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Self-Reflexivity as an Ethical Instrument to Give Full Play to Our Explicit and Implicit Subjectivity as Qualitative Researchers

Lorena Cruz

National University of Cuyo, lorenacruzgarcette@gmail.com

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Abstract

Being a qualitative researcher involves, mainly, assuming the subjective dimension of the research process. This article reflects the process through which I am going through as a junior qualitative researcher within the educative field. If we are immersed in social or humanistic knowledge construction as researchers, we are part of a complex process of relations, we influence and we are influenced, as well. It is an ethical assumption which implies taking responsibility. In this article, I try to reveal how I dealt with my explicit and implicit subjectivity, developing self-reflexivity strategies that allowed me to expand the understanding of the phenomenon.

Keywords

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Self-Reflexivity as an Ethical Instrument to Give Full Play to Our Explicit and Implicit Subjectivity as Qualitative Researchers

Lorena Cruz

National University of Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina

Being a qualitative researcher involves, mainly, assuming the subjective dimension of the research process. This article reflects the process through which I am going through as a junior qualitative researcher within the educative field. If we are immersed in social or humanistic knowledge construction as researchers, we are part of a complex process of relations, we influence and we are influenced, as well. It is an ethical assumption which implies taking responsibility. In this article, I try to reveal how I dealt with my explicit and implicit subjectivity, developing self-reflexivity strategies that allowed me to expand the understanding of the phenomenon. Keywords: Self-Reflexivity, Implicit and Explicit Subjectivity, Qualitative Researcher

"Validity," "scientific knowledge," "objectivity," "relationship between the researcher and the object of study," "subjectivity," "epistemological vigilance," "quantitative or qualitative methods": they are all concepts that imply conflict and profound meanings that surround me as a junior qualitative researcher in an educational context. Although between them there is an intertwined connection, here I will focus on "subjectivity," or, more precisely, on my subjectivity as a researcher and how this subjectivity could affect the relationship with the object of study and knowledge construction.

Nowadays, and within the context of scientific research in social sciences or humanities, the concept of subjectivity is not something new and it does not have just one meaning.

In this paper, I will discuss two types of subjectivity that surfaced during my experience as a researcher. On the one hand, an explicit and conscious subjectivity arises and, on the other hand, an implicit and not so conscious one emerges.

The *explicit subjectivity* is that kind of subjectivity that we are conscious of and recognise it as such. It is possible to find it in our explicit decisions within the research design – decisions concerning the ontological, epistemological and methodological dimensions (Crotty, 2003), the conceptual framework (Maxwell, 1996).

Within the field of research, it is not unusual for researchers to recognise that they have their own framework through which they interact with reality and, in this case, with the object of study. Inside one symbolic system there are not only unique restrictions, but also unique possibilities. Each symbolic system not only reveals but it also hides certain aspects of reality. The way we select and what we select as researchers constitutes the comprehension we achieve. The meanings are part of the message. (Eisner, 1998)

One's observation is not neutral. Observation is an active interaction with reality. We never interact without our own perspectives, our own beliefs and assumptions.

It is impossible to deny our vision, our way of observing; it is impossible to delete our framework and observe with a neutral view. As Eisner (1998) affirmed, perception is not only a decoding process but also an encoding one.

Interaction reveals an active process between the object and the subject, and through this interaction, we construct our framework. If we realise that we are in constant interaction with reality, then our framework is in constant reconstruction. Our framework is not static and finished; it is in permanent movement, even though we are not always aware of this

movement. Moreover, our framework is constructed by the relationship between the local and nonlocal aspects of social organization (Erickson, 1986). The local aspects of social organization are those that are related to particular meanings, intertwined with cultural meanings (nonlocal aspects).

One's frame, and the way one interacts with the context is not simple. Our framework construction is complex because it is affected not only by conscious aspects but also by unconscious ones.

On the other hand, there is *implicit subjectivity* – that kind of subjectivity which is not conscious (Meek, 2003). At the same moment that our framework allows us to see some things, it denies others.

Sometimes, what we observe, how we observe and the decisions we make in the research process are not governed only by our explicit subjectivity, but also by our implicit subjectivity. Why do I observe what I observe and not something else? What lies behind these decisions? And, how could this dimension affect the research process?

