Variation in Folk High School Teachers’ Conceptions of Reflection
Broadening the Understanding of Reflection in Swedish Popular Education

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**Title**  
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**Abstract**  
The concept of reflection expressed as different types of thinking is explicitly given an essential role in specific strands of international discourses on lifelong learning and education. Meanwhile, some researchers consider reflection problematic and point to the lack of consensus on its meaning in theory and practice. Assuming that there are varied conceptualizations and that arguments for learning of reflective skills are deemed sound, it follows that it would be especially meaningful to find out how professionals responsible for educational practices understand the concept. As this kind of research appears scarce in adult education, an exploration may contribute to knowledge underlying what teachers do ‘in the name of reflection’. The pedagogy in Swedish popular education is of special interest as it ideally centers adults’ participation and reflection with others to facilitate learning. Furthermore, the curriculum is not regulated in law which may indicate a wide variety of interpretations of the teaching mission including its key concepts. Therefore, the aim of this phenomenography inspired study is to identify the variation in folk high school teachers’ \(n=7\) conceptions of reflection in Swedish popular education. Based on analysis of semi-structured interviews, it is argued that the results in some sense broaden the understanding of reflection in revealing three different categories of descriptions. These categories are; reflection as a process fostering understanding of experiences, reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development, and reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals of popular education and emancipation. On basis of the theoretical idea that teachers’ thought is important to and influence their professional action, the potential influences of these varying conceptualizations on folk high school teachers’ professional practice are elucidated.

**Keywords**  
Reflection, Swedish popular education, folk high school teacher, phenomenography, variation, conception
Variation in Folk High School Teachers’ Conceptions of Reflection

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1 Introduction

In two strands of discourses on lifelong learning and education, it appears that different types of thinking frequently are emphasized as being crucial in deriving meaning from experiences. For instance, in the context of employability for 16-29 year-olds, OECD (2015) states that “a wide range of skills – cognitive, social and emotional” (p. 15) are general in nature and necessary for life fulfillment. The cognitive skills are referred to as understanding, interpreting, and analyzing complex information to be applied in everyday and professional practice. Concerning Australian higher education graduates, Hager, Holland and Beckett (2002, p. 3, 14) name these skills as logical reasoning, problem solving, and independent and critical thinking, whereas Humburg, van der Velden and Verhagen (2013, p. 11) in a European context refer to them as general academic skills such as analytical thinking and reflectiveness. Another strand where thinking is being presented as crucial in deriving meaning from experiences concerns teachers’ and health care workers’ professional practice, and students. In Mälkki’s (2011, p. 1) review of reflection in higher and adult education, it is claimed that many researchers view reflection as a prerequisite for quality learning among students and both quality teaching and professional development among teachers. In Swedish popular education, for instance, the pedagogy ideally centers adults’ participation and reflection with others to facilitate learning (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 9; Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2013, as cited in Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016c, p. 19). As of 2011 in the United Kingdom, reflection is a student competence explicitly required by government to be demonstrated in all pre-registration nursing programmes in order to successfully gain entry to the professional register (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2014, as cited in Clarke, 2014, p. 1219). Against this background, I claim that reflection is expressed as different types of thinking and explicitly given an essential role in these specific strands of discourses on lifelong learning and education.
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However, the concept of reflection is considered problematic among some researchers. For instance, Emsheimer (2005a, p. 35) states that the unclear delineation of reflection in relation to ‘processing’, ‘ponder’, ‘consider’ or ‘meta-cognition’ results in a loss of meaning. Procee (2006) questions that reflection in education “is a field full of promises: Promises for improving professional proficiency, for fostering personal growth, and for increasing social justice” (p. 252), concluding that the concept lacks conceptual clarity. Rodgers (2002, p. 842) purports that this lack of consensus results in reflection being difficult to be taught, learned, assessed, discussed, and researched. Clearly a picture of a tension can be depicted here. A tension between on the one hand, research and guiding documents in specific discourses on adult learning pointing to the necessity of reflection and, on the other hand, some researcher’s illustrations of a lack of consensus on the meaning of the concept in theory and practice. In a nutshell, much certitude abounds the value of reflection in learning despite critique of its claimed lack of conceptual clarity. A similar picture of a tension is exemplified in discussions on American schools (Rodgers, 2002), the Swedish compulsory school system (Hansson, 2005), and pre-registration nursing programmes in the United Kingdom (Clarke, 2014). Discussions in pre-registration nursing degree programmes in Ireland (e.g. O’Connor, Hyde, & Treacey, 2003, p. 108) have even led to difficulties in implementing reflection in the curricula (O’Donovan, 2007, p. 611).

If one considers the argument ‘reflection lacks conceptual clarity’ convincing, it is reasonable to assume there exists varied conceptualizations. In such case, it would seem meaningful to look closer into what some of those conceptualizations might be? Furthermore, if the arguments for the learning of reflective skills are deemed sound, it follows that it would be especially meaningful to find out how professionals responsible for educational practices
Understand the concept. Of special interest here is the pedagogy in Swedish popular education, as it ideally centers adults' participation and reflection with others to facilitate learning. To this end, then, the present phenomenography inspired study addresses the question of variation in folk high school teachers' ($n=7$) conceptions of reflection in Swedish popular education. This specific population of teachers is also particularly interesting as the curriculum in this type of education is not regulated in law, which may be indicative of a wide variety of interpretations of the teaching mission including its key concepts.

In striving to give these implicit understandings empirically based voices lies the underpinning assumption that the specific meanings professionals attach to reflection influence their professional practice. This assumption is thus founded in that there are links between human thought and action. Pajares (1992, p. 326) suggests that teacher’s individual meanings about key educational concepts are part of their conceptions about learning, teaching, and schooling, concluding that beliefs strongly influence perception and teachers’ behavior. Sweeney, Bula, and Cornett (2001) refer to beliefs as “personal practice theories” (p. 409), meaning systematic sets of beliefs based on prior experiences of teaching, personal life, and culture. These beliefs are held to be true and act as a cognitive filter for teachers in all their planning, decision-making, and teaching practices. Zheng (2015, p. 1) emphasizes that a substantial amount of research over the past decades confirm that what teachers think, know, and believe considerably influence what they actually do in class. Fundamentally, despite their different use of concepts and terms, the mentioned research seems to emphasize the theoretical idea that teachers’ thought is important to and influence professional action.
In line with this purported logic, identifying folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection through semi-structured interviews are part of a voice print in a particular time and context of their thinking influencing professional practice. Such a descriptive exploration may help to contribute towards knowledge underlying what teaching professionals in this specific type of adult education do ‘in the name of reflection’. To some extent, then, the results can potentially provide empirically founded insights to discussions on teacher betterment which fundamentally touches upon the overarching research domain of teachers’ professional development.

Having introduced the general research context of Swedish popular education, it is relevant to initiate the reader into some of its characteristic conditions and content to get a sense for the setting influencing folk high school teachers’ professional practice.

Sketching the Research Context

The Swedish education system\(^1\) consists of several types of schooling and education tailored for people of different ages with differing needs and abilities. The country’s 154 folk high schools and 10 study associations is one such type of schooling commonly being referred to as ‘popular education’\(^2\). This phenomena encompasses activities such as various courses, study circles, and cultural programs in an arena of civil society largely subsidized by the state, councils, and municipalities. In a decree it is clarified that four conditions must be granted to continuously receive state subsidy. Popular education must contribute to Strengthening and developing democracy; making it possible for an increased diversity of people to influence their life situation

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\(^1\) For an overview of the Swedish education system, see the Swedish National Agency for Education (2016).
\(^2\) For a comprehensive account on Swedish popular education as an institution and phenomenon, consult Laginder, Nordvall, and Crowther (2013). For elaborations of another way of conceptualizing popular education, namely as a set of distinctive characteristics in relation to other types of adult schooling, see Sundgren (2003), Abrandt Dahlgren (2013), and Rydbeck & Nordvall (2015).
and create participative involvement in societal development; levelling educational gaps and raise the level of education and cultural awareness; and broaden the interest for and increase participation in cultural life (Decree on government subsidies to popular education, SFS 2015:218). As of 2014, a government bill declares a goal for the popular education state politics, namely to “give everybody opportunity to together with others increase their knowledge and enlightenment for personal development and involvement in society [my translation]” (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 19). From the perspective of the state, the ambition for this subsidized arena of civil society is thus explicitly to enable democracy, equality, diversity, culture, and empowerment through active participation and interaction.

Despite the fact that the state subsidy is conditioned, the curriculum is not regulated in law which results in a freedom and responsibility to independently design courses and activities. Therefore, it is encouraged to uniquely shape content, teaching, and orientation in collaboration with local students and the particular folk high school’s ownership (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 10). This professional freedom is appreciated among folk high school teachers (Andersson, Rudberg, Rydenstam, & Svensson, 2013, p. 109f). However, the freedom is possibly tied to an increased difficulty for them to understand their teaching mission including central concepts, in comparison to teachers in school forms where the curriculum is regulated (Harlin, 2014, p. 91). Consequently, the population of folk high school teachers may carry a wide variety of understandings of reflection.

The folk high schools’ courses vary widely in character. The Information Service of the Swedish Folk High Schools (2014) describes general course as an opportunity for students to in 1-4 years obtain the equivalent of upper secondary school level of knowledge in order to qualify for higher studies. The seven standard subjects included in this level of knowledge are Swedish,
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English, Natural Science, Social studies, Mathematics, Religion, and History. Commonly, this type of course has a general orientation such as local/global issues, environment, art, music, media, or leadership. *Special courses* last 1-2 years and focus subjects such as art, design, music, theatre, physical education, health or environmental/international studies. A selection of these special courses are at the equivalent of university or college level and prepare students for work as, for instance, recreation leader, health coach, journalist, cantor, or sign language interpreter. *Adapted courses* are studies tailored to the needs of individuals with various disabilities or temporarily/permanently weakened psychological function such as anxiety or depression. *Short courses* are carried out for 1-14 days throughout the year but mostly during the summer and focus on subjects such as leadership, religion, art, culture, writing, and the outdoors. *External courses* include Swedish for Immigrants (Sfi) as well as collaborations with the Swedish Public Employment Service. For example, collaborations supporting the settling of adult immigrants in society with six months’ studies in the Swedish language and culture (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2015a, 2016b) or encouraging mostly younger job-seekers to continue their studies or work through attending a twelve weeks long course (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016a).

The folk high schools’ pedagogy is often described as being problem-oriented, focused on connections between theory and practice, and being founded on principles of democracy and a spirit of citizenship (Abrandt Dahlgren, 2007, p. 17). Other descriptions emphasize thematic studies and project work (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2015b) meaning that standard subjects are combined instead of separated. In such studies and projects subjects such as Swedish, Natural Science, and Social studies may be combined into a theme. These themes may last one or several weeks or an entire academic year, and may encompass issues of power,
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sustainability, leadership, international health or entrepreneurship. Usually thematic studies are complemented with teaching that resembles the standard separation of subjects which is often the case with English and Mathematics. The pedagogy ideally centers adults’ participation and reflection with others to facilitate learning (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 9; Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2013, as cited in Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016c, p. 19).

Here it is significant to note that reflective skills explicitly are distinguished as essential in facilitating student learning which, in extension, can be considered a political act striving to achieve the state’s mentioned ambitions with Swedish popular education. Considering this pivotal importance, it seems logical that the curriculum in Sweden’s single Programme in Folk High School Teacher Education progressively increases the demands on their students’ reflective skills (Linköping University, 2012, p. 6). The folk high school teacher students increasingly apply these skills to describing, understanding, and coping with the complexities of professional practice.

Each year about one million individuals engage in the mentioned activities spread throughout all of the country’s 290 municipalities: Approximately 29 000 participate in general and special courses, 84 000 in short courses, 6000 in external courses, 638 000 in study circles, and the remainder participate in cultural programs (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2015b, p. 11, 16). In sum, popular education can be seen as a “highly state integrated phenomenon and a mainstream activity in Swedish society” (Laginder, Nordvall, & Crowther, 2013, p. 4) and facilitating reflection is emphasized in folk high school pedagogy.

