

Toward an Understanding of Attunement as an Autobiographical Theory of Education

Wanying Wang¹
University of British Columbia, Canada

This paper² begins with my story, then followed by an analysis of the story. Primarily derived from my story, also informed by other scholarly work, I propose the theory of attunement – an autobiographical theory of education, which is employed to describe how one’s learning can take place in a subjective sense of intellectual labour striving for deeper understanding. In such an autobiographical theory of education learning becomes situated not only in the school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of intellectual labor.

My Story: the Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT)

The social lounge was filled with people. It was the first time that I realized the room was quite small. As the host stood out and greeted the audience, the competition started. I was the sixth among all the competitors. From the moment it began, my attention was abruptly drawn to the front area where every competitor was supposed to give their speech.

My turn came. The host said, “Now let’s welcome Wanying. The title of her thesis is ‘*The Yuanpei Program in Peking University—a case study of curriculum innovation*’”. I walked to the front and turned around facing the audience. I heard my heart beat faster and could barely lift my arm. I thought it would be fine only if I could remember what I should say. I stood still while comforting myself. I started.

I should keep my smile and posture throughout the process. Gesture needed here. My brain worked excitedly, but in a negative way. I could hear a reminder whispering around my head after I commenced. However, I was only able to half control my body. I was speaking but my face muscles and my arms seemed frozen. The designed pauses and gestures slipped away. I was just there, talking.

Finally I finished. Applause arose from the audience. Twenty minutes after the last competitor finished his speech, the judges announced the result. I did not know where I was located, but I was not among the first two. I tried to suppress my unhappiness, clapping my hands to celebrate the two winners. I felt frustrated and depressed for I had not won the first place. Why do I always want to be the No.1?

This 3MT competition experience serves as a site for autobiographical excavation, through which I can come to recover the social, and cultural structures that formed me, how these structures have worked on me, and how lost memories still function.



TO CITE THIS ARTICLE PLEASE INCLUDE ALL OF THE FOLLOWING DETAILS:

Wang, Wanying (2020). Toward an understanding of attunement as an autobiographical theory of education, *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry* 17 (1) p. 3-15 <http://nitinat.library.ubc.ca/ojs/index.php/tci> <access date>

“I am from Chinese Society”

Like overcooked food, I found that I had over-prepared for the competition. I spent weeks on writing, modifying and reciting the short passage. Just before the real competition, I spent five hours unceasingly practicing my speech. I felt a great loss and pain after I learned the competition result. Why did I struggle so? It seems that I am still a “product” of Chinese culture. Confucius Education communicates the notion that academic success is the most important goal for a student to achieve. I wanted to win because I deemed winning the competition central to my academic success. It is also believed that if one works hard, one can succeed finally: suffering is part of personal cultivation in Chinese culture (Tu, 1998). Wang (2004) argues that the capacity to bear pain is essential to coming maturity in Chinese culture. I even thought the pain that arose in the preparation should be a guarantee for success. In addition, my parents’ impact can explain why I have been so devoted to academic success. In Chinese culture, children’s academic achievement is a family business (Kim, 2006). My mother believed this and put the belief into practice. She sat beside me when I worked on my homework. My parents’ thoughts and behaviors implicitly or explicitly have had a great impact on my choice, on what to focus, and time distribution since I spent a lot of time studying after school. I was directed to study all day and gradually this demand became internalized, the only guiding principle for me.

Displacement (social and cultural)

Where I came from – the place – might be another aspect deserving consideration.

Place as an important concept for understanding curriculum autobiographically emerged decades ago. As Pinar et al. (1995) argue, “place and human feelings are intertwined. When events take place, they achieve particularity and concreteness; they become infused with feeling. Fiction—novels, short stories—express daily human experience, situated in concrete places with specific characters” (p. 533). Kincheloe and Pinar (1991, cited in Pinar et al., 1995) say, “place is the life-force of fiction, serving as the crossroads of circumstance, the playing field on which drama evolves” (p. 533). Place represents certain notions, certain social and cultural norms.

I was born in a middle sized city in the Northern China. Living in the city at that time meant a routinized life that might never change. It was a city with 100 years of history and an industrial base where 8 huge factories operated. These factories ranged from steel production to the manufacture of train compartments; each had more than 10,000 workers. Fifty percent of the population worked in these factories or in occupations related with the factories. My mother was one of them, and she worked for an affiliated middle school as a teacher. After parents retired, their children continued their job. I had heard so many stories about replacing their parents’ job upon graduation from high school or university. People lived quietly.