The main objective of this paper is to share how I struggled with these and other questions concerning my implicit subjectivity, and how I dealt with it through my PhD thesis project. The fragments of the reflexivity of my own subjectivity as a qualitative researcher, attempt to approach the reader to a specific reality that is constantly facing challenges. The first challenge is to debate and justify our ontological, epistemological and methodological conceptions (Crotty, 2003); that is, the explicit subjectivity, the one that we are conscious as researchers. If we take responsibility for and are commit ourselves to the subject in question and to the process of knowledge construction, we have to go a bit further and challenge ourselves in that subjectivity that we are not totally conscious of, the implicit one, the one which appeals to our subconscious (Meek, 2003). Moreover, I will do my best to encourage junior researchers to reflect on their own implicit framework, a responsibility that we must take on from the beginning. As Meek highlights, many difficulties and blockages that we find while doing research take place because we are not listening to our unconscious dimension.

This implicit dimension of our subjectivity as researches is not always recognised and, what is even more dangerous, it is sometimes denied.

The relevance of this topic is not only to recognise the implicit dimension of our research decisions, but also to control them and to make them explicit. I assume it as an ethical action within the research process in social and humanistic sciences. It is the commitment that we have with our object of study and its context.

My Implicit Subjectivity within the Research Process

Although I will focus on my own reflections as a researcher within the process of the fieldwork, how they arise and how I cope with them, it is necessary to contextualize – for the reader, mainly – the whole process of the research project.

As it is mentioned above, this paper conveys my reflections during the process as a junior researcher in my own PhD thesis. In that research, I pretended to understand and interpret how the construction of university teacher knowledge in different knowledge fields is, and how their discipline framework affects this construction.

Concerning the methodological dimension, my project has a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007; Laverty, 2003). Within this approach, "to understand" and "to interpret" meanings are two actions highly important. From a hermeneutic perspective, it is not possible to understand without an interpretation, as they are both bound together (Gadamer, 1998). This interpretation is being assumed as an evolving process, a process of co-creation between the researcher and the participants (Gadamer). Interpretation implies interaction.

Moreover, from this perspective, it is demanded from the researcher to be self-reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and constantly open to experience (van Manen, 1997). This involves reflection actions and alertness during the whole process of research (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011; Breuer & Roth, 2003; Declan, 2014; Sisto, 2008). As Gadamer (1998) affirmed: the production of meaning occurs through a circle of reading, reflective writing and interpretation.

It is possible to notice the researcher's role as essential within a qualitative research process. It is essential because she or he has to be in constant reflection, a committed reflection that enables him/her to make decisions during the ongoing research process. These decisions have to be made considering a web of intertwined aspects that are in constant interaction: research objectives, research context, natural settings, participants, researcher's own framework, etc.

In addition, my project is a qualitative multiple case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) with three university professors from the University of Barcelona. One common characteristic of these professors is that they were positively valued as university teachers not only by their colleagues but also by their students. They all belonged to different knowledge fields: Maths, Economics and Medicine.

The collecting data process was done from January 2008 to May 2009. Non-participative classes' observation of the whole semester, informal conversations with the professors – before and after classes –, and two in-depth interviews with each of them were carried out. Moreover, I kept field notes to capture my reflections during the non-participative observations and the informal conversations.

The field notes during the observation were organized in three columns. In the first one, I documented the descriptions of what I was observing; the second one reflected the theoretical aspect of what I was observing and; the third column pointed out my reflections of what I was observing. In this third column, my thoughts, my assumptions and my perspective of what I was observing appeared spontaneously. My implicit framework began to emerge.

After analysing the meaning of this third column as a whole and with all my notes of the three professors, I could see how, at first, my view revealed my implicit assumptions concerning what I was expecting of these classes. Then, I could see how these implicit assumptions were questioned. This self-reflective process of my implicit dimension allowed me to develop a new sensitivity, "to be alert of my own assumptions."

Moreover, there was another stage where I exposed my reflections of the observations: I reflected on my own reflections. After a class and sometimes after an informal conversation with the professor, I would write down my own reflections concerning the following questions: Why did I observe that specific aspect of the class? Or why did I expect to observe something that I did not observe?

During the second semester of 2007-2008 I observed professor A's classes and during the first semester of 2008-2009 I observed professor B, and C's classes. The chronological differentiation of the observations was due to an academic and organizational aspect. However, if I compare the three non-participative observations, I can realise that there is an evolutionary process of self-reflection between the first and the two last ones.

