Unpacking John Dewey's Connection to Service-Learning

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Abstract

Service-learning is a pedagogy that integrates community service with academic study, reflection and analysis to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. Research on service-learning is on the increase throughout the globe since its emergence in the United States in the 1990s. However, the application of the pedagogy seems not to balance well its fundamental components of service, reflection and learning. Many students tend to care more about the service than about reflecting on it and viewing it as a learning experience. More needs to be done about the practice of service-learning while remaining faithful to Dewey's original ideas of experiential learning, and reflective thought and action, which form the bedrock for service-learning. This article critically examines the logical connection of Dewey's thoughts to service-learning with an aim of providing guidance to the pedagogy.

Keywords: Experiential learning, service-learning, experience, reflection, learning, continuity, interaction

1. Introduction

The theory of service-learning begins with the assumption that experience is the foundation for learning; and various forms of service activities are employed as the experiential basis for learning (Morton & Troppe, 1996:3). It reflects the belief that education must be linked to social responsibility and that learning must be meaningful and active (Kolb, 1984; Zentner, 2011). The theoretical and pedagogical roots of service-learning are founded on John Dewey's (1859 – 1952) theory of experience and education, including his ideas of democracy as a way of life, where everybody has to participate in order to bring democratic values to life, the idea of learning from experience, and linking the school to the community (Dewey, 1916/2011:196). Giles & Eyler (1994) maintain that many scholars look to Dewey as an influential theorist in laying the foundation for service-learning. Although Dewey did not coin the phrase "service-learning," he has historically been associated with the pedagogy and is often called the "father" of service-learning (Zentner 2011:10). Carver (2001) places service-learning on the experiential education continuum, where experience is comprised of sensory awareness, emotions, physical conditions and cognition. Carver names Dewey as an influential scholar in the field of experiential learning and directly links his theory to service-learning by explaining that, learning takes into consideration not only the curriculum of the course, but the learning acquired through the participation in activities. As a result, the student's community-service experience is central, serving as both a process and an outcome.

Dewey (1938) situates the principles of continuity and interaction as the starting point for his philosophy of experience and education, which have implications for service-learning as well. His principle of continuity implies that all experiences are carried forward and influence future experiences; every experience in one way or the other influences all potential future experiences. Alternatively, it could involve carrying on of a habit of action with readaptation to changing conditions necessary to keep it alive and growing (Dewey, 1916/2011:177). His principle of interaction, on the other hand, builds upon his concept of continuity and implies interaction between the learner and what is learned, and how past experience interacts with the present situation to create one's present experience. Dewey (1938) explains that the fundamental purpose of education is to prepare students to function productively as adults in a democratic society that could afford equal opportunity for all, regardless of social class, race, or gender.

He continues with his conviction that "democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience, one which is more widely accessible and enjoyed, than do non-democratic and anti-democratic forms of social life" (34). Furthermore, Dewey (1916/2011) connected the purpose of education to promoting democratic society when he argued that:"A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustments of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (56).He continues to posit that "the devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact" (50). To explain this assertion he identifies "voluntary disposition and interest" among the citizens as an important feature, which he argues, "can be created only by education" (50). The "deeper explanation," however, he finds in the essential quality of democracy as "primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity" (50).

For Dewey (1916/2011), education "to personal initiative and adaptability" is a precondition for the validity of democracy (50). Dewey's view on democracy corresponds with Putnam's (2000:336), who considers a "healthy democratic society" as one in which citizens are actively engaged in influencing the operations, decisions, and actions of their communities, as well as their local and national government beyond voting for representatives, resulting in a government and society that is strongly influenced by, and responsive to, the needs and opinions of its citizens.

Thus, for Dewey (1916/2011), learning becomes the accompaniment of continuous activities or occupations which have a social aim and which utilize the materials of typical social situations. For under such conditions, the school becomes itself a form of social life, a miniature community and one in close interaction with other modes of associated experience beyond school walls. All education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral. It forms a character which not only does the particular deed socially necessary, but also one which is interested in that continuous readjustment which is essential to growth. Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest (96).