Aim and Research Question

Abrandt Dahlgren, Arvidsson and Dahlgren (2009, p. 62ff) highlight that adult education teachers’ main responsibility is to plan, facilitate, and evaluate students’ learning with demands
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of a well thought-out teaching design. This teaching design is to be sensitive to context-specific conditions in various types of schooling. Assuming that teachers’ understanding of central educational concepts influence this professional responsibility, and that arguments for the learning of reflective skills are deemed sound, it follows that it would be meaningful to find out how professionals responsible for educational practices understand the concept of reflection. Reflection is intriguing as it explicitly is illustrated as having an essential role in specific strands of discourses on lifelong learning and education while, at the same time, being pointed to as conceptually problematic by some researchers. As mentioned, the pedagogy in Swedish popular education is of special interest as it ideally centers adults' participation and reflection with others to facilitate learning. Furthermore, the curriculum is not regulated in law which may indicate a wide variety of interpretations of the teaching mission including its key concepts. To this end, then, the aim of the present study is to identify the variation of folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in professional practice. The following research question will be addressed more fully in the analysis of the semi-structured interviews:

- What different ways of experiencing reflection do folk high school teachers describe?

The overarching research area in focus here is the educational sciences. This includes research on learning, teaching, knowledge formation, and education in various contexts (Swedish Research Council, 2016). The explored phenomenon is folk high school teachers' conceptions of reflection. The variation of conceptions as such is of interest and thus not the sociological factors at macro-levels (culture, society, history) that may shape or govern this variation. Neither is the interest to elaborate possible relationships between conceptions of reflection and student outcomes, nor the epistemological, ontological, or philosophical nature of reflection.
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Disposition of the Thesis

The thesis consists of seven main sections. After setting the scene with this introductory section including an overview of the study’s background, context, aim, and research question, section 2 illustrates relevant previous international research on reflection. Emphasis is on sketching a general picture of the concept of reflection and outlining as well as comparing previous studies on conceptions of reflection. In section 3, a theoretical background is explicated where the main idea is that teachers’ thought is important to and influence their professional action. Section 4 depicts the methodology and methods including issues relating to generalization and research ethics. Section 5 illustrates the results in three qualitatively different categories of description. In section 6, the empirically founded results are discussed and limitations of the chosen research design are made explicit. In the final section, the results are concluded and directions for future research offered.
2 Previous Research

There is an ocean of previous research on reflection within the field of adult learning and education. This vast amount of research elaborates on a wide variety of topics in differing contexts and populations, from various perspectives, both nationally and internationally. For reasons of demarcation and relevance, the emphasis here is to (1) sketch a general narrative of the concept of reflection and (2) elucidate seven previous studies that explore individuals’ conceptions of reflection. These studies are then compared with one another in terms of similarities and differences of the principal dimension conceptions of reflection. In order to add breadth of understanding, the dimensions research context and population are briefly compared across the studies as well.

The Concept of Reflection

Etymologically, the noun ‘reflection’ stems from the fourteenth century Latin verb reflectere which means to bend back, bend backwards or turn away (re-, meaning ‘again’ or ‘back’ + flectere, meaning ‘to bend’). Bengtsson (2007, p. 87) states that the term originally was introduced in a branch of physics called optics, involving, for instance, the behavior and properties of light in relation to matter. In optics, reflection was described as the phenomena of light bouncing back from a calm surface of water or a mirror. Transferred from natural science to a social science context instead, Hjertström Lappalainen (2009) describes the concept as “halting or taking a step back” (p. 18) meaning to cognitively observe or discover one’s own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and deeds. Inspired by etymology, then, reflection can be described as using cognition to review oneself in order to understand oneself. It is even argued that this opportunity to understand oneself constantly exists for the human species and that it therefore is a specific
condition or attribute of being human (Ekebergh, 2001, as cited in Gustafsson, Asp, & Fagerberg, 2009, p. 1461).

In colloquial language, there are several views of reflection and Moon (1999, p. 3ff) suggests they place reflection in relation to learning and thinking. For instance, reflection is considered to be the close scrutiny of an issue to gain a further and broader understanding of it; a mental process carried out for a purpose or a useful outcome; a complex mental processing of issues without obvious solutions involving high levels of uncertainty; or transcendence of old patterns of thought by means of critically overviewing them. In its lay use, reflection and thinking in general appears to be interchangeable which may constitute a challenge. One challenge in studying reflection is that much of what has been written about the concept comes from different sources and disciplines, such as education, psychology, philosophy, and sociology but with little integration between them (Moon, 1999, p. vii). Consequently, many scholastic meanings as well as synonyms besides thinking float around the idea of reflection. Other synonyms used are, for instance, reasoning, reviewing, problem solving, pondering, considering, processing, and inquiry. Essentially this absence of conceptual clarity and meaning may distort understanding which some consider problematic.

Among some researchers, the concept of reflection is considered problematic (e.g. Emsheimer, 2005a; Procee, 2006; Rodgers, 2002). For instance, drawing on its use in educational contexts the past decades, Emsheimer (2005a, p. 35) states that the unclear delineation of reflection in relation to its various synonyms results in a loss of meaning. Furthermore, some attempts to be more precise in meaning have a tendency to lean towards defining reflection as ‘meta-cognition’. Hjertström Lappalainen (2009, p. 19f) notes that this idea exists already with the late eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant, who describes
reflection as the ability to observe, judge, and understand oneself, an issue or phenomena, and thus think about thinking itself. Proce (2006, p. 252) purports that a huge amount of educational literature emphasizes the concept as open to multiple interpretations and applied in a myriad of ways in education as well as practice environments, resulting in a lack of conceptual clarity. Basically, promises of professional improvement, personal growth, and increasing social justice tied to reflection in education are questioned. Rodgers (2002, p. 842f) elucidates three unwanted consequences of this lack of conceptual clarity. First, reflection becomes difficult to discuss and therefore difficult to facilitate in teaching. Second, student assessment of reflection becomes a perplexing task as that which is to be assessed is vaguely defined. Third, research on the effects of reflection in relation to student learning or teachers’ professional practice becomes problematic as the researched phenomena is unclear. These consequences are decidedly portrayed as being severe for the field of adult learning and education. Similar critiques concerning the lack of conceptual clarity are pointed out by various other researchers as well (e.g. Akbari, 2007; Burnard, 2005; Ecclestone, 1996; Freshwater, 2008, p. 6f; Ixer, 1999, 2010; Teekman, 2000; Zeichner, 1993, as cited in Alexandersson, (2003[1994]), p. 29).

Nevertheless, a substantial amount of scholars advocate the use of reflection in adult education and professional practice as well as personal development. For instance, Schön (1983, 1987) advocates fostering reflectiveness among students in all forms of vocational education, as well as among practitioners’ continued learning in the unique and frequently complex dynamics of professional practice. It is argued that reflection-in-action, that is, thinking about what one is doing while doing it, is a superior approach in dealing with the often unpredictable and multifaceted issues of practice. This is set in contrast to giving privileged status to an epistemology based in ‘technical rationality’, that is, applying systematic, research-based knowledge to what is
presented as straightforward and context-independent problems of practice. In a learning perspective often called ‘experiential learning’, several scholars assign reflection an essential role stating that there must be dynamic links between human experience and thinking in order for us to potentially construct new knowledge (e.g. Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Dewey, 1997[1938]; Harris, 1989; Kolb, 1984; Moon, 1999). Concerning vocations, there is a plethora of research on reflection in theory and practice specifically related to teachers (e.g. Beauchamp, 2015; Bek, 2012; Boud & Walker, 1998; Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Brookfield, 1995, 2006; Ghaye, 2011; Gibbs, 1988; Harlin, 2013; Kreber, 2005; Ottesen, 2007). Furthermore, reflection and reflective practice are seen as tools for developing education, clinical practice, and research in health care professions, such as for nurses (e.g. Berglund & Ekebergh, 2015; Freshwater, Taylor, & Sherwood, 2008; Johns, 2013; Lethbridge, 2006; Miraglia & Asselin, 2015), for physiotherapists (e.g. Lähteenmäki, 2005; Paterson & Chapman, 2013), and for psychologists (e.g. Fisher, Chew, & Leow, 2015). Reflection is also researched in connection to organizational learning where individual, group, and organizational levels are investigated (e.g. Hilden & Tikkamäki, 2013).

Now focus turns to outlining studies on individuals’ unique conceptions of reflection which is an area of previous research appearing far less attended to.

Conceptions of Reflection

Previous research empirically exploring adult education teachers’ unique conceptions of reflection in professional practice in the field of adult education appears scarce. No empirical

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1 For critiques of experiential learning, see Michelson (1996) and Fenwick (2001).
2 The search for previous research was carried out on several occasions between 16 December, 2015-25 January, 2016, in the data bases DiVA and SwePub as well as on Google Scholar. The search words included ‘teacher’, ‘reflection’, and ‘conception’ in shifting combinations together or in exchange with the words: Popular education, folk high school, professional, perception, experience, understanding, and conceptualization.
studies with full relevance were found that focuses folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in Sweden. In the following, seven studies considered somewhat relevant are outlined engaging the populations nurse teachers and lecturers, teacher/nursing students, and working nurses.

Bulman, Lathlean, and Gobbi’s (2012) ethnographic study describes the meaning of the concept of reflection from the perspective of nine teachers and eleven students within nursing education in the United Kingdom. Reflection is perceived in three ways, including as a positive way to make sense of nursing practice by searching for solutions and thereby improve future practice; as a way to critically analyze feelings and oneself as well as challenge theory in order to add new perspectives about practice; and as a way to intertwine cognitive, affective, and active elements in engaging with ‘being’ a nurse rather than emphasizing ‘doing’ nursing as mainly a cognitive activity.

Clarke’s (2014) interview study investigates lecturers’ and students’ perceptions of reflection in four focus groups of 8-10 per group in a mental health nursing diploma programme in the United Kingdom. The result depicts reflection as an engaging process focusing on framing and reframing the individual’s reality being experienced moment by moment. The purpose of reflection is claimed to be to understand oneself and one’s impact on others in relation to past, present, and future experiences.

Shields’ (1995) interview study explores eleven first-year students’ perspectives on reflection in a nursing programme in Ireland. The findings are that reflection is perceived as thinking actively about prior experiences in order to weave new knowledge into what is already known; and as mental previewing, that is, preparing prior to experience by visualizing, reading, thinking, and talking to others. The purpose of reflecting on experiences is described to be to
change professional conduct, identify and solve problems as well as reduce anxiety when encountered with complex moral dilemmas.

Emsheimer (2005b) explores students’ understanding of reflection in Swedish teacher education with the ambition of adding complexity to the concept. Neither the methodology nor the methods is clarified and the number of interview persons is vaguely described as “a hundred or so” (Emsheimer, 2005b, p. 26). The results depict that reflection is conceptualized in four different ways. First, as a sharing of experiences. This occurs in class when the students share from their everyday practice experiences or a paper they have written but without attempts to synthesize any of it. Second, as taking in information. Here, the process of taking in information and making sense of it in relation to one’s own aim and goals is in focus. Third, as viewing from different perspectives which is illustrated as looking at a written material from as many different perspectives as possible. Fourth, as connecting different experiences, meaning connecting past and present experiences in order to be able to use the knowledge gained.

O'Donovan’s (2007) interview study based on grounded theory examines five students’ perceptions of reflection as a learning strategy during clinical placements in pre-registration mental health nursing education in Ireland. The findings show perception of reflection as a deliberative thinking process of looking back at experiences. This included examining one’s feelings and professional practice with the purpose to improve future practice. Other purposes with reflection were to integrate theory with clinical practice and to learn more about oneself.

O'Connor, Hyde, and Treacey's (2003) interview study resembling grounded theory investigates eleven nurse teachers’ perceptions of using reflection and reflective practice with diploma nursing students in Ireland. The results show that reflection and reflective practice were used synonymously, and illustrate two themes. In the first theme, reflection is perceived as a
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deliberate way of reviewing clinical experiences. The reviewing included posing questions regarding the nature of clinical interactions and the reflective process itself, and changing issues to the better through problem-solving. In the second theme, reflection is perceived as an active way of valuing, developing, and professionalizing nursing practice knowledge. Here, articulating the implicit and intuitive skills involved in professional practice is seen as acknowledging them as valid sources for generating new nursing practice knowledge. Throughout, the purpose of reflection was held to be to learn from experiences and thereby develop personally and professionally.

