

Notions of ‘Experience’ in a high performing primary school: implications for practice, policy and research development.

Abstract

This article discusses one of the most pervasive and taken-for-granted concepts in professional practice - ‘experience’ - that we arguably all seek, enable others to develop, and use to make a case for hiring or firing employees with potential implications on the performance of educational organisations. Yet, it remains one of the most under-researched fields of study.

In response, the article develops a literature-based framework of ‘experience *in retrospect* and *in prospect*’ grounded on John Dewey’s theorisation of educational experience. These theoretical mechanisms are used retroductively to inform the analysis of case study data from a high performing primary school (Rising Star -RS) in a low performing local authority (WEB) in the North of England.

This study shows that ‘experience’ is (can be) understood and applied differently: as reliant on past (retrospect), future (prospect) learning, both or neither. In the case of RS, outstanding pupils’ outcomes can be linked to a matrix that combines both experience in prospect and in retrospect. This combination is represented by a ‘RS retrospection and prospection wheel’ made up of four core spokes (individual, collective, spatio-temporality and consequences) that are unified by a four-pronged disk/hub that arguably set RS as a collective auctor onto a counter-performativity trajectory of its own.

This study adds new insights to interview, induction and professional development processes with the potential to impact on students’ outcomes.

Key words: Experience; Prospection; Retrospection; Educational experience; Professional development; School leadership, Teachers.

Introduction

This article discusses ‘experience’ mainly in the context of educational learning and career development although the concept and the central argument made here can apply to various fields and sectors whether professional or not. The initial discussion develops two notions: experience in prospect and in retrospect. While ‘experience in prospect’ may seem like a contradiction to long held notion of experience as a prospection, the functional purpose of these labels, as discussed in subsequent sections, only help to organise the different experiential processes and activities that can no longer be understood homogenously. Recourse to Dewey’s (1997) conceptualisation of educational experience which arguably combines both experience in retrospect and prospect helps to theoretically frame the research and

envision different conceptual possibilities when experience in retrospect, for example, is privileged over experience in prospect or vice versa or when both are combined or excluded in our educational experience that we use to make a claim for learning, hiring, firing and inducting professionals. This framing helps to analyse data gathered from a case study of an over-performing primary school within a low-ranked local authority in the North of England. Given the intriguing performance of the school within its underperforming local context, the aim of the study, therefore, was to gather various individuals' perspectives on experience and how such views shaped professional behaviour and organisational decision-making and possibly influence overall improvement and effectiveness of the school.

Experience in retrospect: meaning, pervasiveness, and practical dis/advantages
Experience in retrospect refers to past accumulated knowledge, 'practical skill and expertise' (Hackney 1999: 720) that, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, results from contact with and observation of facts and events. This traditional conceptualisation of experience is pervasive and continues to dominate our lives in our homes, as school learners, as prospective employees, as researchers and especially as educational professionals, to name but a few.

In our homes, we encourage the acquisition of lifelong experiences of washing, cleaning and ironing to prepare children for independent adult life. At school age and particularly during the secondary school years, in England at least and perhaps in other parts of the world, two full weeks are usually set aside for students of a particular year group to immerse themselves in 'work experience' (Hatcher and Gallais 2008). When advertising and/or applying for a job vacancy, the requirement for experience and the need to demonstrate it is high in many fields, including education. Social research too would not be what it is today without people's experiences in retrospect, captured in its social, cultural, linguistic, psychological and embodied forms (Devine 2009), that become data upon which to develop theory and research reports that 'make (good leadership) practice available to a wider audience, providing the potential for systemic change' (Bush 2010: 267).

In educational workplaces, which is the focus of this research, the standardisation of professional development of teachers and school leaders evidenced through formal training and or professional placement, certification,

induction processes and evaluation through observation (Schleicher 2012) is often used to develop, assess as well as defend one's accumulated skills and expertise (experience in retrospect).

Although experience (in retrospect) points to human senses and, as such, can be traced back to humanity's very existence, the reliance on senses to account for experience (in retrospect) has fluctuated over time. Historically, human experience lost its novelty when scientific knowledge became the norm. The Heideggerian brand of phenomenology, however, recaptured the centrality of human subjects and shifted the focus onto human experience within spaces as the basis for conceptualising social reality (Spiegelberg 2012). One's experience of the world began then to matter, in contrast to pure science where physicists could, for example, describe the existence of a black hole without subjectively experiencing it. That is not to say that experience was not central to science. We cannot possibly talk about the supremacy of pure science over social sciences, had it not been experienced and/or continues to be felt/observed that way. Even if the focus had turned to machines and routines that subjects had to learn to work the machines or for the survival of organisational systems, the neglect of the *subject* was (is) still a reality that can be experienced.

Whether it is neglected or not, experience as an accumulated body of knowledge arising from previous contact with and observation of events has several advantages.