Dewey (1934) views an experience as a product or by-product of continuous and cumulative interaction of an organic self with the world. It is the result, the sign and the reward of that interaction between organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication. The consequence of such interaction is development of intimate participants in the activities of the world to which they belong rather than unconcerned spectators, making knowledge a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective (Dewey, 1916/2011:184). Dewey emphasises the importance of connecting learning institutions with communities when he states that "the school must itself be a community life in all which that implies. Social perceptions and interests can be developed only in a genuinely social medium – one where there is give and take in the building up of a common experience." He adds that the learning in school should be continuous with that out of school so that there should be a free interplay between the two. To achieve this, Dewey (1916/2011) suggests that there should be numerous points of contact between the social interests of the school and the community. Since a human project cannot be achieved in isolation but demands collective responsibility, learning institutions should provide some opportunities that can enhance the connection between the academy and the community "to make school life more active, more full of immediate meaning, more connected with out-of-school experience" (Dewey, 1916/2011:173). Service-learning is one of the strategies that can enhance this connection. Dewey warns that isolation renders school knowledge inapplicable to life and so infertile in character leading to what he terms "academic exclusion." In which case, "social concern and understanding would be developed, but they would not be available beyond the school walls; they would not carry over" (ibid.195).

2. Service-learning as Founded on Dewey's Philosophy of Experience and Education

Dewey (1916/2011:25) declares that education is not an affair of "telling" and being told, but an active and constructive process. He insists that students must always be involved in "an actual empirical situation as the initiating phase of thought" (85).

Experience, according to Dewey, involves "trying to do something and having the thing perceptibly do something to one in return" (ibid.). This implies learning from experience. Experienced-based education has become widely accepted as a method of instruction and a central lifelong task essential for personal development and career success in colleges and universities (Kolb, 1984). According to the experiential-learning model, learning is defined as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it (Kolb, 1984:41). It can be viewed in terms of a learning model which "begins with an experience followed by reflection, discussion, analysis and evaluation of the experience. The assumption is that we seldom learn from the experience unless we assess the experience, assigning our own meaning in terms of our own goals, aims, ambitions and expectations" (Smith &McKitrick, 2010:58). From these processes come the insights, the discoveries, and understanding (Wight, 1970). Experiential education posits that learning is best done by direct participation in the activity (Dewey, 1916; 1938). It emphasizes the importance of learning through experience, learning both within and outside the classroom, and embedding learning in one's own goals, beliefs and expectations (Smith &McKitrick, 2010). The importance of experiential education lies in its ability to offer "increased opportunity for facilitating transformative learning, teaching on social responsibility, citizenship, public policy, and the social economy, and for upholding a commitment to the principles of mutuality and reciprocity between schools and communities" (ibid. 57-58). In relation to service-learning, the two principles involve a give and take approach so that there is a mutual benefit between the service-provider (students) and the recipient (community) so that stereotypes of "served and server" are broken or reduced (Sheffield, 2011:153).

As an active learning strategy, service-learning is framed by the experiential-learning theory inspired by Dewey and popularised by Kolb (1984) among other scholars. Kolb identifies John Dewey, Kurt Lew in and Jean Piaget as the founding fathers and developers of the concept of experiential learning. He acknowledges the work of Dewey as the most influential and best articulation of the guiding principles of programmes of experiential learning in higher education (ibid. 5). Kolb further identifies internships, field placements, work/study assignments, structured exercises and role plays, gaming simulations, and other forms of experience-based education as playing a large role in the curricula of undergraduate and professional programmes. Moore (2010) claims that nearly everyone cites John Dewey, from How we Think (1910) to Experience and Education (1938), drawing from the simple principle that "experience is the best teacher" as the philosophical and theoretical foundations to various approaches to experiential learning (3). In reference to this principle, Moore (2010) agrees with Kolb (1984). The former identifies service-learning, internship, community-based research and study abroad as some of the approaches to experiential learning. Moore (2010) explains that community-based research involves cooperation between faculty and students with local organisations to conduct research that meets the needs of communities. Conversely, study abroad programmes encourage students to take courses in regular classrooms while at the same period participating in a wide variety of what Moore (ibid: 6) calls "culturally challenging encounters" by living in new places and working with local organisations. However, Moore (2010) acknowledges service-learning as the most widely analysed form of experiential education in higher education.