Gustafsson, Asp, and Fagerberg’s (2009) phenomenographic study explores seven municipal night duty registered nurses’ conceptions of reflection in Sweden. The nurses avoid conceptualizing what reflection is as such and instead conceptualize it in terms of purpose of and prerequisites for reflection. The results are categorized in two main themes, ‘Field of applications’ and ‘Field of prerequisites’. In the first theme, the goals of reflection are described but in actuality they are at times unclear to the nurses themselves. The theme contains three sub-conceptions (a-c) of reflection, namely as, a) an instrument for interpreting situations. This means to in the actual situation simultaneously consider past-reflected experiences as well as the presently existing knowledge, with the intention of seeking connections between them for understanding. b) A strategy for handling the working situation. This is about a need to assess, consider, and discuss one’s own and others’ professional experiences with the ambition of understanding together in retrospect. c) An approach to learning. Here, learning is closely connected with the expansion of personal and professional knowledge through individual and group reflection on experiences.
The second theme, ‘Field of prerequisites’, contains nurse attributes that are considered prerequisites necessary for facilitating reflection. Again, three sub-conceptions (d-f) are described, namely that d) presence facilitates reflection. With the prerequisite ‘presence’ is meant to really be engaged in situations, that is, being receptive and open-minded to anomalies that alter the routine, and assess in each moment what is important. e) Flexibility implies reflection. The prerequisite ‘flexibility’ is described as being receptive and, for instance, adapt to or consider the points of view of patients, relatives, and other care-staff. f) Courage in thought and activity increases reflection. In order to question one’s own as well as colleagues’ behavior and actions, the prerequisite ‘courage’ is needed. Questioning or criticizing with and among colleagues is considered to potentially carry the widening of nurses’ reflection.

Comparing Similarities and Differences in the Studies

In comparing the conceptions of reflection in the seven studies (see Appendix C for a summary), similarities and differences can be detected. Using broad strokes of categorization, one conception seems to frequently recur but in different formulations. In one way or another, all of the studies partly formulate reflection in relation to understanding experiences. For instance, as ‘a way to make sense of practice’ (Bulman, Lathlean, & Gobbi, 2012; Emsheimer, 2005b) and as ‘an engaging process focusing on framing and reframing the individual’s reality’ (Clarke, 2014). Moreover, reflection is formulated as ‘thinking actively about prior experiences in order to weave new knowledge into what is already known’ and ‘mental previewing’ (Shields, 1995), a deliberative thinking process of reviewing experiences (O’Donovan, 2007; O’Connor, Hyde, & Treacey, 2003), and as ‘an instrument for interpreting situations’ (Gustafsson, Asp, & Fagerberg, 2009). Thus, these individually different formulations of conceptions may be lumped together as reflection as a way to understand present, past, and/or future experiences. These studies’
depicted purposes with understanding differ but they are seemingly directed toward professional practice or development. The purposes include: To improve future practice (Bulman, Lathlean, & Gobbi, 2012; O’Donovan, 2007) or professional conduct (Shields, 1995), gain self-knowledge (Clarke, 2014; O’Donovan, 2007), ‘weave new knowledge into what is already known’ (Shields, 1995), problem-solving and anxiety reduction (Shields, 1995), ‘use the knowledge gained’ (Emsheimer, 2005b), and to ‘integrate theory with clinical practice’ (O’Donovan, 2007). In short, the broad conception of reflection as a way to understand present, past, and/or future experiences is illustrated with various purposes seemingly related to professional practice and development. Thus, if one is to sketch a rough tendency of a common conception of reflection existing in the presented previous research, this is it. However, relying merely on such a rough sketch would be overly simplified because some of the studies’ other conceptions of reflection vary.

As mentioned, some of the conceptions of reflection vary. For instance, Bulman, Lathlean, and Gobbi (2012) illustrate reflection as a way to intertwine cognitive, affective, and active elements in engaging with ‘being’ a nurse rather than emphasizing ‘doing’ nursing as mainly a cognitive activity. Here, reflection is perceived as a way to connect different realms within an individual into being a professional. Emsheimer (2005b) depicts reflection partly as a mere sharing of experiences without any attempts of synthesis, partly as viewing from different perspectives meaning to look at a written material from a multitude of different perspectives. Furthermore, O’Connor, Hyde, and Treacey (2003) illustrates a conception of reflection as an active way of valuing, developing, and professionalizing nursing practice knowledge by making it explicit. The purpose is to learn from experiences and thereby develop personally and professionally. Gustafsson, Asp, and Fagerberg (2009) depicts conceptions of reflection partly as a strategy for handling the working situation, partly as an approach to learning. The purpose is
illustrated to be to expand personal/professional knowledge through joint retrospection on experiences. Furthermore, this is the only one of the studies that depicts reflection in terms of a field of prerequisites or necessary attributes (i.e. presence, flexibility, and courage) for reflection to be carried out at all. All in all, these conceptions of reflection point in somewhat different directions. Notably, this is somewhat in contrast to the previously mentioned broad conception of reflection as a way to understand present, past, and/or future experiences.

The outlined studies are similar in that they are all based on the qualitative research tradition involving relatively few participants, ranging from five to Emsheimer’s (2005b) ‘a hundred or so’. However, that particular study differs from the others in that it entirely lacks a methodology description. This may be explained by that it is not a report of a research inquiry per se but rather a chapter in an anthology with the overall ambition to elaborate theoretically and methodologically on the meaning of reflection. Apparently, omitting the methodology section effects the research quality negatively because the reader is set in a weakened position to judge the validity of the results.

Concerning a comparison of the international research contexts across the studies, they are all situated in Northern European geographical settings; five of them in nursing education contexts in the United Kingdom or Ireland while two studies are set in Swedish teacher education and a municipal working night nurse context in Sweden, respectively. The focus on research on reflection in general in nursing education contexts is fairly logical, considering that as of 2011 in the United Kingdom, reflection is a student competence explicitly required by government to be demonstrated in all pre-registration nursing programmes in order to successfully gain entry to the professional register (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2014, as cited in Clarke, 2014, p. 1219). In Irish nurse education, reflection on practice is recommended
to be included as a strategy to facilitate the development of students’ competencies (O’Donovan, 2007). Furthermore, discussions in Ireland are ongoing concerning formally including reflection in the nursing programme curriculum thus requiring some form of systematic outlook to the concept (O’Connor, Hyde, & Treacey, 2003, p. 108). In having these explicit demands for using reflection in professional nursing practice, it seems reasonable that research on conceptions of reflection is facilitated. What is notable here is the underrepresentation of similar research in a Swedish adult education context and this warrants some further explication.

In comparing the national distribution of research contexts, it is apparent that Swedish adult education taken as a whole is underrepresented, which, especially considering the weakened research quality of the Emsheimer (2005b) study, is noteworthy. It is noteworthy in that many researchers in a lifelong learning discourse view reflection as a prerequisite for quality learning among teachers and students alike (Mälkki, 2011, p. 1) yet there appears to be very little research carried out on teachers’ conceptions of reflection in adult education in Sweden. However, this scholarly view on the role of the concept has trickled down to national documents in, for instance, Swedish popular education. Here, the pedagogy is explicitly illustrated as ideally centering adults’ participation and reflection with others to enhance learning (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 9; Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2013, as cited in Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016c, p. 19). Another example is the ordinance regulating Swedish municipal adult education, especially education for adults and instruction in Swedish for immigrants (Sfi), in which it is stated that each student must obtain knowledge on how to “reflect over their experiences and their own ways of learning” (Ordinance SKOLFS 2012:101, p. 10). These explicit illustrations of the role of reflection in learning are significant to attend to despite, or maybe just because of, the earlier mentioned critique of reflection lacking conceptual clarity.
A comparison of populations across the studies further underpin my ‘underrepresentation’ argument.

As stated earlier, the populations under study in the seven studies are nurse teachers and lecturers, teacher/nursing students, and working nurses. When comparing the distribution of these populations, it becomes apparent that there is an underrepresentation of teachers. This is a significant point. It is significant in that if the arguments for the learning of reflective skills are deemed sound, it follows that it would be especially meaningful to find out how professionals responsible for educational practices understand the concept of reflection. The only study solely focusing teachers’ conceptions of reflection is O’Connor, Hyde, and Treacey (2003). Their population is eleven nurse teachers with implied experience of using reflection in teaching. The other six studies have other distributions: Bulman, Lathlean, and Gobbi (2012), and Clarke (2014) involve a mixed population of both students and teachers/lecturers. However, lumping them together makes it impossible to decipher them from one another. This may be interpreted as viewing these populations as indifferent, when in reality they are entirely different social groups with very different conditions for conceptualizing reflection. The focus in the three studies by Shields (1995), Emsheimer (2005b), and O’Donovan (2007) are solely students’ conceptions of reflection. The population addressed by Gustafsson, Asp, and Fagerberg’s (2009) is working night duty registered nurses in a municipal context which differs from the other populations that are situated in adult education settings. In light of both of these underrepresentations, I claim that it seems not only justified but long overdue to identify the variation in folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in Swedish adult education. Such an inquiry may help in contributing towards knowledge underlying what teaching professionals in this specific type of adult education do ‘in the name of reflection’. This can potentially provide empirically based insights.
to discussions on teacher betterment which fundamentally touches upon the research domain of teachers’ professional development.

Summary of Previous Research

There is an ocean of previous research on reflection within the field of adult learning and education, addressing a vast variety of topics from various perspectives in differing contexts and populations. An etymologically inspired meaning of reflection in a social science context is the bending back of thought against itself in order to understand oneself. In colloquial language, views of reflection point to placing the concept in relation to various meanings and synonyms of thinking which some researchers argue is problematic. It is considered problematic in that it is claimed to result in a loss of meaning and lack of conceptual clarity with potentially severe consequences. Despite this, a substantial amount of researchers and vocations assign reflection an essential role in relation to learning, advocating the use of reflection in adult education, professional practice, and personal development. Clearly much certitude abounds the value of reflection while there simultaneously exists a complex of problems with conceptual delineation.

One common and broad tendency is detected when comparing conceptions of reflection across the seven empirical studies, namely the conception of reflection as a way to understand present, past, and/or future experiences. The understanding is interconnected with various purposes relating to professional practice and development. However, several of the studies’ other conceptions of reflection vary and seemingly point in different directions.

The previous research on individuals’ conceptions of reflection considered somewhat relevant all utilize the qualitative approach and are set in Northern European contexts. In comparing the studies’ similarities and differences of the dimensions research context and population, several aspects are noted as significant. Concerning context, the United Kingdom
and Ireland dominate the scene. It is noteworthy that Swedish research on conceptions of reflection is underrepresented as many researchers in a lifelong learning discourse view reflection as a prerequisite for quality learning among teachers and students alike. Moreover, national documents in Swedish popular education and Swedish municipal adult education explicitly give reflection an essential role in teaching and learning. In comparing the studies’ populations, that is, nurse teachers and lecturers, teacher/nursing students, and working nurses, it is apparent that studies merely focusing teachers are underrepresented. As teachers are responsible for facilitating educational practices, and if the arguments for the learning of reflective skills are deemed sound, it follows that it would be especially meaningful to find out how these professionals understand the concept of reflection. In light of both of these underrepresentations, I claim that it seems not only justified but long overdue to identify the variation in folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in Swedish adult education.
3 Theoretical Background

In order to be able to broaden the understanding of the present study’s results, this section attempts to concisely elucidate a theoretical background consisting of specific types of research on human thinking. This is relevant as conceptions are an integrated part of human thinking. Emphasis is on educational research stating that teacher beliefs about key educational concepts influence their professional practice. The overarching assumption here is thus founded in that there are links between human thought and action. This may seem self-evident but as will be noted below, is an assumption with complex nuances. This particular theoretical background is fruitful partly for understanding the pivotal significance of identifying teachers’ individual conceptions as a starting point for professional betterment, partly for the development of forthcoming lines of reasoning on how folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection potentially influence their professional practice. I.e., what consequences are reasonable to expect in action if one conceptualizes reflection in a certain way? Modest lines of reasoning on this theoretical basis are rendered in the upcoming discussion section. It is important for the reader to note that the theoretical background discussed here serves as a background to the present study rather than as strong analytical tools to be operationalized in the data analysis.