The sky in winter was always gloomy due to serious air pollution caused by the eight factories which consumed tons of coal everyday. The dark smog cylinder rising everywhere still remains unforgettable in my mind. Everyday life was the same. I escaped this dull, uncolored life by reading. Reading was the only activity with which I felt fascinated. Every school day, I dashed to the school library, reading for several hours. In most cases, the elementary and secondary education was so ritualized and obsessive that knowledge of the outside world was barely acknowledged in class. However, reading at the library provided me with the possibility to see the outside world, to experience different kinds of life.

Even nowadays, this scene always haunts me: I was reading quietly a newly published magazine or a book. I could smell the newly arrived magazine or book and ran to read it. Almost no teachers or students were around. It was my own space, my place. It was years ago but the place remains in my mind. This educational experience extended my vision, bringing



me into a new “space” where I heard different “voices”. I aspired to try something I had never tried before. I wanted to leave the city. Achieving an excellent score might be the only thing that could help me realize my dream. Academic success became my only pursuit. My life has been centering around this pursuit since then.

Without turning back to my life in the city, I would not see the “lost” connection between me and my hometown city. This regressive moment helps me find the denied elements of the past and see how I had struggled to break free from the bondage of northeastern social boundaries. All these reasons prompted me to pursue No. 1 unceasingly, the desire to go to a top university, and something unidentifiable...

Summary

This competition served as an occasion to question where I had come from, culturally and socially. By re-entering the past, I saw how I had struggled, how I had worked so hard. Consequently I might re-perceive the society and culture context where I had come of age, what has structured me. Autobiographical reflection offered a key to unlock the complexity of my situation. Through such self-study I might recover the bridge to a lost part of “I”.

From the story above, it can be seen that writing autobiographically and theoretically are not, finally, two separate processes; they are mutually intertwined. Writing autobiographically allowed me to present the world as I experienced it, not obscuring that experience by representing it in singular way. I have come to realize my experience is also temporally and spatially layered: how I have been influenced by various discourses, institutional structures, political and policy agendas, teaching protocols. I have come to realize this layered dimension of lived experience as I articulated that experience autobiographically. It seems that I dwell within and among these relationships. This view of self-in-relationship acknowledges our essential connections to others, recognizes interdependence in relationships, and discloses continuity and difference (Plumwood, 1998). Writing autobiographically and theoretically occurs simultaneously. As such, in the following, I posit this autobiographical theory of education called attunement. It emerges from my story, also informed by other scholarly work.

The remainder of this paper involves two sections. In the first I describe my sense of the concept of attunement; in the second, I summarize three elements of the concept of attunement and its characteristics.

The Concept of Attunement

Attunement emphasizes the learning guided and experienced by oneself subjectively striving for deeper understanding. In such an autobiographical theory of education learning becomes situated not only in the school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of intellectual labor. Attunement begins with one’s own autobiography which is used as thriving center piece to extend, contemplate and write, during which one searches for meaning and begets engagement with the world (Wang, 2020). Attuned, it may happen anywhere at any moment. As a result, attunement allows a new or different way of understanding, way of thinking, or perspective. All of these understandings point to a different dimension, as if one were repositioned within something unknown. Possibly, attunement may ‘provide the vehicle wherein the everydayness of life can be lived with reasonable comfort and reasonable freedom from anxiety and unpredictability’ (Huebner, 1999, p. 345).

In the following, I will further illustrate the concept of attunement using my story as an example. Derived from my story, attunement is summarized from the two aspects. First, I explore how one can reveal oneself and engage in searching for meaning while writing



autobiographically. Second, I address how one can beget engagement with world through referring to various discourses and theories: how these external thoughts and experiences have had impact on me and structured me.

Attunement as self revealing and subjective search for meaning

Attunement is autobiographical and private, characterized by self-revealing and subjective search for meaning. When I engage in writing my own story and describe what I have experienced and what I have been struggled with, apparently, I reveal and express myself in a certain way; second, through writing autobiographically, I can see how I have been searching for meaning subjectively in order to understand what has happened in my life.

Self is revealed through being attuned. Attunement reveals oneself. For example, I learned about myself by writing my own story: what matters to myself, how I have allowed myself to be transformed by different ideas, and with what social and cultural determinations that I have been wrestling for so long. I discover the path to myself during the process of writing autobiographically. As Heidegger (1995) had already made explicit in *Being and Time*, ‘Attunements are the fundamental ways in which we find ourselves disposed in such and such a way’ (p. 67). One finds oneself through attunement. As a fundamental structural features of *Dasein* (Being), attunement ‘discovers *Dasein* in its thrownness’ (Heidegger, 1962, p. 175). This thrownness is the revealing or unfolding of self as being in the world. Attunement engages one in this unfolding process, which may involve various sub-processes regarding various issues, often requiring decentering. When one tries to keep record of these unfoldings, one seems to be able to see how one has evolved. One’s thoughts have unfolded, revealing who one is. It is also a process that allows for new forms of revealing that transform the self. It is a new form of revealing that can transform oneself, and move one on to different understandings. Attunement leads to subjective reconstruction. It is not about a search for a final, static self, but rather a search for how one has evolved: to find something that remains constant or enable a lifetime view during the process in which one has evolved.