At a time when education focused primarily on rote memorization and passive acquisition of knowledge, Dewey (1899/2010) advocated for a progressive education that emphasized the need to learn by doing. He believed students would become well-rounded, productive members of society through their natural inquisitiveness and experimentation through interaction with the world. Modern curricula should, therefore, incorporate learning by doing and relate teaching to everyday life so that learning becomes immediately relevant to students. Today's ever-changing world requires people with balanced views, capable of offering creative solutions to the diverse problems affecting society (Pacho, 2013:174). In his book, Experience and Education (1938), Dewey tried to resolve the conflict between what he termed "traditional" education and his "progressive" method. He delineated the trend for change in his approach to education. Thus: If one attempts to formulate the philosophy of education implicit in the practices of the new education, we may, I think, discover certain common principles. To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world. I take it that the fundamental unity of the newer philosophy is found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education (Dewey, 1938:19; 20).

However, Dewey was not blind to potential criticisms on the connection between experience and education. He cautioned that "education and experience cannot be directly equated to each other" because some experiences are not educative, such as an experience that prevents or discourages further learning (25). Dewey was careful to make clear what kinds of experiences were most valuable and useful since some experiences are merely passive affairs, pleasant or painful but not educative.

He maintained that "mere activity does not constitute experience" (Dewey, 1916/2011:78). For, instance, if a learner is learning, it does not imply that every experience that the learner encounters is relevant to the process of education. He illustrated this point using an example of a child and a flame. He argues that it is not educative experience when a child merely sticks his finger into a flame and burns his finger unless he realizes that touching the flame resulted in a burn and, moreover, formulates the general expectation that flames will produce burns if touched. Consequently, Dewey (1916/2011:78) asserts that "it is educative when the movement is connected with the pain which he undergoes in consequence. Henceforth the sticking of the finger into flame means a burn. Being burned is a mere physical change, like the burning of a stick of wood, if it is not perceived as a consequence of some other action." Therefore, learning from experience, which is fundamental to Dewey's philosophy of education, involves doing and then reflecting on what happened. The implication of Dewey's experiential learning model to education in general and service-learning in particular, is that it challenges experience-based educators to provide learners with quality experiences that will result in growth and creativity in their subsequent experiences. In addition, they should challenge students with questions which can inspire reflection, conceptualisation and ways of testing ideas in concrete situations (Kolb, 1984). However, it could be difficult for an educator to predetermine whether a particular experience will necessarily result into a learning outcome.

Dewey distinguishes between educative and mis-educative experiences. He claims that "sound educational experience involves, above all, continuity and interaction between the learner and what is learned" (Dewey, 1938:10). It is about being connected with the world in a meaningful manner and making sense of things (Oral, 2013:133). It could be judged by whether or not the individual grew, or would grow, intellectually and morally, whether the larger community benefited from the learning over the long haul, and whether the situation resulted in conditions leading to further growth, such as arousing curiosity and strengthening initiative, desire and purpose (Dewey, 1916/2011; 1938). He adds that a genuinely educative experience is an added power of subsequent direction or control in which a person's ability is increased in terms of increased perception of the connections and continuities of the activities in which we are engaged (Dewey, 1916/2011). Thus, education becomes what Dewey describes as a continuous "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (ibid. 45). Conversely, Dewey describes mis-educative experience as follows:

Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience. An experience may be immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude; this attitude then operates to modify the quality of subsequent experiences so as to prevent a person from getting out of them what they have to give. Again, experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked cumulatively to one another. Energy is then dissipated and a person becomes scatter- brained. Each experience may be lively, vivid, and "interesting," and yet their disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits. The consequence of formation of such habits is inability to control future experiences. They are then taken, either by way of enjoyment or of discontent and revolt, just as they come. Under such circumstances, it is idle to talk of self-control (Dewey, 1938:25-26).

