is not reliant on the trustworthiness of these records, but that he merely uses them for illustrative purposes. In addition, Carman (2008) has provided contemporary support for Merleau-Ponty's views. Schneider was partially brain-injured in a grenade explosion and was therefore functional in some ways but less functional in others. For example, he did not understand analogies such as 'light is to lamp as heat is to stove', or 'eye is to light and color as ear is to sounds' in a spontaneous manner, such as would be done by a normal person. Instead, Schneider managed to understand the analogies only when he had made them explicit by recourse to conceptual analysis.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) pointed out that a person without Schneider's injuries could also fail to understand the analogies, but for totally different reasons. For the normal person, if this person had similar education to Schneider, the explicit conceptual analysis would be the problem, not the direct understanding. "If we described analogy as the apperception of two given terms under a coordinating concept, we should be giving as normal a procedure which is exclusively pathological, and which represents the roundabout way in which the patient makes good the normal understanding of analogy" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, pp. 147–148). In other words, whereas the person without the injuries understands the analogies immediately but might not be able to analyze and explain them, Schneider learned to recognize these analogies by analyzing them. In other words, he used intellectual tools that, in this case, represent a roundabout way of understanding, a way that calls for reflection. We can now start to outline an account that differs from Schön's theory about reflection (see Erlandson, 2006).

For Schön (1983), the virtuoso architect (or master architect), Quist, represented a pinnacle of reflection-in-action: Quist moves with ease and grace in the architectural studio thanks to his reflection-in-action. However, according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) Schön's (1983) description actually details a roundabout way for Quist to deal with the architectural work. According to Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) account, Quist moves with such speed and grace because he does not have to reflect (think). Both Dahlin (2001) and Dall'Alba (2009) have made

similar points regarding Merleau-Ponty's argument. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), Quist acts like 'the normal person' in the example using Schneider; he therefore immediately, or 'directly', recognizes what needs to be done (a point made by Erlandson, 2006). In contrast, the untrained architect like Petra, or a total novice in the architect's line of work (such as a philosopher of education), needs to think in order to get the work done. Petra does not immediately understand the demands and the expectations interwoven in the work, and she does not know which action needs to be taken. She therefore has to think. The point is that, even if reflection-in-action were a valid concept – which it is not, then it would be applicable to Petra's behaviour in the architectural studio and not to Quist's behaviour (Erlandson, 2006).

Perceiving the World *Perception and Action*

As I have pointed out, according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), when we say that a human exists or that s/he has a world, we do not mean that s/he has a perception of the world or that s/he has consciousness of it but that s/he is in a reciprocal relationship with the world. To put it differently, as lived bodies, humans have a relation to the world, and this precedes our perception of the world. I believe it is helpful to understand this as awareness under the threshold of perception; as a feeling of tension from the world with which we are already interwoven. Through this undifferentiated awareness we are related to the world as an undifferentiated background that pulls us in different directions.³

I think an example will help to make Merleau-Ponty's point clear. If a child enters a dark room with a window open and mistakes a moving curtain for a robber, then it is not the case that the child sees the curtain but mistakes the curtain for a robber. It is also not the case that the child sees the curtain but confuses the category 'curtain' with the category 'robber' (i.e., it is not a mistake in judgment). Instead, the shadow that the child becomes aware of as a movement in the darkness is perceived as a robber.

Romdenh-Romluc (2011) pointed out that in a Merleau-Ponty account, "perception is the activity of bringing perceived properties into being, the awareness of the presence that we have at the limits of our perceptual reach is awareness of that bit of the world *before* perception of it taking place" (p. 127, emphasis in original). For Merleau-Ponty, perception

³ In this text I avoid using the term 'experience' for the simple reason that this concept calls for an article on its own. For an overview of experience from within a Merleau-Ponty framework, I recommend Bengtsson (2013).

is an act of letting undifferentiated awareness of the presence within perceptual reach, appear as something. Perception is an act of mediation by which the world takes shape in such a way that we can categorize it, understand it, talk about it, meditate over it, argue over it and act in it.