While writing autobiographically one can discover ignored aspects of the world in oneself through being attuned. When one focuses on oneself, everything changes. This special attentiveness brings the hidden to the surface and make the existing more prominent, helping to illuminate experience and make one more ready for self-reflective thinking. Consequently, one is more able to move through one’s particularity into the general or common aspects embedded in human being. This common ground constitutes the fundamental aspects of the world (human being). Thus, the world manifests itself in front of oneself in a particular often personal way. One finds the world through understanding oneself. This is why attunement is the very precondition for understanding of the self. For any individual, there might exist a specific way of attuning oneself to the world: different unfoldings as shown in autobiographical writing. We are always involved in the world, usually in situations we do not create or control.

Attunement, as discussed in the previous section, refers to how one strives for deeper understanding. Therefore, attunement supports a search for meaning which is subjective. “The search for meaning is a question of diving below the surface and finding the deeper underlying and intentional meanings that are being born, first in the relationship between subject and phenomenon, but in research also in inter-subjective relationships” (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 16). Meaning does not exist without the subject, and spontaneously, it is not self-evidently or even readily present. Merleau-Ponty (1968) understands meaning as something that is intertwined in ‘the flesh of the world’ (p. 83), and from his epistemology Dahlberg (2006) argues that the researcher, as well as other subjects involved in the research, ‘embodies’, or ‘gives body to’ the phenomenon. Meaning depends on how the subject views

and understands, and how the subject makes sense of one's experience, for different people may find different meaning in light of different cultural background, social standing and personal experience. Moreover, for the particular individual, meaning regarding the same event can keep changing, if one remains open. In a certain sense, attunement occurs within the in between, an interplay of determinacy (certain aspects that do not change relatively) and indeterminacy (certain aspects that always change). Attunement is never fully determinable since my understanding on my story changes over time.

The search for meaning is fluid, unpredictable, which can be spontaneous or long term. How can one determine that one has found the true meaning? How can I know that my current thought is true? Ergas' discussion of a spiritual research paradigm might be relevant to this issue. Ergas (2016) proposes the concept of a spiritual research paradigm which "relies on a knowing apparatus that is beyond reason and sense" (p. 24). He employs resonance principle to assess the quality and rigorousness of a spiritual research paradigm, which refers to a principle in which research is evaluated "by the extent to which it inspires the reader/listener; by the extent to which it touches the individual's own spirit and compels him or her to commit to further unfolding of spirit and life-meaning" (p. 24). This insight might be akin to the search for meaning in this paper. The resonance principle here denotes that one conceives the 'meaning' acquired that reflects or represents what one has experienced and can best explain that experience, thus making one evoked, inspired, or activate one's inner world. As a result, one feels intellectually relieved or emotionally peaceful. For example, when one experiences something unexpected, one may feel sad or uncomfortable. One may feel relieved or gain a certain degree of comfort by referring to a new way of thinking. The new way of thinking or understanding might help one re-adjust the relationships among self, others and the world or reposition self among the magnitude of the world; therefore, it brings forth a sense of inner strength, peace, harmony, and connectedness. 'It is a comfort that cannot be anticipated, a peace that passeth all understanding' (Huebner, 1995, p. 403). One's personal understanding is not judged by other, but rather by if it can invoke us emotionally and intellectually (in this paper it may refer to the intellectual aspect).

Attunement as engagement with the world

Attunement is also public, bridging self and world. Attunement, in essence, addresses the dynamic relationship between self and world. In the following, I will illustrate how attunement allows one's engagement with the world in combination with my story.