Even though Dewey's distinction between educative and mis-educative experiences is important, he did not explain clearly what he meant by an "intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education." When is such relationship intimate? And when is it necessary? If there is an intimate and necessary relationship, why does he claim that some experiences are educative while others are not? In his analogy of the child and the flame, he argues that it is not educative experience when a child merely sticks his finger into a flame and burns his finger unless he realizes that touching the flame resulted in a burn and, moreover, formulates the general expectation that flames will produce burns if touched.

Yet if a child burns his finger on a flame for the first time and later realises that a flame burns and he ceases to bring his finger closer to a flame without necessarily making any intelligible connection between the flame and the pain, has the child not learnt anything? It is possible that a person can learn from any experience without necessary juggling with the connections of causes and effects. Thus, it would be an overstatement to hold that some experiences are mis-educative as Dewey claims since "people do learn from their experiences" in one way or the other (Kolb, 1984:6). In some cases, it may also be difficult to assess whether a person has learnt from a particular experience or not.

Moreover, Dewey seems to contradict himself by asserting that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education while maintaining that only some experiences are educative. To be specific, his statement could be rephrased to include the term "educative" so as to read: "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual [educative] experience and education." Although it could be rightly said that "experience is the best teacher" by means of enriching and reinforcing the learning process, it is not necessary that one must undergo all experiences while reflecting on them in order learn something. Experiential learning is seen as a means to revitalise the university curriculum and to cope with many of the changes facing higher education today. Kolb (1984:21) views experiential learning theory as a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour. He argues that experiential theory offers something more substantial and enduring, in the sense that: It offers the foundation for an approach to education and learning as a lifelong process that is soundly based in intellectual traditions of social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology. The experiential learning model pursues a framework for examining and strengthening the critical linkages among education, work, and personal development. It offers a system of competencies for describing job demands and corresponding educational objectives and emphasizes the critical linkages that can be developed between the classroom and the "real world" with experiential learning methods. It pictures the work place as a learning environment that can enhance and supplement formal education and can foster personal development through meaningful work and career-development opportunities. And it stresses the role of formal education in lifelong learning and the development of individuals to their full potential as citizens, family members, and human beings (Kolb, 1984:3-4).

Despite its growth and acceptance as a method of instruction, particularly, in higher education, experiential learning has its criticisms. Some view it as gimmicky and faddish, more concerned with technique and process than content and substance, and often appearing too thoroughly pragmatic for the academic mind, dangerously associated with the disturbing anti-intellectual and vocation list trends (Kolb, 1984:3). In addition, too much emphasis on practical activities can lead to lack of reflective experience; hence, there is a need to strike a balance between theory and practice through enhanced reflection and critical and creative thinking. This balance is important given that many contemporary systems of education are oriented towards equipping students with practical skills but do not allow students' critical and creative abilities to function appropriately (Pacho, 2013).

3. Reflective Practice in Service-learning as Rooted in Dewey

Although it is problematic to define reflection, the following views are relevant to service-learning pedagogy. According to Schön (1983), reflective practice refers to the capacity to reflect on an action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning. Schön's view accords with Hatcher & Bringle's (1997:153) definition of reflection as the "intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives." Blanchard (2014) describes reflection as a tool of service-learning that deliberately incorporates creative and critical thinking by the student in an effort to understand and evaluate what they did, what they learned, how it affected them personally, and how their services affected society on a broader scale. Parrillo (1994) argues that reflection is critical to the service-learning pedagogy since it is the process through which the true learning takes place. It is considered one of the core components of service-learning that connects the service and the learning and distinguishes it from other community-based experiences. A number of authors stress the importance of reflection as the fundamental link between service and learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Jacoby & Associates; 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Howard, 2001; Sheffield, 2011).