Advantages: As experience is archived into an evolving human history, it plays a crucial role in one's habitus, which is 'seen as the totality of general dispositions acquired through practical experience in the field' (Moi 1991: 1021 correctly interpreting Bourdieu 1984). The trials and errors of real-life situations (Yukl 2010) are said to generate mental maps or a repertoire of scripts that no longer need immediate analysis (Carraccio *et al.* 2008) and enable individuals and groups to make swift decisions (Sergiovanni 1985). Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006: 452) argue that 'the experience gained by employees determines the framework or mind-set from which the work is undertaken, and subsequently, the goals set (motivation) and the means, such as knowledge and skills, that are deployed to do the work'. These 'pre-perspective anticipations, the sort of practical inductions based on previous experiences' (Bourdieu 1994: 155) make 'people ready to play the game, equipped

with the habitus which enables them to know and recognise the immanent laws of the game, the stakes and so on' (Moi 1991: 1021).

In short, experience in retrospect arguably helps in familiarising with an aspect of (professional) life, building confidence, accumulating knowledge, acquiring skills and transferring/redeploying them; speaking with authority based on one's experience, developing policy based on 'what works', etcetera. It is hoped that with such 'experience' capital, individuals are able to redress, in the future, the ills of the past and then make repetition (of what works) the mother of all science.

A critique: However, it can also be argued that educational leaders and other stakeholders who place an emphasis on experience *in retrospect* are not necessarily keen on innovation. Instead, competency, at interviews for example, is assessed on the basis of pre-determined skills through the use of quantifiably demonstrable standards as is reported when appointing school leaders (Grummell *et al.* 2009). Yet, when planted within the décor of a neo-liberal culture of performativity, professionals' 'track record' or 'range of options suggested by previous experiences' (Bush 2010: 267), which becomes their passport to the next employment, may just be a polished historical account of what Perryman (2009) calls fabricated performance and, when misrecognised, arguably brings agents to a state where they 'are not entirely unaware of the truth of their practices, but act as if they must conceal it from themselves' (Thomson 2014: 91).

In addition, there is the reality that experience in retrospect gained through internship, for example, 'are structured by profound race and class inequalities' (Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah 2020); and particularly in the area of school leadership, it 'is unequally open to people' (Lumby 2013: 589) along the lines of race, gender, ability, geography etcetera. Hence, making experience *in retrospect* a prerequisite could (un)knowingly further compound systemic racial injustices, for example, perpetrated against some black ethnic minority teachers (Callender 2018; Elonga Mboyo 2017) and disadvantage non-White overseas-trained teachers (Miller 2019). For example, if a vacancy for headship/ principalship is ringfenced for those with experience in retrospect as deputy headteacher, as reported for example by Hayes (2005), that rules arguably out a segment of the workforce that, for gendered and racially motivated

reasons, are being held back from acquiring the deputy headship experience in retrospect to ever become headteacher.

Overall, experience *in retrospect* is normative and can give us a reflection-based perspective but it cannot teach us everything (Copland *et al.* 2002) as discussed below.

Experience in prospect: meaning, vision and future-looking

Experience in prospect is closely linked to the human subject as a qualitative capacity to innovate and effectively respond to the contingencies of multiple situations and act 'out of their routine as they are confronted by the non-predictable and the ambiguous' (Fillery-Travis and Robinson 2018: 845). By being reminded of the possibility to act 'out of [one's] routine' Fillery-Travis and Robinson are not necessarily neglecting the importance of knowledge and expertise built from experience in retrospect. Instead, they are recognising the nature of a different kind or notion of experience (in prospect) which, more than a human capacity to innovate, is also the creativity of action and what that creative action produces. This notion of experience is discernible not only for the retrospectively inexperienced child capable of creating new experiences as they play with paint (McCarthy and Wright 2004). It is also observable in teachers' professional development stages, for example, where a retrospectively experienced proficient teacher who, after years of application as a novice, an advanced beginner and a competent professional when mental store of repertoires begins to form, still, at a proficient stage, 'refines the totality of input acquired [*experience in retrospect*] during competence and works constantly, often experimenting to develop excellent outcomes' (Enow and Goodwyn 2018: 127).

There are reasons to reinforce this future-looking, creative, and experimentally riskier view of experience in prospect. Firstly, knowledge is not static. Instead, it is social, situated and distributed (Putman and Borko 2000). The non-repeatable and dynamic nature of context implies that innovation, instead of repetition, is the mother of science and the essence of experience. Despite various advances in studies around enhancing human memory, much of the knowledge of our experiences is lost in human unconsciousness (Baars and Franklin 2003). It has also been argued that if humans are not fabulating to compensate for forgetfulness and unreliable memory, they often rely on luck to recall/retrieve their experience (Paley 2014) in retrospect. This is not to

say that practice/experience and research evidence based on one's recollection and meaning making of past experiences is irrelevant. Instead, it calls for the need to view it within a bigger relational construction of narratives that can be contradicted, reviewed, refined, and adapted. In an effort to explicate Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, Paley (2014) offers two understandings of experience: as observable events (Erfahrung) and as a subjective stream (Erlebnis). Paley's (2014: 1522) reading of Heidegger is that experience as a subjective stream does not exist, as his anti-Cartesian stance does not see the subject 'as an entity which has subjective experience, but which is still capable of involvement in the world'.