Attunement shows how one relates to the world and understands the world

In my story, I articulate my life as an international student grappling with my own life history, my present preoccupations, my dreams of the future, both continuous with the present and those unprecedented in the past. The complex roles of institutional structures, political and policy agendas, teaching protocols and educational theories are threaded through the subjective experience of the individual personal-myself, articulated autobiographically. While writing autobiographically, I believe I achieved deepened self-understanding. It happened within my subjective sense of study, of sustained intellectual labor. Spontaneously, this attunement shows how one takes the initiative to relate oneself to the world through engaging in conversations:

In which interlocutors are speaking not only among themselves but to those not present, not only to historical figures and unnamed people and places they may be studying, but to politicians and parents alive and dead, not to mention to the selves they have been, are in the process of becoming, and someday may become. (Pinar, 2011, p. 41)



During the process, one may accept, refute, or otherwise interrogate ideas that human being has ever yielded, as shown in my story how I had conversed with various emerging thoughts in my mind. As one engages in various conversations virtually (possibly through reading) and practically, it begets one's engagement with the world. At the same time, the experience of the world as available is not only to oneself, but also to other. There might exist a gap between the personal and the shared, the self and the others. Such a gap seems to create a dwelling space to receive the alterity of other and let it resonate, and allow opportunity for people to understand each other. This makes understanding each other possible.

Being attuned might be akin to engaging in in-depth thinking, through which one acquires a deepened understanding. It seems that attunement opens up the world to us (Kuperus, 2007), making the inner world, but also the world outside accessible, through this in-depth thinking. Attunement is like a mental optic, which allows one to see. Through writing autobiographically, I begin to realize the inner world, the inner self that I may not have noticed before. Also, attunement allows me to understand more about the world: through being attuned, one can see the world from a deepened perspective, thus more of the world.

Attunement manifests the dynamic relationship between self and world

Being attuned, one acquires heightened consciousness or in-depth understanding. So attuned, one might be more able to understand the world and more able to bring transformative change to the world in which one dwells. Through writing autobiographically, I have achieved deepened understanding on myself and the world around. With this deepened understanding, I may be more likely to engage in certain thinking or initiatives. For example, I have begun to have particular attention to certain issues in the world, and taken the initiative to participate in the discussion. Consequently, in specific and small ways one may transform the world. Attunement prepares one intellectually to shape the world. Attunement is born out of the world; however, it transcends what the world provides us with and how it situates us, which leads to social and self reconstruction. In other words, attunement is spatially, temporally, situationally, subjectively contingent, historically, culturally, and socially constrained.

Summary

Attunement emphasizes how informal forms of study (for example, learning that takes place outside classroom) contributes to understanding self and world. This theory suggests that learning occurs not only in and out of classrooms but always within a person's life. In such a theory of education learning becomes situated in not only school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one's subjective sense of intellectual labor. Attunement demonstrates how I learned from writing my own autobiography. Attunement thus becomes a site in which people participate in the consciousness or act of awakening ourselves, accessing ourselves, engaging ourselves in 'moreness', thus becoming inspired.

Three Elements of Attunement

In the following, in combination with my story, I will further analyze the three elements of the concept of attunement: contingency, boundary, and sensitivity. To make them concrete, I will employ the story (including analysis) as an example to illustrate the three elements. First, contingency refers to the particular experience identified from one's own perspective; it corresponds to the story in the first section. It is similar to objective realities of one's experience. Boundary here refers to the difficulties or challenges perceived by oneself. Sensitivity refers to how one can go beyond one's boundary subjectively, thus being attuned to new forms of understanding or thinking. The section of the analysis demonstrates my sensitivity: how I have employed different theories and perspectives to interpret my story.



Apparently, I may adopt different perspectives to interpret my experience. But I subjectively tend to think that this interpretation may express myself best due to my certain sensitivity. As such, I will provide a detailed description about the three elements.

Contingency

Contingency here refers to the internal and external facets of one's experience from one's particular point of view. One's experience is contingent upon internal and external facets and the combination of facets varies, depending on specific situations and one's perspective. The internal facet refers to the how one subjectively describes one's experience, for example, when I described my own story, the way I described it and what I focused on show the internal facet of my experience from my own particular point of view; the external facet refers to the social and cultural condition that can be seen from my story. These facets constitute the particularity of experience, identified from one's own perspective. Contingency defines and conditions what may happen. It is a combination of all situational circumstances, what is given in one's lived situation.

Contingency is similar to the objective side of one's experience, as one being attuned. However, contingency is also informed by conceptual approach and knowledge as well as by one's social, economic and cultural locations. Therefore, in a sense, it is both objective and subjective. Contingency explains how diverse objective reality can be for different people.