However, as Romdenh-Romluc (2011) also pointed out, for Merleau-Ponty "perception as a movement from what is ambiguous and indeterminate to what is determine, squarely located in the shared world, and available to others ... is aided by consciousness tendency to forget its own phenomena" (p. 18). For example, if I walk in the park one night and first only see ambiguous and diffuse shadows that after a while become visible as an alley of trees, I forget the indeterminate play of darkness and greyness that first occurred for me, and instead remember the alley of trees. It is not only the case that consciousness aids perception, but also that perception aids remembering (without, of course, being the same as remembering). This relationship between perception and memory is exemplified by the stories of the Flying Dutchman. In these stories terrified sailors cast out on a wild ocean experience hours and maybe days of storm, see a grey ship appear in the undifferentiated movements of water and shadows. In this way, memory clings to a piece of the world that is squarely located. Human beings are thus not conscious of their perception, they are conscious in their perception.

As was highlighted earlier, for Merleau-Ponty action does not necessarily have anything to do with reflection in terms of thinking. Merleau-Ponty made a distinction between two kinds of action, labelled abstract action and concrete action, which may be clarifying. Raising an arm on command is an example of abstract action and walking home from a bus stop is an example of concrete action. Concrete actions are not the result of thinking but are instead related to how the potentialities for action are perceived, and they are structured with the help of motoric skills (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). Having a motoric skill, in turn, means being able to do something in a specific situation.

It is typical for motoric skills to involve a special kind of environment, as well as particular artifacts. The range of motoric skills is extensive, therefore scratching yourself is one example of a motoric skill and playing the piano is another, and these skills are acquired through practice (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). Acquiring a motoric skill is a matter of both learning to perceive the world in such a way that it is possible to exercise that particular motoric skill and learning to perceive opportunities to exercise the skill (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). A conclusion of this reasoning is that from a perspective influenced by Merleau-Ponty, effective professional schooling

involves disciplining perception in ways that enable humans to perceive the environment and the working tools in a particular practice (blackboard and chart, computer programs etc.) in such ways that they are able to act effectively in that environment.

When it comes to accounting for Quist in the architectural studio, he makes a perfect example of a professional who has learned to use concrete action as a basis for his professional behaviour. He has learned to use the potential of the architect's studio, for example, the drawing table and the pen, in such a way that these tools in that particular environment have become "poles of action" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 122; this is similar to the example of sewing given by Merleau-Ponty) and form part of Quist's acquired motoric skills, much like the piano for the piano virtuoso. Gradually, Quist has learned to perceive the architect's studio in such a way that it is possible to exercise the particular motoric skill of the architect. At the same time, he has learned to perceive opportunities to exercise these particular motoric skills.

Perception and Sociocultural Dependence

Besides pointing in the direction of a potential need to form an alternative framework for conceptualizing practitioners' professional action as "reflection/reflective practice", Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) view on perception also opens up a discussion about social and historical dependence. The reason for this is that if perception is a process of mediation by which that which is ambiguous and indeterminate is given shape and located in the shared world, and the categorical and linguistic tools that come into use in perception via consciousness are partly culturally and socially dependent, then perception is culturally and socially dependent as well.

The body is no more than an element in the system of the subject and his world, and the task to be performed elicits the necessary movements from him by a sort of remote attraction, as the phenomenological forces at work in my visual field elicits me, without any calculation on my part, the motor reactions which establish the most effective balance between them, or as conventions of our social group, or our set of listeners, immediately elicit from us the words, attitudes and tone which are fitting. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 127)

In the quotation above, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) made it clear both that perception is a part of the subject as a system and that this system is interwoven not only with the physical but also social and cultural

environments. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) is thus far from representing the solipsistic worldview of which his contemporary in France, Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1992) has, in my view correctly, been accused. For Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), a human being and her environment are necessarily and intimately intertwined and are constantly changing. Perception is a naturally occurring tool that is offered as a life resource that calls to be used, and to be related to the world, in specific ways. (As an aside, based on this interpretation, it is possible to argue that there is an obvious lineage from Merleau-Ponty to the micro-sociological approach of Garfinkel, 1967.) We become tuned in relation to environments that we become familiar with, and tend to perceive and act in relation to the demands and possibilities offered in that environment.