The foundation for reflective practice in service-learning was laid by Dewey, who valued highly the practice of reflection in relation to learning. He claims that reflective thought alone is truly educative (Dewey, 1910:2). He emphasises that "information severed from thoughtful action is dead, a mind-crushing load. Since it simulates knowledge and thereby develops the poison of conceit, it is a most powerful obstacle to further growth in the grace of intelligence" (Dewey, 2011:85).

He distinguishes reflective thought from a loose conception of thinking, which signifies everything that is "in our heads" or that "goes through our minds" such as idle fancy, trivial recollection, daydreaming, or flitting impression. In many of his works, Dewey (1910; 1916; 1938) presented his conceptions of reflective thought and action by focusing on the interaction between thought and experience (Miettinen, 2000;Eyler& Giles, 1999). Dewey underscored the necessity of reflection in education to improve the process of learning. He described reflection as an intentional endeavour to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result (in Carter, 1999). He further argues that: "Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence – a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors. The successive portions of the reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another; they do not come and go in a medley. Each phase is a step from something to something technically speaking – it is a term of thought. Each term leaves a deposit which is utilized in the next term. The stream or flow becomes a train, chain, or thread" (Dewey, 1910:2-3). Consequently, reflective thought comprises "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (ibid: 6).From the above perspective, reflection gives meaning to Dewey's conception of education as "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 1916/2011:45).He views experience not as a rigid and closed thing but as something that is vital, and hence growing (Dewey, 1910:156).

The role of reflection in learning from experience has been made explicit in Dewey's (1933:78) assertion that "we do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience." He clarifies this statement when he argues that to "learn from experience" is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying; an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instruction - discovery of the connection of things (Dewey, 1916/2011:78).Dewey considers learning "as an active process of grappling with conditions and problems in the world; constructing and testing solutions; and interacting with others to make sense and make progress" (Moore, 2010:3). Dewey's idea of connection in his reflective thought and action also links well with Freire's (1970/1993:73) critical thinking. Freire describes critical thinking as: Thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them– thinking which perceives reality as a process, as transformation, rather than a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, [on] behalf of the continuing humanization of men. Thinking begins in what Dewey (1910:11) refers to as "a forked-road situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives." He continues to explain that "as long as our activity glides smoothly along from one thing to another, or as long as we permit our imagination to entertain fancies at pleasure, there is no call for reflection." Miettinen (2000:66) concurs with Dewey's position by asserting that "routinized ways of doing things are mostly accomplished without reflection." Dewey (1916/2011) criticises routine activity when he argues that routine habits are unthinking habits which are opposed to the conclusions of conscious deliberation and decision. Difficulty or obstruction in the way of reaching a belief brings us, however, to a pause. In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another (Dewey, 1910:11).

The above point can be illustrated by the following case of Miguel who was pushed into reflection after encountering a crisis in his marriage (Oral, 2013: 140-141). At the beginning, Miguel feels content and his life makes sense. He is happily married; he has a secure job that pays the mortgage and supports his children's education; he has a home he returns to happily every evening; he loves his wife; he has his buddies he hangs out with every once in a while; he is physically okay; and he has plans for summer. Life is good and his sense of what his life is all about and where he is headed is settled. At this phase, there is "no call for reflection" since everything seems to run smoothly (Dewey, 1910:11). Then something drastic happens to Miguel. One morning, his wife, the mother of his children and the person he had shared sixteen years of his life with, breaks the news that she is lesbian and that she is going to leave him for Tracy. This would likely create a dramatic disruption in his experience. The situation with its taken-for-granted meanings and values no longer makes sense and becomes problematic. At this phase, there is a call for reflection since a situation of difficulty, confusion, or doubt has been created (Dewey, 1910).