Boundary

In order to understand attunement, I propose using the concept of boundary to refer to the problems, difficulties or challenges that one may experience. I summarize two characteristics of boundary:

First, boundary determines and thereby limits what one currently knows and understand. In this sense, it is akin to the concept of ontology. I will use Pinar's work to illustrate the concept of boundary. According to Pinar (1975), ontology denotes being, including human being as the gestalt of the physical, emotional and mental dimensions. One's ontological being is more than the totality of these aspects. Pinar (1975) also mentions the 'more' as beyond the three aspects: physical, emotional and mental. He acknowledges that the intellectually underdeveloped can potentially benefit by working with those who are more developed. Pinar (1975) transfers this idea to two interrelated undertakings: learnedness and intellectual development. 'When the exclusive aim is learnedness in the sense of amassing information, the process is primarily technical, and may not involve a transmission of energy in the same sense that occurs when the aim is intellectual development' (p. 101). However, the provision of information and its interrelatedness, can also be an offering of an *élan vital* from one to the other, especially when the mentor is emotionally involved with the information. Moreover, he points out that "when one's aim is intellectual development, one is able to glimpse underneath the manifest behavior to the pre-and unconscious dimension of inter-activity" (p. 102). One shows a higher level of *élan vital* in the area described/analyzed when conceptually and emotionally engaged. Therefore, as argued by Pinar (1975), in such an instance, we can see that 'how one's ontological level enables one to see certain levels, and then use the discursive mind to describe and analyze what it is one sees in certain areas from one's ontological perspective' (p. 102). Pinar (1975) uses the example of student and teacher: 'to see what his teacher sees in such a case, and not just mirror his teacher's language, the student must enter commensurate ontological level' (p. 102). This process is likened to transfusion of *élan vital*, a kind of transfusion. This boundary focuses on the intellectual aspect of being. Boundary is inseparable from limit. Limit here denotes that one becomes

aware of the difficulties and challenges that one is facing: one reaches one's limit, if only for the time being.

Second, the concept of boundary mainly emphasizes an intellectual aspect and is content-specific. One may demonstrate different levels of understanding regarding different issues due to previous experience and knowledge. Hence, one may have in-depth understanding in Philosophy, but have limited understanding in Music. However, the understanding acquired from certain issues or subjects can contribute to understanding of other issues or subjects. For example, one's understanding on certain philosophical issues will definitely contribute to the understanding of educational issues. This synergistic potential does not only happen within the realm of intellect. As discussed by Pinar (1975), one's ontological level mainly involves three aspects: physical, mental and emotional. These three can also contribute to each other. As argued by Fung (1937), not to be affected by sorrow or joy, is to have transformed emotion by means of reason (p. 237). Sense can help transform emotion: one can reduce the feeling of sadness (or negative feeling) if one can know more. As Spinoza argues, if there are persons of (true) knowledge, who understand the reality of the universe, and who know that the way in which things evolve is inevitable, they will be unmoved by whatever they may meet (cited in Fung, 1937, p. 237). They will not be bound by emotion. One need not feel sad or depressed no matter what is encountered. Fung (1937) also uses an example:

A sudden gust of wind blows down a roof tile so that it hits a small child and a mature man on their heads. The child will feel intense anger against the tile, whereas the man's emotion will not be stirred, and for this very reason, his pain will be actually less. This is because the man will understand that the falling of the tile is a physical phenomenon, and therefore he will not be affected by sorrow or joy. (p. 237)

Zhuangzi, an ancient Chinese philosopher, argues that we have reason to transform our emotions. There is a story in *Zhuangzi* that describes how *Zhuangzi* responded when his wife died:

When she first died, how could I help not being affected? But then on examining the matter, I saw that in the Beginning she has originally been lifeless. And not only lifeless, but she had originally lacked all substance. During this first state of confused chaos, there came a change which resulted in substance. This substance changed to assume forms. The form changed and became alive. And it has changed again to reach death. In this it has been like the passing of the four seasons, spring, autumn, winter and summer. And while she is thus lying asleep in the Great House (the universe), for me to go about weeping and wailing, would be to show myself ignorant of Fate. Therefore I refrain. (*Zhuangzi*, pp. 223-224, cited in Fung, 1937).

Zhuangzi understands life and death from what he imagines to be the perspective of universe; he can therefore ease his sadness about his wife's death. This knowledge reduces the negative feeling of loss; it demonstrates the transformation of emotion by means of reason. Intellectual development can contribute to emotional development.