However, by recognizing perception as partly culturally and socially conditioned, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) also pointed toward a cultural and political vulnerability for human beings that is seldom emphasized by phenomenologists, but which seems to have had a profound impact on Merleau-Ponty's most well-known student, Foucault. A logical basis for Foucault's concept of 'discipline', for example, is the recognition of a fundamental intransparency in human self-relations. It becomes possible for human beings to understand and analyze themselves via the use of external intellectual recourses. As a consequence, regulating and steering the self-mediating tools (the means by which self-understanding is formed and executed) involves regulating and steering the forms of subjectivity in a society (Erlandson, 2005; Foucault, 1942/1991; Geerinck et al., 2010; Rose, 1999).

We should here take into consideration Foucault's development as a philosopher. This development is apparent from the early *Madness and Civilization* (1961/1973), where he more or less proclaimed the death of subjectivity, until he wrote in the preface to the later *The Use of Pleasure – The History of Sexuality: II* (1984/1985): "It appeared that I now had to undertake a third shift, in order to analyze what is termed 'the subject'. It seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua subject*" (Foucault, 1984/1985, p. 6, emphasis in original). As Deleuze (1988) pointed out, this later position of Foucault brought him close to his old teacher Merleau-Ponty. In this later view, self-relations are indirect, a result of historically, politically and socio-culturally situated action that offers the resources (and the limitations and possibilities) for the affective self-constitution of the lived body's potentialities (Foucault, 1984/1985; see also Geerinck et al., 2010).

That means that it is possible to trace some of the foundations of Foucault's logic of self-mediation back to the thoughts of his old teacher Merleau-Ponty. The critique on the reflective practitioner formulated by, for example, Erlandson (2005; see also Erlandson, 2006, for an analysis on the logic of self-mediation in Foucault) and Geerinck et al. (2010), appears to adopt Foucaultian perspectives and could therefore also be linked to Merleau-Ponty's ideas. Additionally, for a discussion committed to corporal subjectivity within a Merleau-Ponty framework, see O'Loughlin (1997).

The Place for Reflection *Perception and Reflection*

Schön's (1983) account forces reflection (or, in a broad sense, thinking) back into the actions of Quist, when the whole point with Quist's being experienced in this field was to reduce unnecessary thinking on his part. Of course, thinking has its place. Keeping in mind the character of this article, claiming anything different would indeed be strange. However, Dewey has pointed out that obstacles for action are what trigger reflection. We do not deal with our complex everyday life by thinking of every aspect of it all the time. We therefore do not think about things such as whether we are short enough to pass through a certain doorway or have long enough legs to climb a certain stairway. Instead, we deal with our complex everyday life by thinking only when we have to.

Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) way of viewing perception as a partly socio-culturally conditioned activity, by which the lived body relates to the environment in such a way that it becomes possible to employ motoric skills, is an alternative to Schön's (1983) reflection ideas. Schön's (1983) account puts emphasis on reflection and thinking as a driving force for skillful action (which explains the term reflection-in-action in the first place), while perception is key in Merleau-Ponty's account. We successively become tuned to an environment; we learn to deal with it, execute action in it, and live in it. Thus, like virtuosos of our life-worlds, we shop, brush our teeth and pass in and out of doorways without too much difficulty and without too much thinking. We also use everyday artifacts that are incorporated into these everyday-world environments in much the same way. We can therefore turn the sheets of paper in the Sunday newspaper, or flick through an iPad without intellectual effort. This is a matter of training and repetition. We learn a bodily behaviour that answers to the calls from our environment that we have learned to perceive in a specific way. We are not conscious of how we perceive things; there is no consciousness inside (or within) our consciousness by which we perceive how we perceive.