A deluge of overwhelming questions overtakes his entire being: "I have been married to a gay person all this time? What does that tell me about who I am? What is the meaning of all this? How will this impact my life and my children's lives? What is the meaning of my marriage? Why was I attracted to a gay person in the first place? Am I gay as well? This is not making any sense. What am I going to do? How am I going to explain all of this to my kids? How will they react?"(Oral, 2013:141). How is Miguel supposed to respond to such a situation, in which his whole world turns upside down and the old ways of doing things, his old habits, are no longer helpful in understanding the new situation?

Oral (2013) suggests that Miguel requires a new understanding, a new perspective, and a novel take on things. He needs to take a step back and reflect on the situation. He is compelled to reflect in ways that attempt to restore the equilibrium, to return the state of well-being to his life again so that the world makes sense again and he feels he is part of it in an integral way. He should accept that the old equilibrium is gone and it is not coming back. A new equilibrium has to emerge, one that is more in line with the transformed situation. He needs to revise his old ways and be compelled to change his perspective, his interpretation of the facts to establish a new equilibrium, a better one, a more encompassing, a more caring, a more understanding, a more flexible, a more open-minded equilibrium that restores a sense of being "at home with the world"(Oral, 2013:141). When this takes place, Miguel will settle into a more expanded sense of himself and the world.

In light of the above illustration, the origin of thinking, according to Dewey (1910) is some perplexity, confusion, or doubt and not a case of spontaneous combustion; it does not occur just on "general principles" (12). There is something specific which occasions and evokes it. For Dewey, given a difficulty, the next step is suggestion of some way out – the formation of some tentative plan or project, the entertaining of some theory which will account for the peculiarities in question, the consideration of some solution for the problem. Therefore, a demand for the solution of a perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection(Dewey 1910, 11). Where there is no question of a problem to be solved or a difficulty to be surmounted, the course of suggestions flows on at random. But a question to be answered, an ambiguity to be resolved, sets up an end and holds the current of ideas to a definite channel. Every suggested conclusion is tested by its reference to this regulating end, by its pertinence to the problem at hand. This need of straightening out a perplexity also controls the kind of inquiry undertaken, so that "the problem fixes the end of thought and the end controls the process of thinking" (ibid. 11; 12). Dewey (1925/1929), thus, distinguishes between a primary and a secondary or reflective experience. The primary experience is composed of material interaction with the physical and social environment; it sets the problems and furnishes the first data of the reflection which constructs the secondary experience. In contrast, the secondary experience is reflective and makes the environment the object of reflection and knowledge; the failure and uncertainty of the primary experience gives rise to reflective thought and learning (Miettinen, 2000). For Dewey (1916/2011:90), "the important thing is that thinking is the method of an educative experience." He identifies five key features of reflective thought and action in which the essentials of method are identical with the essentials of reflection: (1) that the pupil have a genuine situation of experience - that there be a continuous activity in which he or she is interested for its own sake; (2) that a genuine problem develop within this situation as a stimulus to thought; (3) that the pupil possess the information and make the observations needed to deal with it; (4) that suggested solutions occur to him or her which he or she shall be responsible for developing in an orderly way; and (5) that he or she have opportunity and occasion to test his or her ideas by application, to make their meaning clear and to discover for himself or herself their validity (Dewey, 1916/2011:90-91).

Thinking, in the Deweyan sense, as described above, starts from doubt or uncertainty which "marks an inquiring, hunting, searching attitude, instead of one of mastery and possession; through its critical process true knowledge is revised and extended, and our convictions as to the state of things reorganized" (Dewey, 1916/2011:62). Continuous search from uncertainty and doubt to understanding to new source of confusion and doubt, is repeated so that knowledge and understanding are under continuous construction as we increase our experience, knowledge base, and ideas about how old conceptions and new information fit together to explain the world. One, hence, moves from feeling, to observing, to thinking, to doing; the full cycle integrates the personal and the affective with the intellectual and academic. By honouring feelings first, the movement toward analytic thought may be enhanced for many students (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Dewey's use of the terms "reflection" and "thinking" interchangeably in his works, is sometimes confusing. At what time is he speaking of reflection and thinking respectively?