Sensitivity

The third element of attunement is sensitivity, which emphasizes the "subjective" side of one's experience. Combined with the story, the element of sensitivity may correspond to the section of analysis provided thereafter. The story may seem objective; however, the analysis followed might be individual specific, in which I made sense of my thoughts and behaviors. It may vary according to different individual. I call what makes this analysis accessible sensitivity. The analysis seems to be the concrete expression of sensitivity, or



sensitivity is concretized through the analysis. This sensitivity refers to the uncertain or individual-specific aspect that may vary in light of different perspectives taken. Heidegger seems to equate attunement with sensitivity, as he understands attunement as a mental optic, which make things visible, through “unlocking” their phenomenality (Demuth, 2012). Each seeing is determined by our background and our conceptual approach. ‘To be in certain attunement means that we have sensibility to see some aspects of things, or that we are capable of understanding things in a certain way. In this way, we can – ‘unlock’ – things as phenomena so that we can grasp them’ (Demuth, 2012. p. 15). Sensitivity helps us see different aspects of things or understand things differently and helps achieve heightened understanding. It is one, albeit central, medium of attunement and has a number of important characteristics.

First, sensitivity means openness to a new idea, or new perspective. While writing my autobiography, I kept myself open to various thoughts or perspectives, especially in the section on how I understood my story: why I had felt frustrated due to the failure in the speech competition. Being open means allowing more possibilities to emerge. Openness embraces the unknown and alterity. Being open means receptive, open to various thoughts, particularly when being exposed to these thoughts. Openness makes one more ready for study and reflection. One can be more readily informed by study and reflection which may proceed unpredictably. By being more receptive and open, the meaning of the experience may emerge as one becomes more ready for new thoughts and possibilities. Being open and more receptive allows the unfolding of thoughts in which various thoughts or discourses interact, considering possible way of thinking.

Second, sensitivity is characterized by engagement: how one interacts with the world outside. It is enacted through how one has accepted, rejected opinions, or negotiated with ideas and events. I was engaging in this process while I consider various thoughts emerging in my mind. One is actually engaging in a lifelong complicated conversation. Under certain circumstances, one may not need to act but to contemplate: conceive and understand different ways of thinking, more aware of their differences, and more reflective of how these human thoughts have evolved, with horizons widened and insights gained. One can be more aware of which thought or discourse tends to be more dominant. *Discern-ability* implies that one can know how one has evolved, what thoughts or thinking pattern have impacted one’s development. The ability to discern shows how one navigates among various thoughts and discourses and how one finds more meaningful interpretations.

Third, sensitivity can render a sense of divinity to learning. How understanding can be achieved tends to be uncertain without a protocol to follow, as shown in the process of writing autobiographically. The process is not quantified or proceduralized. Uncertainty gives a sense of divinity or mystery. Attunements locates the learning process within what transcends human control and understanding. Uncertainty creates more space for one to explore.

Fourth, sensitivity is content-specific: one might be sensitive to certain things or certain aspects of things only. Sensitivity, based on my autobiography, mainly refers to the intellectual dimension of human being, emotional and psychological aspects being excluded though it is difficult to distinguish one from another. Sensitivity can grow as one accumulates relevant knowledge or experiences. Here I want to propose the concept of structural sensitivity, which means that sensitivity can be understood in smaller specific aspects or units pointing to various aspects of world. This structural sensitivity may not be structured by eight aspects of multiple intelligence proposed by Gardner, but can be understood as different aspects that various academic disciplines represent. Under certain circumstance, sensitivity can be further detailed as perceived by individual. It may have a different structure for each individual.

Given the centrality of sensitivity to attunement, are there any ways by which it could be enhanced? What becomes intellectually accessible depends upon one's sensitivity. Sensitivity makes it possible for things to appear, to 'matter' to an individual. Heidegger (1982) believes we encounter the world through our concerned engagement with things, so this means that for us to even have a world, we must be attuned – things must come into view, become welcoming or frightening, exciting or boring, calming or infuriating, sometimes both at once. If particularities – persons, objects, events, ideas – didn't matter, we would not bother to notice them, and we would have no directional interact with them. This statement seems to mostly focus on the emotional aspect, but it includes what make things accessible to us intellectually. In both cases sensitivity tends to be subjective. But how can one reach, through the sensitivity of attunement, certain understandings, or enhance one's understandings? Sensitivity can be enhanced by knowledge, experience, understanding and "awakening inwardness". Knowledge here mainly refers to formal type of knowledge gained from academic study. Understanding tends to be more situated, and it could be acquired by the individual subject from his or her life experience, as well as from formal study. Our understanding of being is manifested in our 'comportment towards beings' (Heidegger, 1982, p. 16). *Comportment* is activity, action or behavior. Thus, the understanding that we have of the Being can be manifested in our acting with them. "Understanding need not be explicit, nor able to be articulate conceptually. It is often embodied in 'know-how' (Wrenn, IEP).