Whether one agrees with this view about experience or not, the idea that an experience of activities, such as journalistic reporting, teaching, learning and leadership, can be exclusively predicated to a private subject is questionable. According to Keller (1999: 1), Heidegger 'rejects the notion of private experience'. Decentring experience on single subjects has seen an emphasis, especially in research where, for example, a study about the experience of headship has required the inclusion of research participants who are not headteachers in order to triangulate experiences and validate research claims (ex. Day *et al.* 2001: 20).

Experience in prospect's reliance on innovation is particularly vital in complex self-organising systems (Doll 2008) where 'some events...are unknowable until they occur and may indeed be unknowable in advance (Schneider and Somers 2006: 354, citing Eve, Horsfall and Lee 1997). In this worldview, it is counterproductive to constantly replicate past experiences in retrospect. Whether retrospectively experienced or not, it becomes necessary to experience the world as on-going flow of creation and discovery, authoring and interpretation (Spillane and Lee 2014: 437). This arguably requires sense-making that would generate 'perspectives [that] are built over time through self-reflection' (Irvine and Brundrett 2019) and capable of giving 'access to thoughts and theories that are beyond the scope of first-hand experience [in retrospect]' (Buchmann and Schwille 1983: 30). That said, an overreliance on constant creativity of thought, actions and experiences on the ground that the world is an unknowable non-repeatable self-organising space can make us blind to 'the value of history [*experience in retrospect*] as an essential professional resource' (Gunter and Thomson 2010: 204).

It is worth noting overall that both notions of experience in retrospect and in prospect have advantages and disadvantages. They are, on the one hand, real in that educational learning and professional processes can be rightly or wrongly linked to specific activities (e.g: certification prior to teaching versus CPD as on-the-job-learning...) and status (newly qualified professional versus one with many years in the profession) that can positively or negatively impact on learning, profession and organisational outcomes. On the other hand, these processes are dynamic in the sense that reified on-the-job educational learning activities that may seem to generate prospective experience at one point, as opposed to teachers' and educational leaders' certification at another point, can become experience in retrospect with time and depending on the nature of on-the-job training. The dynamic nature emerges from the complex patterns of behaviour deployed in various (reified) situations (whether it is about a teacher or school leader certified training programme or on-the-job-learning) in order generate a given notion of experience, learning, knowledge or expertise. It is, therefore, necessary at this juncture to discuss Dewey's (1997) view of educational experience in order to ground the foregoing discussion and theoretically frame various notions (or natures of patterns of behaviours) of experience in retrospect and in prospect to inform data analysis.

Theoretical framework

A monolithic notion of experience is challenged by Dewey (1997: 25) when he says that not 'all experiences are genuinely or equally educative'. Put in another way bearing the above discussion in mind, it could be argued that an overreliance on one notion of experience at the expense of another is not educative. John Dewey goes on to distinguish traditional from progressive education which can generate different kinds of experiences. Traditional education, that arguably can generate experience in retrospect, is vital as it 'may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction' although, alone, it potentially 'narrows the field of further experience (in prospect) (Dewey 1997: 28) that is represented by the progressive education. While recognising the need to learn from traditional and progressive education and the respective experiences (in retrospect and in prospect) that they generate, Dewey (1997) is fully aware of the danger of privileging one over the other.

This theoretical grounding clears the way for postulating further theoretical mechanisms or possibilities for understanding experience in retrospect and in prospect (see figure 1). Figure 1 captures various possible orientations regarding how experience in retrospect and in prospect can be exclusively or simultaneously valued (and enacted or not). Quadrant 2 captures situations when both experience in retrospect and in prospect are devalued and depleted and non-existent. In contrast, quadrants 1 exclusively privileges experience in retrospect while quadrant 3 favours experience in prospect. Quadrant 4, to use Dewey's (1997) terminologies, combines both traditional and progressive education where experience in retrospect generates further experience in prospect.