The interest of the field of teacher beliefs is teachers’ thinking about key educational concepts such as knowledge, learning, teaching, and schooling, as well as how these beliefs develop and what their roles are in relation to professional practice (Skott, 2015). Here it is important to emphasize that in focus are beliefs connected to education and not teachers’ general beliefs about arbitrary social phenomena. One reason for this interest is some research showing that teachers themselves appear to learn mainly from reflection on their own and colleagues’

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3 For comprehensive elaborations on teacher beliefs, see Fives & Gill (2015).
3 Theoretical Background

experiences, and much less from readings of educational research or teacher diploma programmes (e.g. Kagan, 1992, p. 75f). Therefore, identifying teachers’ thinking becomes meaningful as a way to elicit implicit educational beliefs and expose them to scrutiny.

In researching teacher beliefs, data analysis may be qualitative or quantitative. Various data collection methods for eliciting or measuring these beliefs are used, such as semi-structured interviews with or without videotaped teaching sessions, Likert-type questionnaires, and other means of self-reporting such as drawing concept-maps of specific pedagogical concepts (Kagan, 1992, p. 66f). Hoffman and Seidel (2015) also include self-report methods such as reflective writing and the ethnographic approach consisting of observation of teaching sessions as well as the collection of classroom artifacts.

Returning to the role of educational beliefs in relation to practice, the role can be viewed as a fundamental rationale and explanatory principle for professional practice (e.g. Lunn, Walker, & Mascadri, 2015; Pajares, 1992; Sweeney, Bula, & Cornett; Zheng, 2015). Here it is noteworthy that the use of the term ‘teacher beliefs’ is inconsistent and vary among researchers. Lunn, Walker, and Mascadri (2015), for instance, use “personal epistemologies” (p. 326) and state that these beliefs specify teachers’ understanding of knowledge and knowing, asserting that they likely influence approaches to teaching. Pajares (1992, p. 326) suggests that there is convincing support for individual teacher’s beliefs strongly influencing their perception and professional conduct. Sweeney, Bula, and Cornett (2001) use the term “personal practice theories” (p. 409), meaning teachers’ systematic sets of beliefs based on prior experiences of teaching, personal life, and culture. These prior experiences in various social and cultural contexts are viewed as shaping different beliefs that are held to be true and act as a cognitive filter for teachers in all of their planning, decision-making, and teaching practices. Zheng (2015)
states that a substantial amount of research over the past decades confirm that what teachers think, know, and believe considerably influence what they actually do in classrooms. Another research tradition instead refers to ‘teacher thinking’ in which the point of departure is that teachers’ teaching actions are consequences of their thoughts about teaching (e.g. Clark, 2003; Day, Calderhead, & Denicolo, 2014[1993]). In sum, the specific types of research depicted here seemingly address the idea that there are links between human thought and human action but clearly use a mix of concepts and terms to emphasize these links.

The concept of belief is questioned and suggested to have complex nuances. For instance, Skott (2015, p. 17ff) claims that beliefs as an explanatory principle for professional practice is refuted as much as confirmed; one of the foundational critiques is the methodological problems tied to researching an elusive concept without an agreed-upon definition. Pajares (1992, p. 309-312) draws attention to that there is little consensus on how this concept differs from words such as ‘attitude’, ‘values’, ‘judgment’, ‘view’, ‘opinion’, ‘conception’, and ‘perception’. Moreover, belief is also difficult to delineate from other concepts such as knowledge\(^6\). To some extent, then, it seems unclear what is actually being researched. In addition, Fives and Buehl (2012) point to the dilemma of inconsistencies and sometimes even contradictions between what professionals say they believe and what they actually do in practice. Furthermore, explicit educational beliefs may lead to different professional conduct by teachers depending on the unique conditions of specific educational contexts, and seemingly similar conduct may be underpinned by entirely different educational beliefs (Zheng, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, individual teacher beliefs is complicated by potential clashes with state regulated curriculum and by teachers not being consciously aware of their own beliefs during teaching (Hoffman & Seidel, 2015). At first sight,

\(^6\) For attempts at differentiating belief and knowledge, see Nespor (1987) and Pajares (1992).
3 Theoretical Background

the assumption that there are links between human thought and action may be self-evident but the links are complex in character.

Although teacher beliefs and thinking appear difficult to accurately define and measure according to some researchers, and varying research traditions and researchers use differing concepts, I pragmatically assert that this theoretical background is fruitful for broadening the understanding of professional practice. Fundamentally, the varying research traditions through their different concepts and terms seem to emphasize that teachers’ thought is important to and influence professional action. In the present study, this is the main guiding theoretical idea.

Having elucidated the theoretical background, focus turns to accounting for the present study’s methodology and methods including considerations on generalization and ethical aspects.
Methodology and Methods

The present study is situated within the interpretivist research paradigm in which emphasis is interpretive understanding of human behavior and the social world (Bryman, 2016). This paradigm is concerned with individuals’ unique meanings of various social phenomena and the point of departure is that they are multiple and diverse. Accordingly, the heterogeneous spectrum of the qualitative research tradition is chosen. This tradition is chosen for its general preoccupation with “seeking to see through the eyes of one’s research participants” (Bryman, 2016, p. 394). Here, the results provide rich descriptions of the unique meaning that individuals assign to specific aspects of their surrounding world. In order to answer the study’s aim within the qualitative research tradition, inspiration from phenomenography enables focus on the dynamic and context specific conceptions of how unique individuals experience aspects of their reality (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997). The main advantages with this particular approach appreciated in the present study are the strong interest in drawing out rich conceptions from the interview persons and elucidating the interrelation of the resulting categories of description. These conditions appear fruitful for thoroughly depicting vivid categories rich in contrast. Phenomenography and its concurrent data analysis method will be discussed further in this section but first out are accounts of the study’s interview carry out and method selections.

Interview Carry Out

A digital interview person recruitment letter (see Appendix B) was sent out to 26 folk high school teachers and principals in the author’s professional network as well as to 9 network forums for folk high school teachers and adult educators in Sweden. The letter introduced the study together with relevant information on the carry out. 11 potential interview persons expressed interest via e-mail. In response, they were asked to submit a brief description of their
Methodology and Methods

professional experience including the type of courses they currently teach and in which subjects. 
3 out of the 11 were not accepted and one did not reply which means that a total of 7 were 
accepted. All seven interviews were carried out in the early winter of 2016 but for pragmatic 
reasons three of them were interviewed about a month later than specified in the recruitment 
letter.

The language of the interviews was Swedish and they lasted 28-46 minutes each. Most of 
them were carried out and recorded with a laptop in undisturbed rooms at the folk high school 
teachers’ work site. For practical reasons, two of the interviews were carried out online using the 
application Skype together with a plug-in specifically designed for recording conversation, 
Pamela for Skype.

Selection

Population and sampling strategy

The population is folk high school teachers in Swedish popular education and they are chosen for 
three different reasons. First, it is explicit that the folk high school teachers’ pedagogy ideally 
centers adults’ participation and reflection with others to facilitate learning (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 
9; Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2013, as cited in Swedish National Council of 
Adult Education, 2016c, p. 19). In extension, reflective skills are distinguished as essential in 
achieving the state’s ambitions with Swedish popular education. Second, on basis of the 
assumption that the increased difficulty to interpret the teaching mission (Harlin, 2014, p. 91) 
possibly results in a greater variation of ways of perceiving central concepts in professional 
practice. These perceptions may differ more in comparison to, for instance, teachers in the 
compulsory Swedish school system where not only the curriculum but also the teaching 
profession is regulated in law. Third, for the last eight years I have worked as a folk high school
teacher and therefore have an insider perspective that can be valuable in understanding the research context with its particular conceptualizations and professional issues. Familiarity with or closeness to the research context assists in creating a nearness to the interview persons’ terms and conditions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The chosen folk high school teachers are between the ages of 35-62 and work on four different folk high schools in Mid Sweden. They are experienced with reflection and therefore do not represent the perspective of folk high school teachers inexperienced with reflection. The teachers’ gender, the type of course(s) they teach in, and their teaching subject(s) are depicted in Table 1. Several of the folk high school teachers have previously been involved in other course types than the ones they currently teach in.

Table 1. Results of the maximum variation sampling strategy of the folk high school teachers (n=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview person (IP)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Course type</th>
<th>Teaching subject(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IP1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>General course</td>
<td>Swedish, Swedish as a 2nd language, English, Social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>General course</td>
<td>Mathematics, Science studies, and History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Two types of special courses</td>
<td>Diaconal practice, thematic studies, project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>General course, external course</td>
<td>Social studies, thematic studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>External course</td>
<td>Thematic studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>General course, external course</td>
<td>Swedish, Religion, Social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>General course</td>
<td>Social studies, Music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selected purposive sampling strategy is maximum variation (Bryman, 2016, p. 409; Larsson, 2009, p. 31). Here, it involves maximizing the possibility of different conceptions by varying specific aspects among the folk high school teachers. However, in choosing the interview person selection criterion it is difficult to foresee how many and which aspects that are
the most potent to vary. In making the sampling strategy manageable, three aspects seemed like a fruitful amount. The three chosen aspects of variation considered reasonably relevant are the teachers’ gender, the types of courses they teach in, and their teaching subjects. The assumptions underpinning these choices are that these aspects maximize the possibility of different conceptions in that; 1) women and men may learn and experience reality differently (Belenky, Tarule, Goldberger, & Clinchy, 1997), 2) the conditions, pedagogy, and issues in the folk high schools’ different types of courses differ markedly, 3) the teaching subjects vary in content and therefore demand different pedagogic considerations. Other possible aspects not used in this sampling are, for instance, varying the chosen folk high school teachers’ educational background, teaching experience, age or the ideology of the particular folk high school’s ownership.

Data collection
The data collection method is semi-structured interviews. This specific type of interview can be considered suitable to explore individuals’ unique experience of aspects of their reality (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) which is the case in the present study. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggests using an interview guide as a standard probing platform borne out of a study’s aim. The few main questions in this probing platform (see Appendix A) stayed the same throughout the seven interviews which supports the interviewer in planning a clear direction and thus carrying out the intention with the interview. Here, Bryman (2016) states that the interviewer needs a conscious distance from presumptions of the explored phenomena and actively strive to develop the interview persons’ rich variety of meaning. This is the reason why mainly open-ended questions were posed as they encourage a narrative to unfold instead of using leading questions that may confirm the interviewers own conscious or subconscious presumptions. Throughout,
concise questions and an unpretentious use of language was used in order to create further conditions for successful interviews (Bryman, 2016).

In the phenomenographic interview (Dahlgren & Johansson, 2015, p. 166), it is especially important to get rich answers by striving to deepen the participant’s experience with probing questions and an explicit attitude of interest. Clarifying and deepening follow-up probes to the interview persons’ lines of reasoning create conditions for richness of narrative on individual experiences of the explored phenomena. Probes such as “Please tell me more about…”, “Is it possible to be more precise regarding what you just said about…?”, and “Earlier you said… Should I understand that you are meaning…?” The probes somewhat differed depending on how the interviews elapsed but the common core remained the same, namely the intention to continuously deepen the interview persons’ richness of narrative. Probes also function the other way around, that is, the interview person asking the interviewer for clarification on the meaning of questions.

The interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim to increase the thoroughness and quality of the analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The transcription print-outs altogether consist of 43 pages of text in Swedish.

**Phenomenography and Data Analysis**

As mentioned, the methodology is inspired by phenomenography. According to Alexandersson (2003[1994], p. 40ff), several studies in pedagogy based on this approach examine how teacher’s experience different aspects in professional practice. For instance, Swedish municipal adult education teachers’ conceptions of knowledge, intentions and restrictions in teaching, teacher competence, distinctive features of students, and students’ prior experiences as a resource in adult education (Larsson, 1982); Swedish compulsory school teachers’ conceptions of their
professional practice (Andersson & Lawenius, 1983); and physical education teachers’
conceptions of their subject (Annerstedt, 1991). A common denominator in these studies is
illustrations of variation in teacher’s experience of differing aspects in professional practice.7

This approach focuses the dynamic and context specific conceptions of how unique
individuals experience aspects of their reality (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997) which thus
enables the exploration and description of the interview persons’ conceptions of reflection.
Marton (1981) clarifies that the verb ‘experience’ in phenomenography is synonymous with
“interpret, understand, perceive or conceptualize” (p. 178) and that the interest is on dealing with
“what is culturally learned and with what are individually developed ways of relating ourselves
to the world around us” (p. 181). A fundamental pillar is the non-dualistic ontology in which it is
assumed that the only world people can communicate with is the world we experience (Marton
& Booth, 1997). Essentially, individuals’ unique meaning-making of various aspects of their
world is how it is experienced by them, and in phenomenography this is considered to be the
base of human knowledge.