The Implicit Subjectivity Dimension Concerning Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Foundations. My Personal Experience

When you are about to begin a research process, the first step you have to consider is the design of the project. Here, the ideas, the research questions, the objectives and the theoretical and methodological framework are expressed in an explicit way.

During the design of my PhD research project, I made the research questions, the objectives, the theoretical and methodological framework, and my ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives explicit. When you define the research questions, the objectives and the theoretical framework, you are working within an ontological (nature of the object) and epistemological perspective; you make these perspectives explicit. I was aware of my decisions. This awareness is what I called "my explicit subjectivity," the conscious one.

Going through the research process, more precisely in the fieldwork, some aspects of my hidden subjectivity began to emerge. Our framework not only works in a conscious way but also in an implicit one.

In my research process, which were the hidden aspects of my framework? If there were hidden aspects in my framework, I could not be aware of them, could I? Were the implicit and the hidden aspects of my framework coherent with the explicit ones? How could this affect the whole process of the research? Is it possible to make explicit the implicit dimensions? If so, how?

My first approach to the object of my thesis project was one of my initial concerns: How is the relationship between the subject matter framework and teacher university knowledge? How do university teachers from disciplines other than mine (Pedagogy) cope with their knowledge as university teachers? Could this teacher knowledge of the academic professor be affected by the hidden relationship between the functions of teachers and researchers?

Why did I have this concern? Why was I interested in other knowledge fields? What was hidden in this concern?

When I began to think about my own decisions as regards the object of study – which is the focus of my research –, I realised that on the one hand I had the implicit assumption that teachers from hard pure or hard applied disciplines were more traditional in their teaching practices. But on the other hand, I couldn't make this generalisation, or any other, within the educative area. I was aware of this contradiction when I began the research process. Therefore, this research presented a challenge not only as a novice researcher but also within my profession in the educative field.

Fragments of My Field Notes: My Reflections on the Meaning of a Master Class

Professor A – Subject matter: Spanish Economic Policy – Degree: Economics – Year: 4th

> *"The lecture is very clear, and it is interesting for me, but I only hear her voice, bla, bla, bla, bla. What do the students understand? Do they understand what she is explaining? How are they (students) following her conceptual explanations? Do they have doubts? How do they solve their doubts if they do not ask anything? She talks a lot but, does she hear what they are "saying" in the implicit meaning?"*
> Professor A: observing class notes (third column own reflections 20/02/08)

The questions reflect deep concern about the absence of students' voices, neither their doubts nor their level of comprehension appear in class. Undoubtedly, from my perspective, a class valued as positive, without an explicit participation, disturbed me. Nevertheless, the fact that the class was valued as positive obliged me to question my own preconceptions about the meaning of a good academic class. The following excerpts point it out:

> *"When we talk about a master class, are there different kinds of master classes? I am asking myself this because I began to feel drawn to how she is explaining the conceptual knowledge."*
>
> Professor A: observing class notes (third column own reflections 26/02/08)

> *"It seems that what I expect from a good class, from a good teaching practice, is an explicit interaction between teacher and students. For example, when the professor makes some questions I expect that he/she waits for the answer or maybe that he/she motivates the students to ask more questions, not to answer him or herself."*

> *"Maybe there are different kinds of questions and professors not always make them to get an answer."*

> *"I realise that in this class observation I focused on the content, not to evaluate it, but to see how she/he developed it."*

> *"Being focus on the pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986), I could reflect on my preconceptions and assumptions about a master class and on the socialised meaning of a master class at university. It is possible to understand a master class with a negative connotation and also with a positive connotation. Not always, when we talk about a master class, we are giving the same meaning. What is the meaning, for me, that arises from this class?"*
>
> Professor A: after class reflections notes 26/02/08

The fact that I questioned my negative preconception about the meaning of a master class, made explicit what appeared to be hidden and allowed me to change my perspective. The following fragment clearly shows an example of it:

> *"My observations are focused again on the pedagogical content knowledge, PCK, within the framework of master class methodology. This PCK is presented as a complex content, with macro and micro examples, with personal and non-personal anecdotes and with analogies. It seems that I have a different view of a master class, a positive one. Am I constructing a new meaning of what a master class is? Am I changing my older beliefs?"*
>
> Professor A: after class reflections notes 27/02/08

Some implicit assumptions began to emerge from my reflections of class observations. I could realise that from my point of view, from my specialized framework as a Pedagogue, in the first observations I assumed that a good class should be characterised by different aspects, for example, hearing students' voices, oral participation. I wanted to hear their doubts, their questions, their previous knowledge, etc.; a kind of participation that is possible to be observed externally. Why did I expect external behaviours from students and from the teacher to assume that that participation was taking place? From which theoretical perspective was I making this assumption? Didn't I believe in implicit meanings? Perhaps, in my position as external observer, there were implicit things between the teacher and the students that I couldn't see as a researcher.