Sensitivity is, then, not only informed by knowledge, conceptual approach, experience, but also awakening inwardness which mainly refers to the way one learns from, reflects on, and reacts to events. This awakening inwardness exists independently of other aspects. It is not identical with knowledge or experience, but informed by each continuously. This 'awakening inwardness' evolves gradually as one learns more, and is grounded in a continuing sense of self – a certain synthesis that could contain certain beliefs or sense of mission - that guides how one thinks and reflects. It can be concretized into the following aspects, but not limited to them. For example, understanding that each gestalt is created by human being, and may undergo constant change; being willing to explore and accept different way of thinking; being aware that all what we have attended to, contemplated, and explored demonstrates the trajectory of self-evolving embodying the interaction of the public and the private, the self and the society.

Certain extant scholarly discussions might be related to this concept of awakening inwardness. Contemplative inquiry proposed by Ergas (2016) might be the one that deserves attention. Contemplative practices include 'the many ways human beings have found across cultures and across time to concentrate, broaden and deepen conscious awareness' (Roth, 2008, p. 19). "East-Asian wisdom traditions and Western monotheistic religions have been among the richest sources for these practices that include diverse forms of meditation and yoga, philosophical practices rendered in Hadot's (1995) terms as 'spiritual exercises' and many others" (Ergas, 2016, p. 24). As argued by Ergas (2016), these practices are now being applied within academia as methods of inquiry. It is also associated with the concept of subjectivity. As pointed out by Roth (2008), human subjectivity is the source of human being's conceptual activities and products:

Human subjectivity is the source for all the conceptual models we develop to explain the underlying structures of the world in the physical sciences and the underlying structures of consciousness in the cognitive sciences. Thus despite all the principles of experimental science that attempt to establish objective standards for research they all in the last analysis, are derived by human beings, and therefore they are grounded in human subjectivity. (p. 221)

Subjectivity might be the deepest structure – or medium – of human being. According to Pinar (2010), ‘by subjectivity, I mean the inner life, the lived sense of self, non-unitary, dispersed, and fragmented—that is associated with what has been given and what one has chosen, those circumstances of everyday life, those residues of trauma and of fantasy, from which one reconstructs a life’ (p. 3). Subjectivity, then, refers to the inner life, the process of becoming, which can be ongoing if one is in fact ‘becoming’ all the time. I suggest that subjectivity entails beliefs, thinking, commitments, desires, feelings that may not always be nameable (such as something between feeling and desire) but focuses on the site of experience. Such lived experience and its reconstruction – i.e. educational experience – constitute the uniqueness of a person, which distinguishes a person from others, from what one was. For me, the concept of ‘awakening inwardness’ might be narrower than that of subjectivity. While one is growing, one develops a complex ‘inwardness’ that is unique and yet comprehensive; it underlies one’s thinking and behavior. This inwardness can be informed by experience and academic study, but it also exists isolated from one’s experience and conceptual knowledge. It is something that one has evolved (and vice versa), a state of subjectivity consistently working in and through self. This inwardness can be manifested through one’s way of thinking, one’s reflections on experience, crystallized perhaps in a sense of mission, but not limited to these. Awakening inwardness tends to take scattered forms; it is rarely a systematic congregation or set of ideas since sense of mission may not be systematic in real life. It is a state that might trigger one’s deep thinking, awaken one’s underlying consciousness, and engage one in a socially and culturally meaningful way. It allows one to think and reflect. This concept – awakening inwardness essentially involves two aspects: reflective and anticipative. Being reflective means that one identifies something that one may not be aware of and engages oneself in reconstructive thinking, thus leading to meaningful action; being anticipative means that one looks forwards to something greater than what is, which one transcends.

Metaphorically speaking, how sensitivity can be fostered or improved might be akin to spring rain moistening earth. Spring rain (water) moisturizes soil and provides essentials for seeds to grow. This metaphor seems to illuminate the dynamics of how sensitivity can be fostered: sensitivity being fostered or improved through a secret and sacred process, the dynamics of which may not be observable, but can be felt and identified later by consequences: plants appear. If one is porous, one can be more sensitive, like a sponge absorbing water. This porousness can expand one’s knowledge system: more comprehensive; more responsive to the outside world. It echoes the concept of structural sensitivity, which means that sensitivity can be conceptualized as threaded through smaller aspects or units attuned to various aspects of world. Each structural aspect does not exist totally isolated from other aspects, but rather they can mutually inform one another. Recall that Fung argues that as one gains more knowledge, one can better control one’s feeling. Intellectual development fosters emotional development.