Larsson (1986) describes phenomenography as having four main characteristics; 1) Human conceptions focuses individuals’ different ways of experiencing aspects of reality, 2) The collected data is grounded empirically, 3) Identify and maximize the possibility of variation of conceptions from the data. The existence of variation is due to that different individuals experience the world differently and thus have different knowledge. 4) The result, called an ‘outcome space’, is essentially an analysis and systematized description of the qualitatively different conceptions in which the relationship between them is elucidated. The variation within

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7 For an account on the content and geographical spread of more recent phenomenographic studies as well as ongoing debates in phenomenography, consult Tight (2016).
the resulting category system of descriptions stems from the unique conceptions either within or in between individuals (Larsson, 1986). The descriptive categories in the outcome space are set at the collective level and therefore does not necessarily represent the conception of merely one interview person.

The last one of the four characteristics above can be sketched out with Dahlgren and Johansson’s (2015, pp. 167-171) model for phenomenographic data analysis. This model is a simplified step-by-step account of an analysis that in actuality may be quite non-linear and thus skip between steps. Initially, the researcher gets acquainted with the transcribed data set by reading it several times while taking notes to gain an overall impression. Analytical work starts with marking in the text what is judged to be significant passages of conceptions in relation to the research question. These passages are then systematically compared to one another in terms of similarities and differences. This time consuming process is repeated again and again in order to fine-tune a preliminary category system consisting of different categories of qualitatively similar passages. Each category is named on grounds of what appears to be the essence of their similarities. The last step is to closely scrutinize the significant passages again in relation to all the categories to assure that they merely fit into one unique category. The final category system of descriptions is the outcome space which as mentioned is the result of phenomenographic data analysis. In order to make it possible for the reader to check the plausibility of the analysis, that is, the author’s interpretation, the outcome space is illustrated with unerring excerpts of conceptions from passages in the transcribed data (Dahlgren & Johansson, 2015).

However, any solid claim of depicting a uniform or clear-cut image of the complex field of qualitative methodology, methods or analyses is deemed to be overly simplified (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015, p. 17). Therefore, Dahlgren and Johansson’s model is here seen as one of many
possible illustrations and to ensure depth in understanding of phenomenographic data analysis, their model is contrasted with the multiple alternatives depicted in Åkerlind (2012) as well as Collier-Reed and Ingerman (2014, p. 251ff).

In order to minimize loss of meanings expressed in the transcription through translation from Swedish to English, the data analysis is based on the Swedish original and merely the selected excerpts are translated.

**Generalization in Qualitative Research**

Generalization in research concerns the extent to which a study’s results may be applicable to other individuals, situations, time periods and contexts beyond those specifically investigated (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015, p. 270f). In qualitative research, generalization can be conceptualized in different ways. One such way is analytic generalization (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 296f), where the logic is that the results are a modest speculation or reasoned judgment being applicable as a working hypothesis in contextually similar situations. The working hypothesis may then be tested in various situations and contexts. This conceptualization is in stark contrast to statistical generalizations of inferences valid for all humans, places, and times, based on claims of the representativeness of strict sampling from a defined population (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 540).

Larsson (2009) conceptualizes generalization in qualitative research in several ways and three lines of reasoning are briefly touched upon here. First, selecting a varied sample of interview persons is argued to enhance the generalizability by optimizing the probability of many views to be described. The generalization potential of a study’s results is often closely linked to the way sampling is done. The logic with a varied sample is that “the variation in the study should be expected to exist also in relevant situations that one wants to generalize to” (Larsson,
Second, in this line of reasoning attention is drawn to similarity between the investigated context and other contexts as a foundation for generalization. As the reader of a study obviously knows their own unique context better than the researcher, the role of the researcher is to provide a sufficient context description in order to facilitate the reader’s assessment of similarity between contexts (Bryman, 2016, p. 399). Third, by producing interpretations, concepts, metaphors, and descriptions of processes or patterns, Larsson (2009) states that results of qualitative research make it possible for the reader to identify new ways of seeing the empirical world which may “transcend old or taken-for-granted ways of understanding the studied phenomena” (p. 33). Essentially, the logic is that effective and convincing ways of seeing potentially are brought to the fore when the reader actively recognizes them in a situation in their everyday context, and this is considered an act of generalization.

In the logic behind Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2015) analytic generalization and Larsson’s (2009) conceptualizations of generalization as context similarity or recognition of the researcher’s interpretation, the reader is given a pivotal role. The role consists of being an interpretative link between their context and a study’s results, and this role can be referred to as user generalization (Merriam, 1998, as cited in Fejes & Thornberg, 2015, p. 273). Essentially, the reader of a study is given the power and responsibility for judging the extent of the result’s applicability in their own specific space-time context.

In turning the gaze to the present study, I purport that the generalization potential of the results is two-fold, namely as (1) being a modest working hypothesis to other folk high school teachers in Swedish popular education and (2) as effective ways of seeing that may be brought to the fore when being recognized in a reader’s context. Moreover, the generalization potential is strengthened by the sampling strategy maximum variation as well as by a relatively concise
sketch of the research context which may facilitate the reader’s assessment of similarity between contexts. Finally, it is up to the reader to wisely estimate the application of these results in their own context.

**Ethical Aspects**

Ethical considerations are crucial in research as it impacts society deeply, in many arenas, and in the long term (Swedish Research Council, 2011, pp. 29-31). In the relation between researcher and participants, the research process is to follow the Swedish Research Council’s four ethical principles. These principles are the requirement to inform, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement, and the usage requirement (Swedish Research Council, 2002). Consequently, the interview persons of this study are informed of its purpose, design, and scope, and ensured that names and locations are anonymized. Voluntary participation is emphasized as well as the participants’ choice to avoid certain questions or withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. Information concerning recording of the interview and its sole use for the stated purpose is clarified.

The audio files from the recordings are kept on a password-protected computer and thus inaccessible to unauthorized persons. The transcription print-outs are kept securely. There are no conditions of dependency between the author and the interview persons, and no conflict of interests on part of the author.

Having accounted for the methodology and methods including as well as generalization and ethical aspects, the results of the study are now to take center stage.
5 Results

In this section, the outcome space is illustrated in categories of description systematized from the variation of conceptions of reflection among the seven folk high school teachers. They conceptualize reflection in terms of its purpose. Thus, a similarity across the categories is experiencing reflection as a means for a purpose or a useful outcome albeit an unclear one to some of the folk high school teachers themselves.

In the initial stage of data analysis, there were 38 excerpts ranging between 1 and 7 sentences in length that fit into 7 at first sight different categories. Upon subsequent analysis, the excerpts were condensed to sixteen and the unique categories finalized into three. I claim that the following three unique categories illustrate the variation of folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in Swedish popular education. Reflection is conceptualized as:

- A process fostering understanding
- A tool facilitating learning and development
- A pedagogy enacting ideals

In short, the purpose of reflection is experienced to be fostering understanding, facilitating learning and development, and enacting ideals. In the following, each category is portrayed in order of appearance and I argue they are a plausible interpretation of the data set. This argument is underpinned with a selection of unerring excerpts of conceptions from the folk high school teachers. For the sake of increased readability, all of the sixteen depicted excerpts are indented regardless of their length and in them the interview person pausing is denoted with “…” and a few omitted words with “---“.
**Reflection as a Process Fostering Understanding**

In this category of description, reflection is conceptualized as a process fostering understanding of experiences in practice. In focus is making a reality consisting of shifting experiences in time and space intelligible, a process involving cognition and interpretation. Through this process, individuals are potentially set in a position to gain a sense of coherence of reality and thereby handle it constructively. The use of this process is carried out in two different directions and so these will be illustrated henceforth. The first direction is towards *folk high school teachers’ own experiences in and of practice*. In the following exemplifications, the understanding of situations and courses of events in the folk high school teachers’ professional practice is described to be explored from various perspectives and in different contexts:

> Why I reflect at work? It is to, really, to create meaning. To create meaning in what I do at work, to create meaning in what we do during class and put it in a context. To try to understand it from different perspectives and eventually form it into some sort of a whole. Is this just enough fuzzy? (IP5)

> Reflection is sort of...where I consider the meaning of things. Ask why, try to put them in different contexts, view them from different perspectives, twist and turn them a little. (IP5)

These two excerpts elucidate making the ‘doing’ and ‘things’ of practice intelligible by means of continuous diversification of perspectives and contexts, with the ambition to form them into a whole and gain a sense of coherence. Furthermore, reflection as a process to foster understanding is also related to distance and closeness which is exemplified in the following excerpt:

> Reflection creates both distance and closeness… Distance in the sense that one, sort of, that one can take a step back and look at a totality but also closeness, it is to then get closer because of having looked at it from the outside and maybe understand a course of events or people in a better way. (IP6)

This excerpt highlights that reflection also is related to facilitating distance and nearness to experiences. These experiences consist of a course of events or people and reflection creates
conditions for understanding them more comprehensively. In yet other examples, the folk high school teacher’s clarifying questions to oneself concerning the carried out practice are brought to focus in order to foster understanding from experiences. This is exemplified in the following:

When one has completed a course [for the students], what was it that happened? Did everything turn out according to my plan? Where did it deviate? Why so? What may one think [differently] for the next time? (IP3)

This [particular] class went well. This way of doing [teaching a class], can I develop it… can I continue on the same track? How do I create this again, that which went well? (IP7)

By means of guiding questions to oneself, these two excerpts center on understanding experiences in a course or class in relation to what was initially planned. The final question in both excerpts, ‘What may one think [differently] for the next time?’ and ‘How do I create this again, that which went well?’, can be seen as a motion forward. It can be seen as a motion forward in that they ask about how to potentially apply an understanding of past experiences into future practice. This understanding is based on past reflected courses, classes, and experiences, and is projected into future carry out.

Having illustrated the first direction, that the use of the process of fostering understanding is carried out towards folk high school teachers’ own experiences in and of practice, the second direction is up next. The second direction that the use of this process is carried out towards, is teaching situations with students. Fostering understanding of experiences is exemplified through an excerpt of a teaching situation, as told by the folk high school teacher, with an assignment involving student documentation and reflection:

I had different parts in a theme, on human rights, and parallel with it they [the students] were asked to document how they felt and experienced throughout each of the theme’s different parts. Afterwards they looked at the documentation and also got to retell how much they remembered from the different parts and if they could find any links between how they felt or experienced the situations, and how much they remembered. (IP5)
This excerpt shows the facilitation of an assignment for and with students, where they are asked to reflect on the connection between their individual experiences of different parts of a theme on human rights in relation to their recall of content knowledge of the theme. Essentially, the assignment is a way to have the students become aware of their individual experiences and with the help of reflection on the documentation, create potential bridges of understanding between past experience and recall. Another example relates to a teaching situation in which a student encounters a surprising and unexpected outcome to an action, an action that did not render that outcome previously:

Reflection is something that is brought to the fore when old knowledge meets new knowledge. Then I must reflect, or I must not, but it is tempting to do so. As a teacher, one can be part of and encourage [the student]: What happened now? You had some knowledge previously, yes. You thought you knew this but now that [unexpectedly] happened. Now you have to reconsider. (IP3)

In this excerpt, the folk high school teacher supports the student in fostering understanding based on an unexpected clash of outcomes. The clash is between the student’s previous knowledge of the outcome to a specific action and the present, factual and unexpected, outcome of the same or similar action. The existing way of thinking is challenged and the teacher tries to support the student in forming bridges of understanding between previous and new knowledge.

The final exemplification of fostering understanding carried out in teaching situations with students, is concrete questions to be discussed jointly after class:

In a way I think it is really good if you, having done something together, that you sit together afterwards and discuss: How did it [class] go? What went well, what went less well? How did your group work out? Can we move on with this [teaching design]? Should we do it the same way, or otherwise? (IP7)

This excerpt illustrates the folk high school teacher arranging a discussion for the students at the end of class, in order to encourage them to foster understanding from the experiences they
5 Results

have just had. The questions are open-ended which may facilitate discussion as well as the students’ connection of previous experiences and future classes.