I thought that it was declared explicitly in the design of my research project that from the ontological assumptions I believed in human action and not in human behaviour. This means that when we talk about human action there is a complex web of relations behind that

action; it is not a simple relation of cause and effect. The meaning that is behind that action depends on the interrelationship between different aspects: personal, cultural, social, historical, and they are not always explicit.

And once again, the same question arose: why did I expect an external behaviour? Did I epistemologically live with two paradigms, the positivist and the interpretative one? Is this possible?

Fragments of My Field Notes: My Reflections About the Use of Didactical Resources in Class.

"It seems that everything is planned, it is all so structured, the slides, the examples, etc..."
        Professor B: observing class notes (third column - own reflections) 18/09/08

"I could only observe the subject matter knowledge. Bla, bla, bla"
"I could only focus on PCK. Which is the relationship between the professor and the students? How do students follow his class? Does he ask himself this?"
"Isn't he tired of talking and talking?"
        Professor B: observing class notes (third column - own reflections) 22/09/08

These reflections were done during the first classes of professor B (Subject matter: Immunology – Degree: Pharmacy – Year: 3rd). As my reflections point out, I could only see the external dimension of the class: the professor talking, and talking, his structured didactical material (the power point he used), students not participating.

Although I have these reflections where the complexity of the class is being minimized, I was alert of this. I realised that I needed more time inside the field to go beyond the external behaviour. And, as I was alert of my own assumptions, I recognised that with only a few class observations I couldn't characterise them. I had to wait.

Moreover, I had to understand the purpose of this professor's decisions and, relying only on my observations, this understanding could not be reached. This is why, regarding the methodological aspect of the project, I could recognise that having informal conversations before and after classes, allowed me to go beyond the external appearance. An example of this recognition is reflected in the following fragment:

"We began to talk about the power point and the slides. He said that some people are against the use of many slides, but in his subject they are really important. This material was done with different resources from scientific articles, books, etc. He and other professors of the subject updated it. He told me that if students don't visualized what he is explaining, they won't understand. Traditionally, when this resource wasn't available, teachers wrote notes on the blackboard, but now, if you know how to use them, they are useful instruments that allow students to comprehend what you are explaining."
        Professor B: Notes from the informal dialogue after class session 22/10/08

The use of power point in class has different didactic objectives and it was through different informal conversations with Professor B, that I could access them. For sure, if I hadn't questioned my own preconceptions about the meaning of a master class, which acted from

the implicit dimension of my framework, I wouldn't have gone further than the external behaviour

> *"From my pedagogical framework, my way of conceiving teaching and the didactical dimension, I could realise that there are some beliefs of my implicit framework that are changing and others that are being reaffirmed:*
> *The use of the power point in professor B's classes has its meaning. Each slide was designed for a purpose:*
>
> - *Some of them showed the movement of the blood cell (an animated slide). In this case, it was important for the professor that students could realise that this process had a movement; that it was not static.*
> - *Some of them showed a summary of what he had already explained (a complex subject content to understand).*
> - *Some of them showed scientific examples, taken from scientific articles.*
>
> *Although he used a lot of slides throughout his classes, they were well-used, each of them was designed for a specific purpose and they were aligned with the subject objectives.*
>   *Thus, it is not possible to generalise that using slides excessively throughout a class is negative. The excess or not excess of something depends on multidimensional aspects. It should depend on many aspects: personal (style of the professor), time, discipline, objectives, group, institutional context, etc."*
>
>   Professor B: my reflections after class 22/10/08

In this reflection, a new perspective appears concerning ontological and epistemological aspects. From a particular experience, example or assumption, it is not possible to generalise. I am assuming that when it comes to teaching it is not possible or convenient to generalise. It is important to understand the meaning that is behind each teacher's decision and to intertwine it with the complexity of the context.