To sum up, attunement involves contingency, boundary and sensitivity. Contingency emphasizes the objective side of one’s experience: the particularity of experience, identified from one’s own perspective. Boundary here means the difficulties or challenges that one may perceive and experience. Sensitivity emphasizes how one can go beyond one’s boundary subjectively, thus being attuned to new form of understanding or thinking and becoming engaged with the world. Awakening inwardness remains central to sensitivity. The three elements constitute the concept of attunement. Overall, attunement stresses that how one’s informal form of learning (for example, learning that takes place outside classroom), can take place in a subjective sense of intellectual labour striving for deeper understanding. Learning

occurs not only in but also out of classrooms, and it always seems to take place within a person's life.

Conclusion

This paper illuminates the concept of attunement. Attunement emphasizes how informal forms of study (for example, learning that takes place outside classroom) contributes to understanding self and world. This theory suggests that learning occurs not only in and out of classrooms but always within a person's life. In such a theory of education learning becomes situated in not only school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one's subjective sense of intellectual labor. Attunement demonstrates how I learned from writing my own autobiography.

The concept of attunement contributes to understanding *currere* as complicated conversation -- how one struggles for self-understanding. Attunement reveals how self-self model works. The theory of attunement enriches the understanding of *currere* and provides possible practice of *currere*. It emphasizes how one learns individually. The concept of attunement can be considered as indirect autobiography in which I, based upon my own autobiography, develop my understanding on curriculum of attunement that addresses how one can engage in understanding self and world. This indirect autobiography emphasizes how one can learn from one's experience through engaging in complicated conversations inviting others and otherness to participate. Thus, curriculum of attunement places oneself at the center of exploration, using one's autobiography as a thriving centerpiece from which to extend, contemplate, interpret and teach. The paper of attunement is the example of such attempt.

Notes

¹ wywang105@163.com

² Here I want to express my gratitude to Prof. William Pinar for his editorial assistance for this paper.

References

- Dahlberg, K. (2006). The essence of essences-the search for meaning structures in phenomenological analysis of lifeworld phenomena. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 1, 11-19.
- DeLancey, C. (2014). Commitment and attunement. *Phenomenal Cognitive science*, 13, p.579-594. Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht.
- Demuth, A. (2012). Heidegger's concept of „die Befindlichkeit“ and His Role in Human Cognition and Self-cognition. Retrieved from: <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423907282.pdf>
- Ergas, O. (2016). Knowing the unknown: Transcending the educational narrative of the Kantian paradigm through contemplative inquiry. In J. Lin, R. Oxford & Culham, T. (eds) *Establishing a spiritual research paradigm*. Toronto: Information Age Publishing. 1-23.
- Fishbane, M. (2008). *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fung, Y. (1937). *The History of Chinese Philosophy*. Peiping: Henri Vetch.



-
- Hadot, P. (1995). *Philosophy as a way of life*. (M. Case, trans.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Heidegger, M. (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1995). *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, Studies in Continental Thought.
- Huebner, D. (1999). *The lure of the transcendent*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kim, S. (2006). *The experience of Korean parents' educational zeal*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, MN.
- Kuperus, Gerard (2007), "Attunement, Deprivation, and Drive: Heidegger and Animality". *Philosophy*. 37. Retrieved on September, 13rd, 2019, from <https://repository.usfca.edu/phil/37> Article originally published in in *Phenomenology and the Non-Human Animal*, edited by Christian Lotz and Corinne Painter, Kluwer/Springer, 2007.
- Lipari, L. (2014). *Listening, thinking and being: toward an Ethics of Attunement*. University Park: Penn State University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968/1948). *The visible and the invisible* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Evanston, IL, USA: North Western University Press.
- Pinar, W. F. (1975). The Analysis of Educational Experience. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists* (pp. 384-395). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.
- Pinar, W. F. (2009). *Worldliness of Cosmopolitan Education: a passionate life in public Service*. New York: Routledge.
- Pinar, W. F. (2011). *The Character of Curriculum Studies*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan.
- Pinar, W. F., Reynolds, W. M., Slattery, P., & Taubman, P. T. (1995). *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Plumwood, V. (1991). Nature, self and gender: Feminism, environmental philosophy and the critique of rationalism. *Ecological Feminism*, 6(3), 3-27
- Roth, H. (2008). Against cognitive imperialism. *Religion East & West*, 8, 1-26. Retrieved on May 20, 2016, from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>
- Tu, W. M. (1998). Confucius and Confucianism. In W.H. Slote & G.A. DeVos (Eds.), *Confucianism and the family* (pp. 3-36). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Wang, H. (2004). *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Wang, W. (2020). *Chinese Currere, Subjective Reconstruction and Attunement – When Calls My Heart*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Submitted: September, 15th, 2019.

Approved: June, 23rd, 2020.