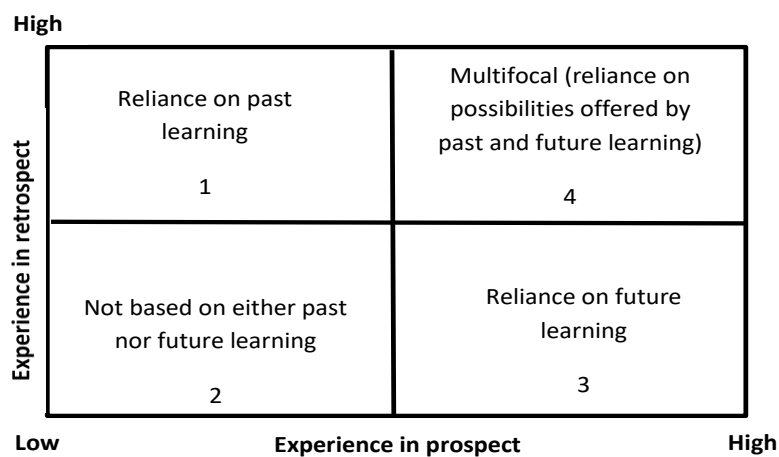


Figure 1 Retrospect and prospect intersection

Having, in the previous section, discussed the 'orthodoxy of known patterns of working' represented by experience in retrospect (quadrant 1), 'change as orthodoxy' seen through experience in prospect (quadrant 3) and it is possible to extrapolate these two to imagine a combination of experience in retrospect and prospect (quadrant 4). What is, however, less clear to situate is a scenario where experience is emptied of its retrospective and prospective dimensions (quadrant 2). It may seem theoretically and practically unimaginable, although not impossible, that an educational organisation would be so immersed in the ongoing practice that it would not be predisposed to explore new possibilities and develop new experiences or that, if it did, such experiences would automatically be subsumed into a state of non-recollection and contradict Yukl (2010) assertion that prior knowledge serves as mental maps for new experiences. Hence, it is ontologically and epistemologically near to impossible to find oneself in quadrant 2 although some meditative religious/ mystical experiences

are said to enable some to reach the 'bottomless ground of being' *or knowing* (my italics) (Shaft 1995: 233) where experience in prospect and retrospect would be conflated in the ever-present-now. There are traces of this conflated ontology et epistemology of 'experience' reflected through school activities such as 'mindfulness' aimed at helping staff and students to cope with the stresses of modern day living.

These explanatory mechanisms offer, more than anything, different ontological states of mind of professionals and institutions that can play out in various educational processes. These states of mind and their corresponding processes can be researched differently as will be underscored when discussing this study's findings. However, the approach taken here is described below.

Methodology and Context

Research design: This small-scale qualitative research adopted a retroductive design informed by case study data. The retroductive design involved:

'the identification of a phenomenon, to theoretically postulate mechanisms or structures that are offered as explanatory candidates accounting for the phenomena being the way they are, and exercising the powers, effects and tendencies that they exhibit to examining and adjudicating_between these competing theoretical explanations in the light of empirical evidence' (Reed 2009: 438)

To explain how the above quotation sums up the research design, the reader is invited to view 'experience' as the phenomenon that has been arguably identified as pervasive and elected as a topic of research for this article. Experience in retrospect and in prospect grounded in John Dewey's understanding of educational experience as fully framed in figure 1 are then postulated as mechanisms that help to explain the nature(s) of the phenomenon (experience) at play. The case study, as described below, therefore helps to generate empirical data in order to establish the nature of experience at RS (see figures 2 and 3) and further understand the different complex processes that play out when RS attempts to churn out its established nature of experience (see figure 4).

Research approach and selection of case: The case study approach (Bassey 2012) followed the purposive selection of a high-performing primary school (Rising Star - RS) that the researcher made sure participants were aware of this primary intriguing motive. RS had moved from good to securing an 'outstanding' Ofsted report

in all areas (achievement of pupils, quality of teaching, behaviour and safety of pupils, and leadership and management) in their most recent inspection in 2014 just four years before this research was carried out. The school is located in an underperforming local authority (WEB) in the North of England; a region with the lowest educational inequalities and outcomes compared to the rest of the country (Harris and Jones 2018). WEB is ranked among the bottom 10 out of 146 local authorities with 40 percent or so children achieving expected standards for reading, writing and maths against a national average of 65 percent. Yet, more than 80 percent of children at RS managed to achieve their expected standards in the most recent school report at the time this research was carried out. Despite the figures being below national average, RS has a sizeable mix of pupil premium, school action, school action plus, educational needs statemented, and ethnic minority pupil population.

Data collection method(s) to meet research aims: Researching a taken-for-granted phenomenon in a hectic school working environment meant that an asynchronous form of communication had to be adopted for its flexibility despite the potential for a long data collection process (Story and Perks 2014). From January to March 2018, staff at RS were sent a questionnaire that first explained what the study was about and its practice value. It guaranteed confidentiality and made clear that by completing the questionnaire, each potential respondent was freely consenting to take part in the study. Although not all staff took part, eleven respondents ranging from head, deputy head, teachers, support and admin staff anonymously provided written responses that were deemed enough to provide a sense of what was going on the school. Although it is crucial to specify the gender, race, years in the profession and qualification status characteristics of research participants in order to develop a clear picture when linking context to data findings, a deliberate decision was made not to include these details in this initial exploratory study. The main reason for that is to avoid an engravement of data findings to reified categories as the emphasis shifts on establishing the ontological state of mind of what experience means and the corresponding educational processes involved.

Beyond the basic information about one's role in the school, the questionnaire asked respondents to provide a Likert scale score (from least to most), about how felt RS valued experience in getting and keeping their positions at the school. The researcher refrained from explaining how 'experience' might be conceptualised (see

figure 1) and instead relied on participants' responses to the second question asking them to justify the score entered. This way, the researcher was able to interpret the data and establish the emergent notion of experience at RS and effectively meet the first research objective.

Once it has been possible to determine RS's notion of experience (see figure 1), the next questions that prompted participants to share how experience is assessed and developed at RS helped to generate data for the second research objective which was to explore the different dynamics involved in promoting the emerging notion of experience. It is important to note that given the diversity of participants' leadership, teaching and administrative roles, this case study offers triangulated narratives of experiences at RS and should interest all especially those seeking to transform whole school educational experiences.