    Why, if the educative reality is so complex, and has so many different meanings, do I – as a researcher- look for generalisations? By recognising this complexity, this difficulty of generalisation, am I afraid of not being recognised as a researcher? It seems that this concern reveals a positivist view about the conception of scientific knowledge.

Fragments of My Field Notes: My Reflections About the Sensitive Dimension of Teaching

> *"It seems that he takes students' faces on account when he explains something."*
> *"I believe that from his view, when he asks students if they understand, he is expecting a sincere answer. The way he observes his students, it is like he is analysing the students' faces at the same moment he is asking a question."*
>   Professor C: observing class notes (third column own reflections) 21/10/2008
>
> *"He is always trying to capture his students' faces. Students' faces seem to speak to him."*

> *"Is it a kind of interaction? Is it an implicit interaction that can be merely perceived?"*
>
>   Professor C: observing class notes (third column own reflections) 11/11/2008

From these reflections (Subject matter: Introduction to Maths – Degree: Business Administration – Year: 1st), it is possible to be aware of how my assumption of what interaction means within a class was changing. My view was more sensitive; I could go beyond the external aspects of the interaction and wonder if there was an implicit one. Like an iceberg, I realised that there is an external aspect that can be seen, but there is also a deep implicit meaning.

I knew, however, that this was my own interpretation of the iceberg and so I needed to go beyond and ask the professor himself.

The complexity of a class was being assumed not only by the explicit dimension of my framework, but also by my implicit one.

I was also aware of the importance of my methodological decision: if I wanted to understand the complexity, I should use different instruments to collect data. Through the in-depth interview and after the analysis of Professor C's classes, I could go beyond the explicit dimension.

> **Me:** *It surprised me when you asked your students if they understood what you were explaining, and you looked at them ….*
> **Professor C:** *Yes, have you noticed this? You can see in their faces if they don't understand. Sometimes I can be wrong. But you can see it.*
> **Me:** *At one point, you finished an exercise and you said: "we will do it again," even though they didn't say anything.*
> **Professor C:** *Because I could realise that they were stiff, they were looking at the exercise. When they understand a problem you see it…….When they don't understand they are still, they don't react, they don't look into your eyes. Maybe they understand and I think they don't…….I trust my intuition.*
>
>   Professor C: in depth interview 26/03/2009

> *"Implicitly, I was expecting a more powerful relationship between pedagogical knowledge and discipline knowledge, where the specialised knowledge has more power than the pedagogical one. But now I think that this isn't so, and I am being alert of this assumption; there are more things at stake.*
> *Maybe this pedagogical knowledge from university professors has a new complexity that I couldn't understand before. Within the function of university teacher, there are not two separate kinds of knowledge; it is an amalgamated knowledge with its own entity."*
>
>   Professor B: my reflections after class 03/10/08

As I made these assumptions explicit, I understood how they were changing or may be that the older assumptions were being questioned.

I also realised that I was on the collecting data step, so I wondered how this new assumption could affect the other observations, how they could affect the analysis and the results of the research. Once I understood this, I was alert – I could recognise it.

> *"In the interaction with students there is authenticity. There is a respect to the student as a person. I perceive his interest in the way he asks, how he*

communicates with students. He wants them to understand, to comprehend, to learn.
Is there an ontological foundation behind his action? How is this ontological strength?

Professor C: my reflections after class 09/12/08

I began to observe and reflect beyond what is externally and superficially observed. My first research questions were related to the discipline, the epistemological framework and teacher knowledge. How do teachers construct their teacher knowledge with the influence of their discipline framework?

As I was finishing the non-participative observations of the three professors, it appeared a new dimension of their teaching: the ontological dimension.

The Reflective Dimension: Being Aware of Our Subjectivity as Social Researchers. How I Dealt with this Subjectivity

The Explicit Subjectivity: My Conscious Onto-epistemological Background.

As I expressed above, the framework of the whole process of the research is the hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007; Laverty, 2003). This means that I tried to keep a focus on understanding the meaning that university professors hold about their pedagogical knowledge in their natural settings (University of Barcelona, own Faculties and Departments) and interpreting them. (Creswell, 2007).