While reflection is a sub-set of thinking, and one may not easily separate reflection from thinking, it would be important for Dewey to be consistent in his use of these terms to avoid confusing his readers. Moreover, while Dewey insists on uncertainty, doubt, and perplexity or confusion as necessary conditions for reflection and learning from experience, one may not necessarily wait for such conditions to occur in order to start reflecting and to learn. If thinking is synonymous with reflection as Dewey posits, then it implies that we are reflecting all the time as long as we are alive and have reached some level of reason, because to think belongs to our nature as human beings. Nevertheless, one would agree with Dewey that a person is more likely to engage in a more rigorous reflective activity when one encounters a crisis or a condition of uncertainty, doubt or confusion, as one tries to find solutions and ways out of these situations. Therefore, Dewey's assertion that "we do not learn from experience but by reflecting on experience" is true to some extent since reflection enhances and strengthens the learning from experience. Yet, it is also possible to learn from an experience without necessary reflecting on it.

Secondly, Dewey's criticism on the roles of habits and routine in the learning process seems questionable and somehow contradictory. While at some point he disowns their roles in the learning process, they too are acquired over time through some level of reflection and experimentation which requires learning or training, experience, and practice. Former habits and ways of doing things can ensure some standards and can be foundational for future improvement and development since "we are what we repeatedly do; habit is the basis for acquiring key principles" (Pacho, 2013: xxi). Dewey himself underscores the significance of understanding the past to shape the future when he claims that "it is a part of wisdom to utilize the products of past history so far as they are of help for the future. Since they represent the results of prior experience, their value for future experience can, of course, be indefinitely great" (Dewey, 1916/2011:43). And for Freire (1970/1993:65), "looking at the past should only be a means of understanding clearly what and who people are, so that we can build the future more wisely."

It is important to recognize that we are connected to our past. However, if we are excessively conservative, we are unable to offer even provisional solutions to new problems and emerging challenges, because new problems and emerging challenges usually demand new approaches (Pacho, 2013). In a dynamic environment, holding on or clinging to past habits can be disastrous as they may not be relevant in dealing with new situations. When habits are not challenged or put into question, they are likely to hinder critical thinking and growth. Dewey's (1916/2011:177) ideas of reflective thought and action, and of carrying on of a habit of action with constant readaptation to changing conditions necessary to keep it alive and growing remains relevant for a transformational educational endeavour in a world that is constantly changing and where some people "prefer to cling to familiar structures and rules that give them security, and which they find easier, more comfortable and less challenging" (Pacho, 2013:161).

4. Conclusion

Advocates of service-learning emphasise purposeful and intentional reflection as the distinctive feature that links the service and the learning, and that distinguishes it from other forms of community-based service experiences. This can be traced to John Dewey's theory of experiential learning, and his ideas on reflective thought and action, which form the theoretical and pedagogical basis for service-learning. While service-learning pedagogy can be applied to diverse contexts and disciplines, its practitioners must remain faithful to its original ideas as stipulatedby Dewey in order for it to remain authentic. Dewey's experiential learning theory provides a model within which service-learning can operate. Although service-learning has gained broad support among many contemporary academics, there are some criticisms and challenges to the approach. Dewey himself acknowledges that "mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of 'Either-Ors,' between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities" (Dewey, 1938:17). Moore (2010), for instance questions whether experience is an appropriate source of learning, and, if it is, whether existing pedagogical methods realise its potential. Despite these criticisms, Dewey's concepts of progressive education; reflective thought and action; learning from experience; democratic approach to education; and linking the school to the community remain foundational to service-learning.

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