Data analysis: The ordinal Likert scale scores on how each research participant thought RS valued experience were converted into a chart to build a single case profile of the school. This overall picture was necessary but only told half the story. Explanatory qualitative data qualifying each score were essential in determining RS's emergent notion(s) of experience within the broader theoretical framework developed for this study. After this initial data analysis stage came thematic and content analysis processes (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Riesman 2008) to gain a more complex context specific assessment and development of RS's emergent overall notion of experience.

Findings and discussion

Figure 2, therefore, captures the entire body of RS staff scores to the value of experience at RS. Except for 4 respondents who neither most-valued nor least-valued it, the rest (7 out of 11) gave definitive scores that least valued experience. When analysed in relation to their supporting qualifying responses (see sample extracts below), it became apparent that they understood experience as primarily *in retrospect* that they thought was least valued at RS.

Having many years of experience does not guarantee good teaching – sometimes it embeds poor practice (headteacher). I got my job without much experience (school assistant).

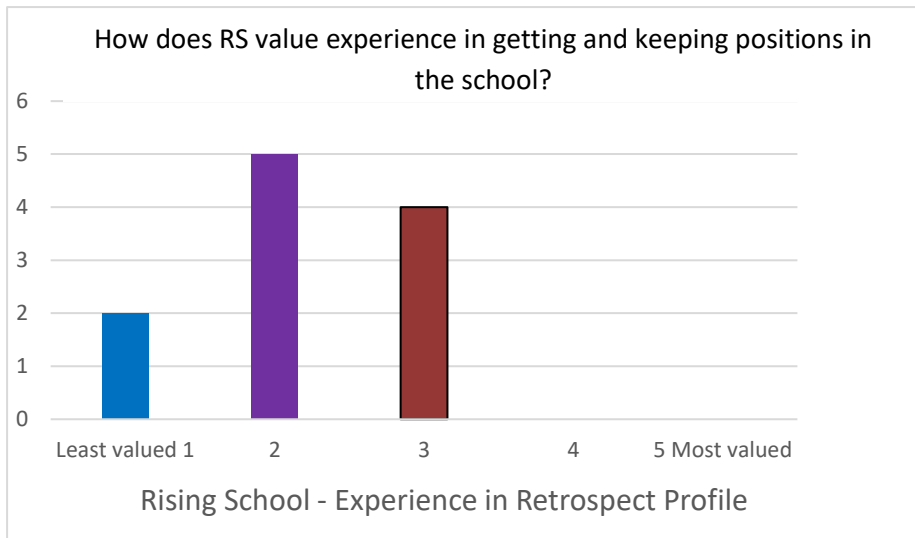


Figure 2 RS experience in retrospect

For illustrative purposes, the same data in figure 2 can be reinterpreted and presented in the opposite direction as the following figure 3 shows. Using the literature and theoretical framework to interpret the supporting descriptive data, it became more logical to argue that these participants still valued ‘experience’ but in prospect (see figure 3) as theoretically framed here.

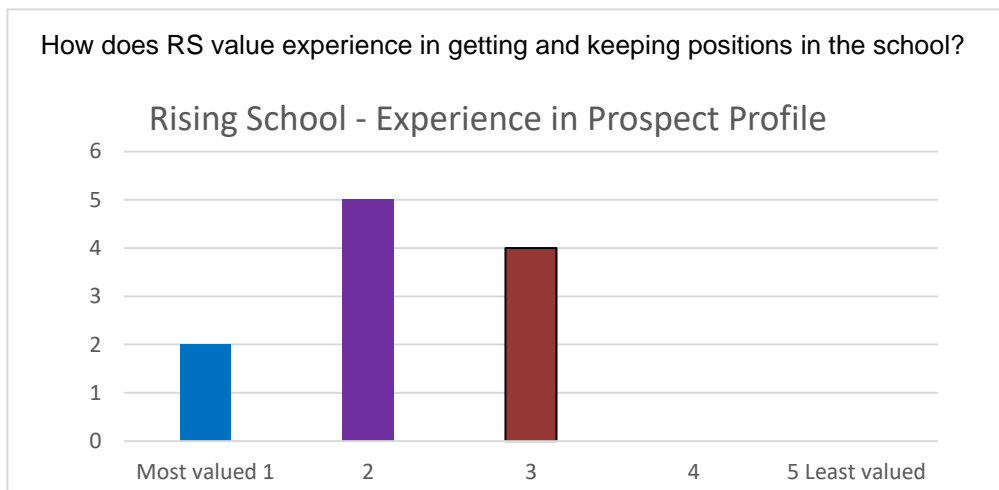


Figure 3 RS experience in prospect

Despite the recognition that experience in retrospect ‘...sometimes [...] embeds poor practice’ in school contexts that are not identical (Schneider and Sommers 2006) with the potential risk of fabricated performance (Perryman 2009), it is, nevertheless, not disvalued and the following extract is indicative of RS’s drive to tap into experience in retrospect:

Experience as in the number of years, context of school at which one worked, and level of responsibility can be beneficial (deputy headteacher); You need a fair amount of experience to be good (teacher).