In the above mentioned experience, I observed my own action as a researcher and tried to make it explicit through a reflective process. In doing so, I saw myself as a subject, with my own symbolic framework, and I recognised my subjectivity. What I observe and the way I observe depend on my framework. Or is it possible as a social researcher not to have a subjective system with specific characteristics? Is it possible not to be a member of a society that codetermines my own constructions just by being a researcher? (Breuer & Roth, 2003). As a researcher, I also have social, cultural, historic, and biographic traits.

The experience of recognising my own subjectivity and trying to reflect on it during the non-participative observation of university teachers' classes, does not appear out of the blue, without any theoretical foundations and worries.

Although the experience of reflexivity was a new one and allowed me to understand, construct and discover new dimensions as a qualitative researcher, it did not appear spontaneously out of nowhere. There were certain onto-epistemological (conceptions about the nature of the object of study and about science and scientific knowledge) and methodological (related to the way scientific knowledge is constructed) foundations that allowed this reflexivity to be developed.

Besides, when we decide as researchers on the methodological approach of our project, and the instruments we will use to approach the object of study, we are making subjective decisions, not neutral. The instruments we decide to use during the scientific process will allow us to approach the object of study differently and, consequently, gather different kind of information. This methodological decision is subjective (Breuer & Roth, 2003).

Reflexivity: How to Make our Implicit Assumptions Explicit

I have already expressed above my explicit assumptions about science and scientific knowledge construction. As a researcher, I have my symbolic framework; the conceptual

view that addressed my attention to particular aspects; what I experience is shaped by this framework (Eisner, 1998).

Once I assume this subjectivity as a researcher, how could I manage it? How could I control it? Consequently, and in connection with this perspective, the relationship between subjectivity and reflexivity in the research process appear. What is the meaning of subjectivity and reflexivity in this context?

The word reflexivity is not a new word in the context of research in general and in qualitative research in particular (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011; Breuer & Roth, 2003; Cruz, Reyes, y Cornejo, 2012; Humphreys, 2005; Meek, 2003). As Lynch (2000) stated, the word and the concept of reflexivity have different meanings, depending on the perspective in which it is framed. It is not the same thing to talk about reflexivity as a mechanical action, as a social construction, or inside an interpretative or hermeneutic process. It is not intended, here, however, to expand on the meanings of the different perspectives of reflexivity.

From Lynch's (2000) categories I recognised my reflective approach within the methodological reflexivity, the methodological self-consciousness. I tried to be conscious of my own assumptions and prejudices and focus upon uncertainties.

Raeithel (1998, as cited in Breuer & Roth, 2003) developed the concept of *epistemological model of reflection*. Within this model, the researcher assumed the position of observer of his own actions and interactions between himself and the object of study within the research context. This epistemological reflection is composed by three phases: "basic centering," "decentering" and "recentering." The first phase expresses that, as epistemic subjects, we establish an interaction with the object of study, but without being aware of the structure of this interaction. The "decentering" phase makes reference to taking a step back, taking distance from our own action patterns. This means that we need to be aware and reflective of this interaction structure. And, finally, the recentering phase is related to that kind of dialogue with oneself and with others; the observer reflects, transforms or reinvents the parts of the social system that determines the problem's vision. It is a stage of reflective actions. Breuer & Roth (2003) also proposed that the last two phases, decentering and recentering, have to be actioned in each step of the research process, where the subject-object relation is used reflexively.

Another approach supported by the phenomenological perspective, is reflective observation, as described by the author Ríos Saavedra (2005). This approach is based on the conception that sociologist Alfred Schutz developed, the phenomenological attitude, and it is also grounded on the phenomenological theory of Edmund Husserl. This attitude implies to bracket the world, to suspend the researcher's judgements, making the aspects that once were certain and evident for himself debatable. This attitude of the observer is a reflexive and distant one. This reflective observation means taking a distance, but within the proximity.

It is not so easy to accept this point of view. From the phenomenological perspective, the concepts of "bracketing the world" or "bracketing our own symbolic framework as researchers"- that arise in the research process -, have polemic meanings. As Le Vasseur (2003) affirmed, "bracketing," as described by Husserl (1931), implied that prior knowledge could be suspended and set aside so that fresh impressions about phenomena could be formed without the interference of these interpretative influences. Is it possible to suspend our framework? Is it possible to delete our symbolic frame and to access the meanings of the phenomena, in the purest way?