Now to the next conceptualization, in which the purpose of reflection is experienced as a tool facilitating learning and development.

Reflection as a Tool Facilitating Learning and Development

In this category of description, reflection is conceptualized as a tool facilitating learning and development among folk high school teachers and students. For instance, it is depicted in a principal outlook on pedagogy in which reflection is experienced to have an essential role in facilitating learning and new knowledge:

I probably think of reflection as a tool or sort of a technique… that occur somehow--- that occur in different parts of a learning process, sort of. (IP6)

If one thinks a bit broader, then reflection is at the foundation of new knowledge. That is to say, if one would not reflect and not consider what one is doing, then it becomes very flat. Neither would it move one further. Somewhere everything you do demands reflection, sort of, to develop further… and it does not only entail this [pedagogic] situation but life at large. (IP6)

In these excerpts, it is portrayed that reflection facilitates learning and new knowledge. This includes facilitating new knowledge in this type of adult education but also in life at large. According to this line of reasoning, avoiding to reflect on ‘everything you do’ results in not moving one ‘further’ and thus no new knowledge is facilitated. In extending this principal outlook on pedagogy into life at large, it actually becomes more of a general outlook on how new knowledge or learning is facilitated in other arenas as well, such as the arenas of work, leisure, and family. In another exemplification, emphasis is on reflection as a tool for professional and personal knowledge development:

In the folk high school, it feels like I as a teacher as well as the students must develop. It is something that makes me perceive the job as very much fun. --- Reflection is maybe a tool
for development, then. To develop myself, to develop my courses, to develop maybe with other teachers and somehow get the students to develop their personality, within themselves, and with their knowledge. (IP7)

In this excerpt, reflection experienced as a tool for professional and personal development is perceived to be a ‘must’ of this particular school form but a must in an uplifting sense. The professional development is illustrated to involve the folk high school teacher either individually or collaboratively, the teaching methods and course contents, and the students’ personalities and knowledge.

However, a complexity in experiencing reflection as a tool to facilitate learning and development is recognized by the folk high school teachers. This significant complexity consists of notions that specific types of learning may be facilitated without reflection. These certain types of learning not requiring reflection are specified as memorization, socialization, and repetition. Memorization of facts is claimed not to demand reflection at all, exemplified in a fact about the battle of Waterloo:

I have learnt that the battle of Waterloo was in 1815 but not why and what the effects were. That I have to ponder on. Now, today: What are the effects? Yes, such things. Certain knowledge one can learn without reflection. (IP3)

Here, it is stated as an example of a point that memorizing that the battle of Waterloo was in 1815 in fact is learning. However, in this type of (rote) learning, it is also stated that reflection is not demanded until the battle in question is related to broader issues and set in a contemporary context. In another example, socialization is viewed as a specific type of learning also not necessarily being facilitated by reflection:

If one looks at the process of socialization, for example, it might not come about with so much reflection. That we imitate each other. We inherit norms and values from our parents. They [the inherited norms and values] might not be, this is also a type of learning, they might not be reflected upon. They can be, but many times they are certainly not. It is much of what one does that one has learnt, that one does not think about, at all. (IP5)
The above excerpt elucidates that socialization from an early age involves inheriting norms and values, for instance from our parents, and consequently, imitations that can but might not be reflected upon. Basically, the social inheritance becomes the invisible and taken-for-granted background context against which life is lived. Consequently, learning can be facilitated without reflection. The final exemplification portrays repetition as the third way of learning that does not necessarily assign reflection such crucial importance:

In this case I am thinking sort of from the perspective of the student. Let us say you get an assignment, and you work with it. You get another assignment, you do the same thing again. Without [using] too much reflection there, you could learn a technique, for instance. In repetition, I am thinking that reflection may not be required until much later. --- There could be elements where learning come about without reflection having such crucial importance, if one breaks it down. (IP6)

The excerpt highlights that repetition of an activity may not require much demands of reflection but nonetheless learning may be acquired. As stated earlier, these three types of learning claimed to be acquired entirely without or with little reflection add complexity to the conceptualization of reflection as a tool facilitating learning. Essentially, and this is significant, the conceptualization comes into play as a tool necessary to facilitate the type of learning not related to memorization, socialization, or repetition. The folk high school teachers do not specify what this particular type of learning is to be called.

Now to the final conceptualization, where the purpose of reflection is experienced as a pedagogy enacting ideals.

**Reflection as a Pedagogy Enacting Ideals**

In this category of description, reflection is conceptualized as a pedagogy enacting ideals in professional practice. The purpose of reflection is thus experienced as the enactment of ideals. In
the following exemplification, the concept ‘popular education’ with a distinctive character or uniqueness in relation to other types of schooling is purported to be a desirable ideal:

Popular education is to be about taking the step away from the book, away from that which is academia and consider the matter of the human condition. And work with your own experiences and work with others’ experiences, and thereby sharpen one’s own understanding of the situation one is in. And also sharpen the tools to deal with one’s situation and the future. As we do not, then, set out from that we must devour a book but rather work with own experiences, then we must bring them out. Popular education and the folk high school, I would like to claim, would be nothing without reflection. It would not work. Then they [the students] might as well go to Komvux [Swedish municipal adult education]. (IP2)

In this fairly long excerpt, the desirable ideal ‘popular education’ is characterized as the stepping away from books and the academic world, and instead think about the conditions under which we live as people in the world. The fundamental starting point is to be students’ individual and collective experiences, and starting from this point is claimed to sharpen their understanding of their situations as well as ‘the tools to deal with one’s situation and the future’. Without reflection, then, neither Swedish popular education as an arena of civil society nor folk high schools are worthy the name. In the final strophe, it is implied that teachers in Swedish municipal adult education (Komvux) are disinterested in this type of ideal. It appears that the primary purpose of reflection is experienced as a pedagogy enacting this ideal and upon doing so, the sharpening of the students’ understanding and dealing with life follows. In the final exemplification of this final category of description, the purpose of reflection is experienced as enacting an ideal in the form of the students’ emancipation:

And it should lead to emancipation then, this reflection, preferably. It is a result with me. A liberation in some…. now I sound half-religious… a liberation, simply. A setting free of resources with the human being and her…. One is to become a better human being, simply, whatever that is now. (IP4)

In this final excerpt, reflection is conceptualized as a pedagogy enacting an ideal in the form of the students’ emancipation. The term ‘liberation’ is used here, a term often being charged with
efforts of the procuring of socioeconomic rights, political rights and equality to minority groups in society. Students from a multitude of vulnerable minority groups are not only common but fairly standardized in Swedish popular education. Moreover, it is not far-fetched to link the ‘setting free’ of the students’ resources to the concept of empowerment. This link is relatively logical as the ambition for this arena of civil society explicitly is, as mentioned earlier, to foster democracy, equality, diversity, culture, and empowerment through active participation and interaction. The ultimate goal of emancipation is to ‘become a better human being’, a goal that is expressed as being somewhat unclear. Moreover, an emancipatory pedagogy can be seen as being closely tied to the concept of citizenship.

For reasons of clarity, a summary of the results section as a whole is offered below.

**Results Summary**

The folk high school teachers conceptualize reflection in terms of its purpose. Notwithstanding, the purpose is somewhat unclear to some of them. The three unique categories of description illustrate the variation of folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection. In focus of the first conceptualization, ‘reflection as a process fostering understanding’, is making reality intelligible. This process involves cognition and interpretation, and potentially gives reality a sense of coherence in order to handle it constructively. Fostering understanding from experiences is carried out in two different directions. It is carried out towards the folk high school teachers’ own experiences of practice in which perspective diversification, distance-closeness, and connections between past experiences and future practice are highlighted; towards teaching situations with students where focus is on creating potential bridges of understanding between past experiences and recall, between previous and new knowledge, and between previous experiences and future classes. In the second conceptualization, ‘reflection as a tool facilitating
learning and development’, reflection is experienced as having an essential role in facilitating learning and new knowledge as well as professional and personal development. In this category, the concept of learning is made complex in illustrating that specific types of learning – such as memorization, socialization, and repetition - may be facilitated without reflection or assigning it such crucial importance. The third and final conceptualization, ‘reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals’, comprises the concept of popular education as an ideal with a distinct characterization in relation to Swedish municipal adult education, and the emancipation or empowerment of students from a multitude of vulnerable minority groups.
6 Discussion

This study adds to previous research on reflection by identifying variation in folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in Swedish popular education. In the previous section, I argued that the empirically founded data provides evidence for the interpretation of three qualitatively different categories of descriptions; Reflection as a process fostering understanding of experiences, reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development, and reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals. The ensuing lines of reasoning draw attention to four main aspects, namely the relation between the categories, the results in relation to previous research and the potential influences of varying conceptions of reflection on professional practice, the unclear purpose of reflection, and to methodological considerations of the study.

Discussion of Results

Interrelation of categories of description

In line with phenomenographic data analysis, the relationship between the three categories of description is here elucidated as way to clarify and argue for the uniqueness of each category (Larsson, 1986). The category ‘reflection as a process fostering understanding’ is directed towards folk high school teachers’ experiences and teaching situations with students. In focus is interpreting a practice encompassing a plethora of shifting experiences in time and space, and form bridges of understanding between them. Granted, this process may later result in learning or be a constituent of learning but, and this is significant, in this category the folk high school teachers are not making explicit connections to learning. Again, in focus is making shifting experiences intelligible and thereby gain a sense of coherence to handle practice. In contrast, the category ‘reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development’ clearly underscores that the purpose of reflection is experienced as learning and development. Here, learning is not only underscored but also rendered problematic. It is rendered problematic in acknowledging that
certain types of learning (memorization, socialization, or repetition) may not necessitate reflection or deem it crucially important. Admittedly, understanding experiences may or is even likely to partake in facilitating learning and development but it is not expressed as such. The final category, ‘reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals’, encompasses both an ideal of a distinct characterization of popular education and the emancipation or empowerment of students from a multitude of vulnerable minority groups. Manifesting these pedagogic ideals, respectively, are described as being the desirable purposes of reflection. Reflection is not related to learning but to some extent to understanding. By working with the students’ own experiences of reality, in the case of the ideal ‘popular education’, understanding is illustrated as being a result of enacting reflection and not the other way around. This is significant as it sets the enactment of ideals at the forefront while the resulting understanding is considered a by-product, which, consequently, makes this category qualitatively different from that of the category ‘reflection as a process fostering understanding’.

Despite arguing for the results providing empirically founded evidence for the interpretation of three qualitatively different categories of descriptions, it is important to note that there may exist possibilities of conceptions of reflection within the field of adult education beyond what has been detected here. In addition, it is important to note that, as mentioned earlier, the variation within the resulting category system of descriptions stems from the unique conceptions either within or in between individuals (Larsson, 1986). In other words, even though these conceptions of reflection arguably are qualitatively different and thus analytically separate, they may in practice be interwoven within the same folk high school teacher. Depending on the professional situation and its varying demands, the conceptions of reflection may run parallel and
at times shift places with one another from forefront to background or seemingly disappear altogether.

Having concisely related the categories of description to one another, focus now shifts to the results in relation to previous research on the concept of reflection and conceptions of reflection as well as the theoretical background. Each category is discussed in order of prior appearance.