While recognising that experience in retrospect can perpetuate 'rote habits' (Glassman 2001: 8) reflected in '...years of experience...does not guarantee good teaching - sometimes embeds poor practice', the above collection of extracts reinforces the importance of prior understanding of a given role (experience in retrospect) in providing some knowledge of the game (Bourdieu 1994) and navigating frameworks (Heijde and Van Der Heijden 2006). However, experience in retrospect is deemed not to be enough at RS as it seeks to combine both experience in retrospect and in prospect and be firmly rooted in quadrant 4 (see fig 1):

Some experience is required but the rest is gathered on the job (teacher/assistant headteacher).

While recognising 'experience in retrospect' expressed in the above extract more generally as 'some experience', 'the rest' - meaning experience in prospect as theorised here - is generated in the carrying out of one's administrative, teaching and leadership roles.

Having established that RS values automatic skills built from prior experience (in retrospect) and the creativity of further experiences (in prospect) (Dewey 1997), it is important to explore what it means for RS to take a multifocal approach to experience. The data which sought to get participants to describe and explain how they assess and develop experience was then used to put propose what is essentially a professional develop approach that administrative staff, teachers and those in leadership positions at RS are inducted into in order to build multifocal educational experiences. It is also important to bear in mind that the participants did not, at this point, have knowledge of the above findings. Such knowledge followed by focus group and/ or observations are viable methodological options that, although not used in this research, could be pursued by other researchers in an effort to improve our understanding of this study's first and second research objectives. That said, figure 4 is the researcher's plausible attempt to assemble participants' brief responses to the questionnaire and build a hopefully coherent organisational approach to what it means to embrace a multifocal approach to developing experience (in retrospect and in prospect) at RS. The RS retrospection-prospection wheel is made up of four core

spokes (echoing the four domains of teaching and learning - see Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002) that are unified by a four-pronged disk or hub that helps to move the spokes and the wheel forward.

Spoke 1: Individual level

What stood out from the data and could account for the collective success of RS's development of multifocal re-pro wheel was its attention to individual administrative, teaching and leadership trajectories of its members both in terms of their accumulated patterns of working (experience in retrospect) and their capacity for creative action (experience in prospect). There was emphasis placed on the fact that:

You need some experience to be good, some experience is required (teacher); experience as in the number of years, context of the school worked and level of responsibility can be beneficial (deputy headteacher); and I assess experience by looking at prior knowledge, understanding of role, outcomes and procedures (headteacher).

The above attention to experience in retrospect is also matched with the privileging of prospective experience at the individual:

I always start by checking out the personal qualities, values and vision they hold and then train them to our standards (headteacher); In the role of a teacher, the personal traits of a person are equally/if not more important than experience (teacher).

Spoke 2: Collective level

The balancing act of experience in retrospect and in prospect may not be easy and further research is needed to examine how this is handled from when putting out a job advert, shortlisting candidates, interviews, induction and other professional development stages. What is however clear, from this study, is that attention to or awareness of these two dynamics are only the starting point of a multifocal approach to experience in retrospect and in prospect:

...plan each individual pathway based on their starting point (headteacher).

It also became apparent that focusing only on what can be accounted for at the individual level would be perpetuating the falsehood of the singularity of experience. The privatisation of experience (Keller 1999: 1) at the individual level had to be developed further through collective 'patterns of participation in professional

development activities' (Borko 2004: 8). This was clearly articulated by participants in this study as the following representative extract shows:

School looks at the person then offers a variety of opportunity (teacher).

A significant feature of RS's retrospection-prospection wheel for churning both experience in retrospect and in prospect is opportunity, according to participants, to:

Try; experience new challenges; experiment, take risks and try new things (all participants).

The collective level was not only geared towards the development of experience in prospect since participants also recognised the benefits of prior learning. Further research is needed here again to determine genuine (coaching, mentorship, and other professional development provisions) opportunities for multifocal experience in retrospect and in prospect to emerge through experimentation and taking of risks without the fabricating of performance (Perryman 2009) for whatever (obscure) reasons. However, what is clear from RS's perspective is that this collective level of generating retrospection-prospection experience is a negotiated process of mutual validation through observations of others, sharing of good practice, training, collaborative work and feedback as the following extracts show:

We start at the beginning by taking small steps to ensure that outstanding practice and training is embedded. As a team, we identify and differentiate between outstanding and bad practices. Implement the outstanding and reflect on why practices are not good for our roles or school (school administrator).

To reiterate a point that has already been made, what is crucial to retain here is that experience as an individual enterprise (spoke 1) is inextricably tied to school organisational dialogical interactions (Petta *et al.* 2019) that go on in spoke 2.