To bracket our assumptions is a controversial conception within the phenomenological approach (Tufford & Newman, 2012). From other points of view, other authors have expressed that bracketing is not the elimination of preconceived notions but, rather, a temporary suspension of prior beliefs so that other perspectives and questions can emerge (Boyd, 1989). *"We speak only of suspending it briefly in a reflective move that*

cultivates persistent curiosity and allows us to make progress toward things themselves." (Le Vasseur, 2003, p. 418). Similar to this conception, and from the phenomenological perspective, the hermeneutic circle is a process of questioning prior knowledge that allows the researcher to expand into a new horizon of meaning.

If I assume my own subjectivity in the research process, I cannot affirm that I could bracket my symbolic framework as a mechanic action and have a new, fresh view in the interaction with the object of study. From my point of view, it is not compatible.

By assuming my own framework, the explicit and the implicit aspects of it, I could go beyond it but not suspend it. I completely agree when Unger (2005) affirmed that "*social sciences must not suspend the subjectivity of the researcher- which is impossible- but, rather, it must knowingly engage with his or her own prejudices in a continual meaning –bearing process*" (p. 54).

Concerning my own experience and as I have previously stated, the first observing action took place a semester before the other two. With the last three observations I realised that my view, my framework was in an evolutionary process of change as regards my assumptions of what it meant to me a good class and good teaching practices. What did good teaching mean in different knowledge fields?

My field notes from the first observation expressed that Professor A talked, talked and talked and students voices were never heard. So, why was this class or this professor's teaching practice valued as positive? Wasn't this class a traditional one?

Not only did I begin to reflect on my own perceptions of teaching practices, but I also began to question and doubt them. As Le Vasseur (2003) affirmed: "When we begin to inquire in this way, we no longer assume that we understand fully, and the effect is a questioning of prior knowledge." (p. 417). In this reflection and questioning, I began to assume that my understanding was no longer full. In this particular case, with this teaching practices of professor A in the Economic field, my framework did not allow me to see and perceive things that students could. As I challenged my own prejudice, I gave it full play, and during the other non-participative observations of the other two professors' teaching practices, my view was more sensitive. My understanding was expanded.

A clear example of this are some reflections expressed above of professor C's teaching practices. Although his voice was the protagonist of the class, my view went beyond my prejudice, expanding my comprehension of the phenomenon

Conclusions and Recommendations

My experience was a reflective action of my own assumptions: the explicit ones and the ones that were hidden, the implicit ones. Once these assumptions arose from the implicit world, I did not intend to suspend them; instead, I questioned them, trying to amplify my perspective as an observer of a complex reality. It was an opportunity that invited me to confront feelings and conflicts that I would have otherwise ignored, and that traditional training has, in fact, encouraged us to disavow. (Russell & Kelly, 2002)

This kind of reflexivity allowed me to go beyond my own assumptions and I realised that the way I observed was more sensitive. My observation was being alert of my own observation process. It was and intense and challenging dialogue that allowed to experience the expansion in meaning.

As a strategy to develop this reflexivity, I wrote down my reflective notes at different points of the gathering data stage: at the same moment I was observing, after the observation, and after the informal conversations. To be constant and systematic through this reflective work is absolutely necessary.

As Russell and Kelly (2002) expressed, strategies for its implementation often include the completion of self-reflective records and diaries, the examination of personal assumptions and goals, and the clarification of individual belief systems and subjectivities. There are different ways of expressing self-reflexivity along the research journey: self-reflective records or diaries (Ben–Ari & Enosh, 2011; Russell & Kelly, 2002) or autobiography vignettes (Cruz, Reyes, y Cornejo, 2012; Declan, 2014; Humphreys, 2005). For sure, each qualitative researcher will find his personal way to reflect his own subjectivity.

In this reflexivity process of my own subjectivity, I could see myself as a researcher, as an activity system within a relationship with another activity system, the object of study (Roth & Breuer, 2003).

I did not deny my framework; I was alert of it. And, being both subject and object of the research, an interesting phenomenon was introduced: the possibility of transformation and learning (Roth & Breuer) as a novice qualitative researcher in a complex context.

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Author Note

Lorena Cruz, PhD is financed by CONICET Argentina post-doctoral fellowship. Member of Science Education Research Institution (ICE) at the National University of Cuyo, Argentine. She took her first steps as a qualitative researcher within the educative field at the University of Barcelona and at the University of Utrecht. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Lorena Cruz at lorenacruzgarcette@gmail.com.

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