**Reflection as a process fostering understanding**

The category ‘reflection as a process fostering understanding’ of experiences in practice seemingly aligns with the etymologically inspired meaning of reflection, expressed as using cognition to review oneself in order to understand oneself. Upon first sight these two may appear to have differing objects in focus of the understanding. The former has ‘experiences in practice’ as the object of understanding while the latter has ‘oneself’ which can be seen as different foci. However, considering that one’s own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and deeds (Hjertström Lappalainen, 2009) are specified as ‘oneself’, the differing descriptions are in philosophical terms fairly similar in striving to think about thinking itself and make individual experiences of reality intelligible. Moreover, this category aligns with some of the views of reflection in colloquial language described by Moon (1999, p. 3ff). Reflection is described as (1) the close scrutiny of an issue to gain a further and broader understanding of it; (2) as a mental process carried out for a purpose or a useful outcome; (3) as a complex mental processing of issues without obvious solutions involving high levels of uncertainty; and (4) as transcendence of old patterns of thought by means of critically overviewing them. The alignment clearly encompasses (1) in similarity and (2) in description, possibly (4) in creating bridges of understanding between previous and new knowledge but not (3) in the complex mental processing of issues without
obvious solutions involving high levels of uncertainty. On the whole, the congruency of this category with the etymologically inspired meaning of reflection and the views of reflection in colloquial language appears striking. But what about the previous research on conceptions of reflection? In the presented previous research on conceptions of reflection (Bulman, Lathlean, & Gobbi, 2012; Clarke, 2014; Emsheimer, 2005b; Gustafsson, Asp, & Fagerberg, 2009; O’Connor, Hyde, & Treacey, 2003; O'Donovan, 2007; Shields, 1995), the detected broad tendency was viewing reflection as a way to understand present, past, and/or future experiences. The category ‘reflection as a process fostering understanding’, empirically founded in folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in Swedish popular education, is clearly homogenous with the depicted broad tendency. This previous research was carried out in nursing education in the United Kingdom and Ireland, in Swedish teacher education, and in a municipal working night nurse context in Sweden, involving the populations nurse teachers and lecturers, teacher/nursing students, and working nurses. In these specific Northern European contexts and with these populations, then, there are clear indications of homogeneity in conceptualizing reflection as a means for understanding a variety of practice experiences in time and space. Noteworthy is that this makes explicit a homogeneity in conceptualization with significant parts but not all of the presented previous research.

In this category, a minor but significant aspect is detected in the data set that seemingly have not been highlighted in quite the same manner in the previous research. More specifically, the aspect concerns folk high school teachers’ own experiences in and of practice being explored from various perspectives and in different contexts, here called perspective diversification. In order to foster understanding and coherence, experiences are continuously to be ‘twisted and turned’ to potentially consider their meanings from a range of varying viewpoints. Another way
of depicting a similar aspect, is through the notions of distance and closeness in fostering understanding, meaning that looking at a course of events or people from a distance as well as up close may aid in fostering a more comprehensive understanding. The recurring aspect in relation to this category is, again, perspective diversification and this is a minor but significant finding. This appears to be a somewhat more vivid illustration of an aspect that Emsheimer (2005b) refers to as the purpose of reflection.

Arguably, teachers’ thought is important to and influence professional action (Clark, 2003; Day, Calderhead, & Denicolo, 2014[1993]; Lunn, Walker, & Mascadri, 2015; Pajares, 1992; Sweeney, Bula, & Cornett; Zheng, 2015). In line with this main guiding theoretical idea, experiencing reflection as a process fostering understanding of experiences in practice leads to consequences in professional action. A reasonable consequence in the foreground will be the ambition to make various experiences in time and space cognitively intelligible. This includes assisting oneself, colleagues, and students with creating meaning of past and present experiences as well as future practice. Fostering understanding thus involves striving for some tangible sense of meaningfulness in and coherence of reality. Reasonably, then, one is interested in interpretations of experiences and moreover, processes of raising the level of awareness of thinking become key. For example, this interest may manifest in prompting others to become explicitly aware of that and what they are thinking on any given experience or topic. Such as prompting them to describe what they are thinking, what this thinking may signify, what the possible inferences are and what the consequences might be of particular ways of thinking. Furthermore, assist them with probing into if their interpretations can be viewed from other perspectives or in other contexts in order to foster a broader understanding. Important skills on part of folk high school teachers include listening and asking open-ended questions regarding
how students puzzle together past and present experiences, and possibly suggest collaborative scrutiny for increased perspective diversification. Collaborative scrutiny can be carried out in smaller groups with or without the presence of a teacher. Creating a climate in class or among colleagues conducive to this type of collaborative probing also becomes pivotal. Interactions and discussions can be facilitated verbally or by individual audio recordings but also in writing, for instance in the form of reflective journals and papers or by means of blogs. The process of fostering understanding of experiences in practice may result in learning or development but this is in the background, in sharp contrast to the next conception of reflection.

Reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development
The category ‘reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development’ has no apparent etymological connection to reflection and somewhat relates to one of Moon’s (1999, p. 3ff) views on reflection based on colloquial language, namely as a mental process carried out for a purpose or a useful outcome. The purpose or useful outcome of reflection in this case is learning and development, an outcome bearing resonances of the learning perspective often referred to as experiential learning. Several scholars assign reflection an essential role in experiential learning, stating that there must be dynamic links between experience and thinking in order for us to potentially construct new knowledge (e.g. Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Dewey, 1997[1938]; Harris, 1989; Kolb, 1984; Moon, 1999). Here, the formulation that there must be dynamic links between experience and thinking is a key factor. It is a key factor in that the recognized complexity of learning where certain types (i.e. memorization, socialization, and repetition) may be facilitated without reflection or assigning it such crucial importance, seem to lack this required dynamism of reflection. Consequently, a pertinent suggestion as to what to call the specific type of learning that is facilitated by reflection, is experiential learning. Additionally, in
Discussion

emphasizing reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development, more specifically professional and personal knowledge development, there are also resonances with the view on reflection in some health care professions. Reflection and reflective practice are seen as tools for developing education, clinical practice, and research for nurses (e.g. Berglund & Ekebergh, 2015; Freshwater, Taylor, & Sherwood, 2008; Johns, 2013; Lethbridge, 2006; Miraglia & Asselin, 2015), for physiotherapists (e.g. Lähteenmäki, 2005; Paterson & Chapman, 2013), and for psychologists (e.g. Fisher, Chew, & Leow, 2015). Furthermore, in Swedish popular education the pedagogy ideally centers adults' participation and reflection with others to facilitate learning (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 9; Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2013, as cited in Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016c, p. 19).

Regarding resonances between this category and conceptions of reflection from previous research, five of the seven previous studies in somewhat different ways address learning or knowledge. For instance, Shields (1995) highlights that reflection is perceived as thinking actively about prior experiences in order to weave new knowledge into what is already known; Emsheimer (2005b) depicts reflection as connecting different experiences, meaning connecting past and present experiences in order to be able to use the knowledge gained; O'Donovan (2007) states that one purpose with reflection is to learn more about oneself; O'Connor, Hyde, and Treacey (2003) concludes that the purpose of reflection in two different themes is to learn from experiences and thereby develop personally and professionally; Gustafsson, Asp, and Fagerberg (2009) find reflection being conceptualized as an approach to learning and connect it to the expansion of personal and professional knowledge through individual and group reflection on experiences. This previous research was carried out in nursing education in Ireland, Swedish teacher education, and in a municipal working night nurse context in Sweden, involving the
populations nursing and teacher students, nurse teachers, and working nurses. These findings are thus detected among students and professionals in formal education and nursing environments, and bear clear resemblances with the category ‘reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development’. In short, there is a noticeable homogeneity in conceptualization within the mentioned parts of the presented previous research.

On basis of the above lines of reasoning, the experience of reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development arguably refer to experiential learning. The dynamic links between experience and thinking in order for us to potentially construct new knowledge seem to be somewhat lacking in other types of learning, such as memorization, socialization or repetition. As teachers’ thought is important to and influence professional action (Clark, 2003; Day, Calderhead, & Denicolo, 2014[1993]; Lunn, Walker, & Mascadri, 2015; Pajares, 1992; Sweeney, Bula, & Cornett; Zheng, 2015), experiencing reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development leads to consequences in professional action. It follows then, that expected consequences on professional practice of this way of experiencing reflection potentially involve activating dynamic links between experience and thinking. In teaching, this can be facilitated by setting up situations encouraging active and systematic thinking about experiences. These experiences may be joint or individual or a combination of both and be combined with discussions involving probing questions on gained knowledge and potential complexities or difficulties. For example, a pedagogic situation focusing on teaching students Nordic walking\footnote{For a detailed description of the physical activity Nordic walking, see Santos & Fernandez-Rio (2013).} may start with a demonstration. The demonstration involves actively gaining experiences by observing the teacher as well as the students trying for themselves and observing one another. These experiences are then reflected upon and discussed in terms of what Nordic walking consist
of and feels like, and potential difficulties are addressed. Quality discussion and interaction between students, and between students and teachers, is a key principle (Dewey, 1997[1938]). After the reflective element, students are to try again and gain more experience but now with the carried-out reflections in mind. These new experiences are also systematically reflected upon, with repeated active experience again, and so on. The cycle to be repeated thus involves the elements observation-demonstration-reflection-discussion-new experiences. Somewhat simplified, these elements to be repeated can be considered classical in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and allegedly prompt students to create and recreate knowledge. Depending on the topic or subject to be taught, the content and methods are adapted to engage the students actively in the elements of the cycle. Pivotal aspects in the foreground are active student engagement in experiences and jointly thinking upon these experiences.

**Reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals**

The category ‘reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals’ somewhat relates to one of Moon’s (1999, p. 3ff) views on reflection based on colloquial language, namely as a mental process carried out for a purpose or a useful outcome. The purpose or useful outcome of reflection here is the enactment of ideals of popular education and emancipation, respectively. In looking at possible alignments between this category and the summary of previous research on conceptions of reflection (see Appendix C), no obvious alignments are detected. This is in sharp contrast to the two categories ‘reflection as a process fostering understanding’ and ‘reflection as a tool facilitating learning and development’. Therefore, ‘reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals’ could be considered a significant finding adding to previous knowledge on conceptions of reflection. What becomes interesting to ponder on, is what makes this specific category exist among folk high school teachers in Swedish popular education but in none of the previous
6 Discussion

research contexts? In speculating on what a difference might be, it seems sensible to start in the conditions specific to Swedish popular education.

A recapitulation of relevant conditions is necessary in order to speculate on a difference. The state subsidy to Swedish popular education is granted under certain conditions and these are explicitly expressed as enabling democracy, equality, diversity, culture, and empowerment through active participation and interaction (Decree on government subsidies to popular education, SFS 2015:218). In this part of civil society, folk high school teachers are thus responsible for enacting these central concepts or ideals in professional practice with the students. As the curriculum is not regulated in law, the content, teaching, and orientation can be designed in collaboration with local students and the particular folk high school’s ownership (Bill 2013/14:172, p. 10). This professional freedom is appreciated among folk high school teachers (Andersson, Rudberg, Rydenstam, & Svensson, 2013, p. 109f). The difference that makes a difference may thus be the freedom to shape the content and teaching in line with interpretations of the mentioned conditions. Reflection becomes the pedagogy or part of the pedagogy with which the ideals of popular education and emancipation are enacted. These conditions of freedom are not prevalent in the contexts of the previous research, that is, formal education regulated in law in Sweden, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, and nursing practice environments. However, the freedom from curriculum state regulation is also problematic in relation to reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals.

In comparison to teachers in school forms where the curriculum is regulated, the freedom is problematic in that it possibly increases the difficulty for folk high school teachers to interpret their teaching mission including its central concepts and conditions (Harlin, 2014, p. 91). Consequently, in professional practice there may be a wide variety of interpretations circulating.
For example, a wide variety of interpretations of concepts such as popular education, emancipation or empowerment. In the case of the category ‘reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals’, for instance, reflection is understood a pedagogy enacting an ideal of popular education. This difficult-to-catch concept is experienced as the stepping away from books and the academic world, and instead thinking about the conditions under which we live as people in the world. The fundamental starting point is to be students’ individual and collective experiences. What is significant here is that this specific interpretation is one of many other possible interpretations of popular education. This wide variety of interpretations of popular education is problematic in both theory and practice which has been elaborated by some scholars (e.g. Sundgren, 2003; Abrandt Dahlgren, 2013; Rydbeck & Nordvall, 2015).