The point in training to be an architect, or a nurse, or a teacher, is to be able to have an 'every day relation', or in other words a familiar relation, to our environment as much as possible. Most often professional practice is about training perception and learning to respond with the appropriate action to the demands and possibilities offered in a particular situation. We do not want emergency nurses who think about socio-cultural theories about artifact use when putting a needle in a patient's arm. We do not want teachers that contemplate Ryle's distinction between knowing that and knowing how when mediating in a classroom conflict between two eleven-year-old boys. Experienced practitioners are experienced owing to the fact that they have acquired certain ways to perceive things. They have a trained perception.

Discipline and Critique

Besides being a troublesome concept in accounting for human action, the muddiness in Schön's (1983) conceptualizations is one of the most common criticisms aimed at his enterprise. Everything tends to be reflection in one way or another (Canning, 2008; Erlandson, 2005; Grimmett & Erickson, 1988). In Schön's theoretical account, the concept reflection-in-action becomes a conceptual veil that hides differences of different kinds. Apart from the obvious problems (for instance, the lack of conceptual coherence makes it hard to use Schön's account as a basis for theoretical analyses, for empirical research on professional practice, as well as for developing practice), over-usage of reflection also tends to diminish the importance of reflection in situations where it should be valued. In a way, reflection-in-action incorporates two different *modi*, two different kinds, in a human being's repertoire, perception and reflection, and collapses the difference between them. However, at the same time the difference between effective and critical is also collapsed, as well as the difference between following a practice and recreating a new practice (or a new way to view a practice).

Humans are able to be effective by perceiving the environment in a practice according to praxis, and therefore to work according to the lines of that practice, and, when well trained, without too much intellectual effort. However, we are also able to read and learn about that practice, to attach it to political ideas, to reflect on it and its ethical standards. We are able to reflect upon ourselves as parts of it and to challenge it. I think a fruitful way to see this is that the dressage on the subject's perception cannot be limitless. There is also an actual phenomenon that appears for the subject, whether that is a wooden chair or heavy social injustice. For example, the child who has been schooled in watching out for robbers

may tend to perceive a movement in a dark room as a robber. Still, if it is actually a curtain that gives rise to the movement in the room and not a robber, the child's perception will change: The movement will eventually be seen as a curtain instead of a robber. In educational matters, due to their complexity, more powerful resources are called for in order to establish a change in perspective. This is the environment for reflection (see for example Bengtsson, 1995).

There is always a need for reflection in its 'classical' sense; such as thinking about matters of life, of politics, of power, and of the social and instrumental environment that make people act and think in certain ways. (For example, as a suggestion and with pragmatic theory as a framework, Dewey (1911/1997, pp. 2-10) established in *How We Think* that reflection as a distinct order of thinking is systematic, is aimed at gaining knowledge, is critical and leads to action). Even if introspective movements are impossible from a Merleau-Ponty point of view, the resources that are offered to us as tools for self-subjection are indeed open for investigation, and therefore also for reflection. It is here that philosophers of education find their role; philosophers of education are not in the business of dressage, but in the business of creative and critical thinking. It is also here that reflection becomes urgent for teachers. In their work,

teachers certainly need to look at social and political life, steering mechanisms and strategies, and the consequences of certain political decisions. This kind of reflection is only indirectly related to actual teacher practice in the classroom, but has a large long term impact on that practice. From a Merleau-Ponty perspective, it is possible to argue that reflection in a broad sense can be used to restructure the resources that mediate perception of professional practice and that it is therefore a valuable tool for professional practitioners.

From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty (but also of classical thinkers and authors of the existential philosophical tradition, like Dostoyevsky, 1866/2008, or Camus, 1947/2001) one could claim that while becoming a skillful and effective practitioner is a question of training and disciplining perception, reflection, much like *bildung*, serves a different purpose. This purpose is not necessarily to incline humans to become more effective as legitimate participants in a social practice, but instead to become more critical, and consequently perhaps less effective. The training to becoming a skillful participant in a practice could very well contradict the reflective creed of a teacher, and even more, of a philosopher.

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