Spoke 3: Spatio-temporality

Spatio-temporality is about asking what sort of conceptualisation of time and space (spatio-temporality) has RS become that allows it to engage with the individual as well as collective levels in order to generate a multifocal notion of experience. Here, the participants projected a sense that RS, as a learning space, was uniquely transformative:

We endeavour to offer a unique experience here that our staff would not have anywhere else (deputy headteacher). I look at [...], then train them to our standards (headteacher).

The uniqueness of RS as a space, that reportedly would not be found anywhere else, could be defined by the degree of support available:

Staff support one another (teacher).

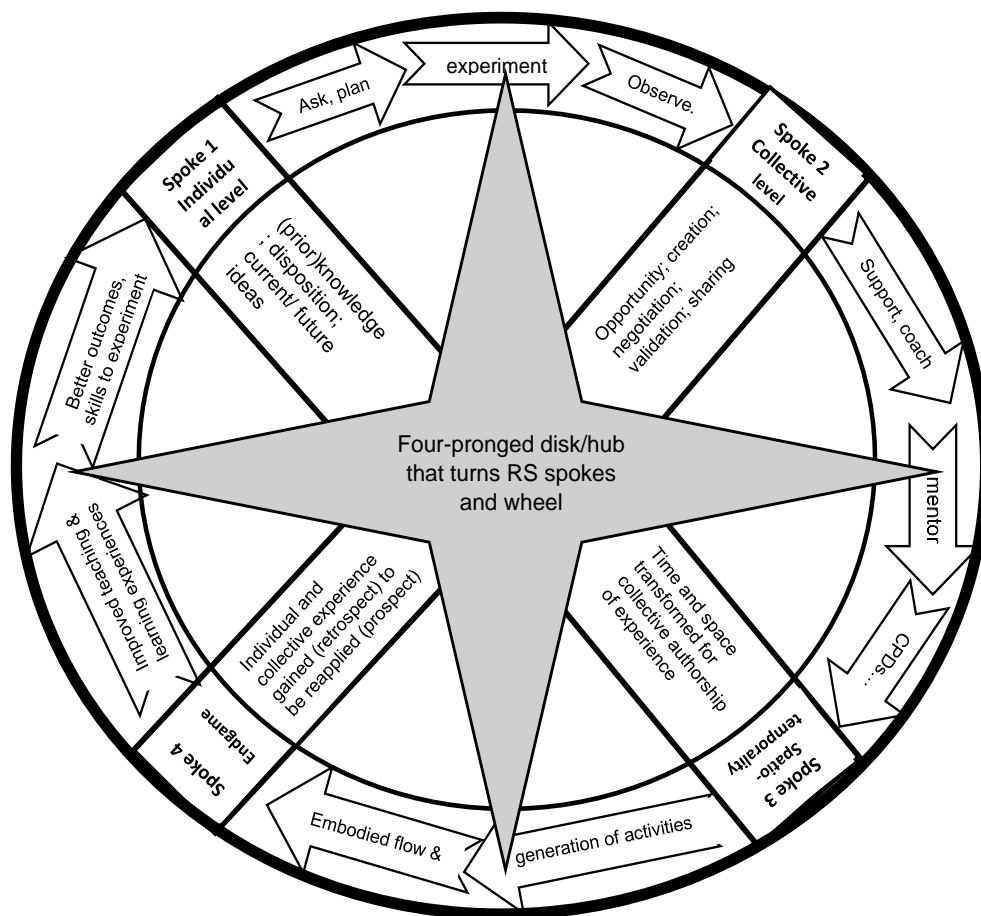


Figure 4 The RS retrospection-prospection wheel

As already shown when discussing spoke 2, it is possible to further qualify the nature of this support being about providing the space to take risks and experiment old and new ideas. This emerging sense of RS's spatial identity is coupled with a sense of the time (*durée*) it takes in the unfolding of administrative, teaching and leadership activities. While open to giant leaps of learning, RS begins by placing an emphasis on small steps that can be taken:

We start at the beginning by *taking small steps* to ensure that outstanding practice and training is embedded (school administrator).

Those small steps can only flourish when time is conceptualised differently as the unfolding of activities implied in the following extract:

Experience is developed over time and support (teacher). I once stopped everything else I had planned to focus on this one activity that I felt my students seemed to enjoy and learnt a lot from (teacher).

Although it has been argued that RS is in the multifocal quadrant 4 (see figure 1), its characterisation of time can also draw, although not exclusively, from quadrant 2 where, as suggested in the above extract, staff and students would get immersed in a productive activity here-and-now and effectively create a learning space that is not concerned with past and future. Here, time is a chain of embodied re-pro events. The sort of time that does not race people against a predetermined timescale to clock apportioned sets of activities regardless of the learning trajectories.

Spoke 4: Endgame

As well as establishing *what* goes on at the individual, collective and spatio-temporal levels in order to develop multifocal retrospection-prospection experiences at RS, it became increasingly pertinent to understand *why* these individual, collective and spatio-temporal processes were taking place. The responses captured in the extract below indicated a nuanced vision:

...We work as a team so that no one, students and teachers, is left behind (school administrator).