Again, the main guiding theoretical idea here is that teachers’ thought is important to and influence professional action (Clark, 2003; Day, Calderhead, & Denicolo, 2014[1993]; Lunn, Walker, & Mascadri, 2015; Pajares, 1992; Sweeney, Bula, & Cornett; Zheng, 2015). When experiencing reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals, the consequences in the foreground of professional practice will differ depending on what the ideal or concept at hand is and how it is interpreted. As mentioned, the matter of interpretation is problematic but in setting this aside for the sake of example, some potential influences on practice can be detected based on the ideal of popular education. The ideal is experienced as thinking about the conditions under which we live as people in the world with the fundamental starting point being students’ individual and collective experiences. Instead of first and foremost utilizing book knowledge, the pedagogy will center on utilizing the knowledge already existing among the students on any given topic. In returning to the pedagogic situation with Nordic walking as an example of influence in practice, the start may consist of the students in smaller groups sharing their individual experiences of this
specific physical activity. The discussion is also to involve thoughts on what Nordic walking may affect in us and society at large, in the short and long term, thus addressing basic human and societal conditions. Books and other information sources such as the internet may be used but neither as the main sources nor without the students sharing their own experiences. Trying Nordic walking is on the agenda as is, for instance, submitting an assignment including an aspect of choice. The aspect could focus how Nordic walking affects health, rehabilitation, elite athletes, studying or something completely else that sparks the interest of the students but not necessarily the teacher. Some students may write a paper while others create a minor video documentary or informative video clips. Yet others create a podcast or even make a photo exhibition emphasizing the meaninglessness of Nordic walking in living a satisfactory life in the world. The practice influence in the foreground of experiencing reflection as a pedagogy enacting ideals in this example, then, is focusing students’ experiences and interests as well as possible connections of the topic at hand to conditions of being human.

**Unclear purpose of reflection**

The folk high school teachers conceptualize reflection in terms of its purpose. A common denominator across the three categories of description is therefore experiencing reflection as a means for a purpose. Notwithstanding, it seems in the empirical data that this purpose often is somewhat unclear to some of the folk high school teachers themselves. This interpretation of the purpose being somewhat unclear stems from specific formulations or use of words in the excerpts that may denote uncertainty or hesitancy. For instance, excerpts incorporating many ‘sort of’ or ending with ‘Is this just enough fuzzy?’ as well as formulations such as ‘probably think of reflection as’, ‘Reflection is maybe a tool for development’, and finally ‘One is to become a better human being… whatever that is’. Granted, perhaps abstract thoughts on
reflection are more rarely made explicit among teachers than concrete methods for its application in professional practice. Furthermore, these excerpts are here pulled out of their context which may bias the interpretation. In fact, several of the excerpts do not necessarily express neither uncertainty nor hesitancy. Nevertheless, the depicted excerpts denoting uncertainty or hesitancy may in fact be expressions of that and this is the lasting impression; some of the folk high school teachers appear more or less unclear on the purpose(s) of reflection.

One may wonder why the folk high school teachers express conceptualizations of reflection in terms of its purpose in the foreground at the expense of conceptualizing what reflection is. It does appear reasonable to understand what something is before rendering conceptions of what the purpose of this something is. However, theorizing the nature of reflection is largely a deeply philosophical undertaking which therefore may go beyond the inclination or competence of most people, including folk high school teachers. But then again, the somewhat lacking clarity on the conceptualization of reflection in terms of its purpose combined with the lack of conceptual clarity of reflection as pointed out by various researchers, is noteworthy. It does seem to warrant further discussion on reflection among folk high school teacher teams and folk high school teacher educators in Swedish popular education.

Methodological Considerations

Every study has its limitations and in this section methodological considerations of the present study are elucidated. A selection of considerations or limitations include the search for previous research and choices of population (folk high school teachers), sampling strategy (maximum variation), and data collection method (semi-structured interview). One limitation is the search for previous research in the data bases DiVA, SwePub, and Google Scholar. These particular databases focus on studies mainly written in English from Europe and other English-speaking
6 Discussion

countries. This raises questions regarding how the discussion would have turned out had the previous research instead or also consisted of contributions in other languages and from other geographical parts of the world. Another limitation concerns the choice of population, that is, folk high school teachers in Swedish popular education. Here, it can be argued that the interviewer’s familiarity of and with the context creates a bias. I have been aware of this potential bias and therefore actively strived to parry the nearness to the context by distancing myself with previous research on reflection. However, the familiarity is here considered more of an asset than a burden in that my close understanding of the interview person’s conditions potentially increase the nearness to their conceptualizations.

The choice of the sampling strategy maximum variation can be questioned on basis of difficulties to convincingly argue for how many and which aspects that are the most potent to vary. The decision on which ones to vary often rests on loose and problematic assumptions that certain human characteristics render better conditions for variation than others (Larsson, 2009). The choice of the data collection method semi-structured interviews can be critiqued on basis of the inevitable effects that the interviewer has on the interview person. The interview person’s narrative is colored by the interviewer’s situational competence, prior experiences, and gender as well as cultural and ethnical belonging (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview situation also entails power asymmetries in that it may carry elements of one-directional questioning and an inequality between interviewer and interview person.
Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This phenomenography inspired study set out from shore aiming to identify the variation in folk high school teachers’ conceptions of reflection in Swedish popular education. Having sailed under somewhat foggy conditions in empirical waters and returned from the journey, the results in some sense broaden the understanding of reflection. The broadening of understanding consists of identifying three (1-3) empirically founded conceptualizations of reflection, namely reflection (1) as a process fostering understanding of experiences. In focus here is gaining a sense of coherence of reality in order to handle it constructively. This potentially influences professional practice in folk high school teachers’ interest in methods and assignments that prompt perspective diversification and explicit awareness of thoughts on any given experience or topic.

Conceptualizing reflection (2) as a tool facilitating learning and development encompasses dynamic links between experience and thinking to construct new knowledge. The expected consequences on professional practice potentially include setting up situations encouraging students’ active and systematic thinking about experiences. The final conceptualization, reflection (3) as a pedagogy enacting ideals, entails both an ideal of a distinct characterization of popular education and the emancipation or empowerment of minority group students. This final conceptualization is not detected in previous research and may thus add new knowledge to previous research on conceptions of reflection. When experiencing reflection in this way, the consequences to professional practice differ depending on the ideal strived for. In the case of the purported ideal of popular education, the potential influence is the folk high school teachers emphasizing students’ experiences and interests as well as their connections to conditions of being human. Noteworthy is that these conceptualizations appear unclear to some of the folk high school teachers themselves. Combined with the lack of conceptual clarity of reflection as pointed out by various researchers, this may warrant considering discussions on reflection among
Concerning future research, the wide and deep hole dug when curiously asking questions and digging ambitiously for answers gives rise to even further questions. More specifically, one interest is exploring barriers and bridges between teachers’ espoused conceptualization of reflection and its observed influence on various teaching practices. In sticking to institutional arenas in Sweden, the varying teaching practices explored could be situated in the contexts folk high school, municipal adult education, and higher education. Another meaningful path of inquiry would be to explore possible relationships between teachers’ conceptions of reflection and their students’ learning outcomes. Such an inquiry could also include theorizing the nature of reflection and thus combine philosophical perspectives with empirical research. Yet another interesting inquiry concerns examining sociological factors at micro- (setting, situation) and macro-levels (culture, society, history) that shape or govern teachers’ conceptions of reflection. Issues of power could be examined as well, including who the ‘winners and losers’ might be in conceptualizing reflection in certain dominating ways. These directions for future research may separately or jointly further broaden the understanding of reflection in the field of adult education.
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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A. *Interview guide*

*Introductory questions*

Do you use reflection in your work as a teacher? If so, how?

What risks can you see with reflection?

*Main questions*

Why do you use reflection in your practice as a folk high school teacher?

Please describe your understanding of what reflection is?

What, according to you, is not to be considered reflection?

*Clarifying and deepening follow-up probes to the previously asked questions*

Please tell me more about…

Is it possible to be more precise regarding what you just said about…? 

Earlier you said… Should I understand that you are meaning…?

Can you please try to elaborate on the thought(s) you had on…?

Can you provide examples that may illustrate what you just said about…?
Appendix B. Interview person recruitment letter

[Translated to English from Swedish by the author. Anonymizations are marked with “…”]

Participation that can make a difference: Interviews weeks 7-8

Hello!

My name is Andreas Ruschkowski and I have worked as a folk high school teacher for seven years. During the Spring I will write a Master’s thesis in the programme Adult Learning and Global Change www.liu.se/utbildning/pabyggnad/L7MLG?l=en and the aim is to explore folk high school teachers’ understanding of reflection.

I am now seeking for ten teachers at folk high schools in …. that can participate in interviews who will act as a foundation for the thesis. This data material will for ethical reasons be anonymized. Your participation is voluntary and can make a difference partly for Swedish popular education in general, partly specifically for teachers and teacher educators in the field of adult learning.

Both male and female teachers of different ages are sought for! Preferably with varied educational backgrounds and professional experience, teaching in a variation of subjects on different courses, activities, and education programmes.

The interviews last approximately 45 minutes and will be carried out and recorded at your work site during weeks 7-8. For practical reasons, several interviews at the same folk high school is preferred. Current dates and times are:

- Thursday February 18 between 9.30 AM-4 PM
- Friday February 19 between 9 AM-4 PM
- Tuesday February 23 between 9.30 AM-4 PM

Interested? Questions? Please get in touch with me! I can be reached at …@student.liu.se or 073-…. More information about the programme can be retrieved from my supervisor or the Director of Studies at the Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning, Linköping University.

Kind regards,
Andreas Ruschkowski

Anders Hallqvist      Song-ee Ahn
Supervisor           Assistant Professor/ Director of Studies
anders.hallqvist@liu.se   song.ee.ahn@liu.se
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Appendices

Appendix C. *Summary of conceptions of reflection from previous research*

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<th>Study</th>
<th>Reflection is understood as:</th>
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| Bulman, Lathlean, and Gobbi (2012)         | 1. A way to make sense of nursing practice by searching for solutions and thereby improve future practice  
2. A way to critically analyze feelings and oneself as well as challenge theory in order to add new perspectives about practice  
3. A way to intertwine cognitive, affective, and active elements in engaging with ‘being’ a nurse rather than emphasizing ‘doing’ nursing as mainly a cognitive activity |
| Clarke (2014)                              | 4. An engaging process focusing on framing and reframing the individual’s reality being experienced moment by moment, with the purpose to understand oneself and one’s impact on others in relation to past, present, and future experiences |
| Shields (1995)                             | 5. Thinking actively about prior experiences in order to weave new knowledge into what is already known  
6. Mental previewing, meaning to prepare prior to experience by visualizing, reading, thinking, and talking to others. The purpose of reflecting on experiences is described to be to change professional conduct, identify and solve problems as well as reduce anxiety when encountered with complex moral dilemmas |
| Emsheimer (2005b)                          | 7. A sharing of experiences  
8. Making sense of information in relation to one’s own aim and goals  
9. Viewing from different perspectives  
10. Connecting past and present experiences in order to be able to use the knowledge gained |
| O’Donovan (2007)                           | 11. A deliberative thinking process of looking back at experiences. This includes examining one’s feelings and professional practice with the purpose to improve future practice. Other purposes with reflection were to integrate theory with clinical practice and to learn more about oneself |
| O’Connor, Hyde, and Treacey (2003)         | 12. A deliberate way of reviewing clinical experiences by posing questions regarding the nature of clinical interactions and the reflective process itself, and changing issues to the better through problem-solving  
13. An active way of valuing, developing, and professionalizing nursing practice knowledge. Here, articulating the implicit and intuitive skills involved in professional practice is seen as acknowledging them as valid sources for generating new nursing practice knowledge. Throughout, the purpose of reflection was held to be to learn from experiences and thereby develop personally and professionally |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Gustafsson, Asp, and Fagerberg (2009)</th>
<th>‘A Field of applications’, meaning:</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>14. An instrument for interpreting situations. This means to in the actual situation simultaneously consider past-reflected experiences as well as the presently existing knowledge, with the intention of seeking connections between them for understanding.</td>
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<td>15. A strategy for handling the working situation. This is about a need to assess, consider, and discuss one’s own and others’ professional experiences with the ambition of understanding together in retrospect.</td>
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<td>16. An approach to learning. Here, learning is closely connected with the expansion of personal and professional knowledge through individual and group reflection on experiences.</td>
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<td>‘A Field of prerequisites’, meaning that:</td>
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<td>17. Presence facilitates reflection. With the prerequisite ‘presence’ is meant to really be engaged in situations, that is, being receptive and open-minded to anomalies that alter the routine, and assess in each moment what is important.</td>
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<td>18. Flexibility implies reflection. The prerequisite ‘flexibility’ is described as being receptive and, for instance, adapt to or consider the points of view of patients, relatives, and other care-staff.</td>
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<td>19. Courage in thought and activity increases reflection. In order to question one’s own as well as colleagues’ behavior and actions, the prerequisite ‘courage’ is needed. Questioning or criticizing with and among colleagues is considered to potentially carry the widening of nurses’ reflection.</td>
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