Here, school children as learners are inextricably linked to how much learning, and nature thereof, is experienced by administrative, teaching and leadership staff. This inclusive dimension that views professionals as learners (Shulman and Sherin 2004) in the same order as students begs the question about other possible forms of inclusivity and social justice (inequalities based on social class, race, gender, outcome) considerations that could be fostered in schools such as RS that are rooted in a multifocal approach to educational experience that leave no one behind. The term 'behind' should not be understood in the same way as 'past' as employed in this article when referring to past learning. Taking a multifocal approach to experience, past learning is part and parcel of RS's spatio-temporal embodied flow of activities. Not being left 'behind' in the above extract should therefore be understood as referring to the distance between the point at which individual members of RS are compared to

where RS as a collective auctor is and wants to be, its vision (Hallinger and Heck 2002). The vision or the endgame here is arguably the 'educatedness' of school children (Biesta 2017) through effective teaching and learning that is deemed high priority for most educational institutions (Day *et al.* 2011) as exemplified by outstanding results of RS which triggered the purposive selection of RS as a case study and communicated to participants on the onset of this research. However, that new experience, expertise and educatedness that is gained and archived is arguably useful only in so far as it leads individuals and institutions to new moments of experimentation and creation of experience in prospect. Hence, as shown in the cyclical figure 4, the endgame only represents another opportunity to generate new experiences.

Conclusion

Research findings summary: This study began by exploring what we mean by experience and lead to the proposing of two major notions of experience in retrospect and in prospect which when theoretically reframed offer four possibilities of conceptualising experience (see figure 1). Decoupling experience in retrospect and in prospect may seem artificial since the capacity for innovation, the creative action and the outcomes as well as the learning resulting from such a process are automatically archived as experience in retrospect as events unfold. That said, the analytical exercise has proven to be a viable research undertaking in order to grasp learning and professional processes that exclusively revolve around the 'orthodoxy of known patterns of working' (experience in retrospect), 'change as orthodoxy' (experience in prospect), both (multifocal) or none.

However, when specifically analysing numerical and supporting qualitative responses from RS case study, it can be argued that this highly successful school in a low performing locality was driven by a multifocal understanding of experience. To churn out such experience in retrospect and in prospect, RS seemed to, unknowingly or knowingly, rely on four interrelated dimensions or levels that are represented here by four spokes (see figure 4) which are set in motion by four-pronged sets of activities and results at each level. The interrelated dimensions begin with initial considerations at the individual level where prior learning and personal dispositions are assessed, teased out, and fostered through asking, planning, experimentation, observation and reflections. This, it is argued, must be seen in conjunction with the collective dimension

of experience where processes of validation, negotiation, opportunity creation, sharing of experiences are undertaken through various supportive mentoring, coaching and continuous professional development programmes. The generation and maturation of experience in retrospect and in prospect are anchored on the transformative nature of how space and time are conceptualised as embodied flow of activities. How well all these components are engaged with, it has been argued, correlatedly explains the endgame of success for all at RS. This whole process also implies that experience of this nature and the positive outcomes it produces for both individuals and educational organisations is rather a co-constructed reality.

Practice implications and recommendations: These theoretical mechanisms and findings could arguably be used to analyse and understand various processes of experience or expertise development ranging from how a teacher plans lessons, through how an institution frames its job advertising, interviewing and induction processes to how teachers and school leaders develop professionally in different educational settings. Limited space precludes the possibility of examining all the above areas. However, some simple questions suffice to underscore how this research might affect, for example, lesson planning and observation and shape the way forward for teachers and school leaders. Imagine the sort of expertise, experience or value being affirmed when a lesson observer asks pupils/ staff or self-reflect: (1) 'have you/ I always (been) taught like this' and/ or (2) 'what is the new in activity'? These questions arguably elicit the (in)consistency of past learning or experiences and possible future innovation and learning, or lack thereof. How these sorts of questions are asked, the rewards and sanctions put in place to discourage and encourage the resulting notions of experience matter and should be considered by education professionals and their institutions.

Policy implications and recommendations: A brief look at sample of the literature, internal policies and practices should, I hope, reveal that institutional education job advertising (Tes 2021) and interviewing (Gummell *et al.* 2009) processes, to name but a few, are phrased and framed in a way that leans heavily on requiring and assessing experience in retrospect to gain educational employment. The racial, gender and class inequalities involved in developing such notion experience combined by the realisation that RS's multifocal notion of experience is a relational process means that institutions should reevaluate their policies and build institutional

infrastructures similar to or different from that of RS (see figure 4) in order to develop multifocal experiences.

Research implications and recommendations: That said, these findings only point to the possibility for further methodological approaches in order to enrich the research claims made here and even provide alternative explanations. RS retrospection and prospection wheel (see figure 4) begs numerous questions about what exactly is involved when asking, planning, experimenting, observing, supporting through coaching, mentoring, CPDs... in ways that develops multifocal experiences. Different methodological approaches such as focus groups, (participants) observations and other designs could be deployed in order to not only establish other explanatory mechanisms when adopting a multifocal or other approach to experience, it could also shed more light on various curriculum, pedagogical, leadership and policy decisions that are made in classrooms, departments, schools within the education systems and beyond.

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