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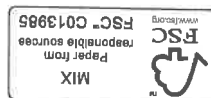
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Outdoor studies and a sound philosophy of experience

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Experience and outdoor studies

Scholars in outdoor studies have long engaged with the notion of experience in education. This effort is necessitated by its status as a 'field based' endeavour, one that often attempts to challenge educational orthodoxy. The construct of experience offers a possible way through the thicket of educational questions entailed within any programme of reform, but its interpretation remains an unresolved issue.

Any focus on experience draws education together with philosophy, as the two are intimately entwined. John Dewey – widely regarded as the chief architect of experience in education – argued, 'If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow-men [sic], philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education' (1916, p. 383). In this chapter we build on Dewey's pragmatism to outline an account of experience for outdoor studies, crafted also from Martin Heidegger's phenomenology.

Why 'experience'?

Scholars have reason to take up experience in the field of outdoor studies. Many of the initiatives under this title began as 'progressive' alternatives to more traditional classroom-based forms of education, ranging from nature study, to school camps, to adventure programming, to environmental education, to place-based education (see Quay & Seaman, 2013). Such reforms typically emerged in response to problems perceived with indoor studies, such as a moribund curriculum and flagging student motivation.

This historical origin created difficulties because it usually positioned outdoor studies as a reaction *against* traditional education – and in the eyes of critics, was concerned *only* with experience. When questions about the nature of progressive reforms (like outdoor studies) arise, the

answer often entails some version of what they are *not* – traditional, indoor, classroom-based education; versions of outdoor studies were often justified throughout the 20th century because they were the opposite, educationally speaking, of the indoor classroom.

A consequence of this dichotomy is that outdoor studies are often associated with the catchphrase 'learning by doing' (Roberts, 2011). The doing vs thinking dichotomy has recently been sustained in part by heavy reliance on constructivist models derived from the human potential movement, which characterise experiential learning as an action–reflection cycle (Fenwick, 2003; Seaman, 2008). We do something (experience) then we reflect on it (thinking); 'experience' is a necessary precursor to how educators plan for and facilitate the thinking. As one popular article maintains, 'experience alone is insufficient to be called experiential education, and it is the reflection process which turns experience into experiential education' (Joplin, 1981, p. 17). Encoded in such models is a persistent and unfortunate hierarchy: experience – provided through means like outdoor studies – is the poor cousin to thinking.

Historical accounts of experience in outdoor studies thereby express what Dewey described as 'educational confusion' (1931, p. 1). This confusion reflects the ongoing conflict between opposing viewpoints in education, where 'the opposition . . . tends to take the form of contrast between traditional and progressive education' (1938, p. 17). Another way Dewey described confusion/conflict is as 'the case of the child vs. the curriculum' (1902, p. 5). Both renditions highlight the dichotomy between outdoor and indoor studies; one is more concerned with the interests of the child or young person, the other with knowledge contained in the curriculum.

The most obvious path out of this problem would seem to be through some compromise between the two, a '*via media*' (1938, p. 5), as Dewey put it (although he advocated a different solution). This middle way is, in effect, what usually happens, resulting in a subtle mixing of the two – teaching for student interest some of the time, and for knowledge acquisition at other times – thereby leaving both viewpoints intact and mollifying each side to a degree. The action–reflection cycle is one version of this compromise. Yet attempts at compromise or balance do not offer a way out of educational confusion, they simply reproduce it.

For Dewey, the perpetual battle between opposing 'sects' (1902, p. 4) represented a serious misunderstanding of education – if not philosophy – itself. He wrote: 'It is the business of an intelligent theory of education to . . . indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties' (1938, p. 5). Going to a level deeper requires development of 'a coherent theory of experience' (p. 30) or a 'sound philosophy of experience' (p. 91) that illuminates 'Education itself' (p. 6) rather than some –ism of education. Rather than balancing experience with thinking, experience must be understood more broadly to encompass both.

Outdoor studies will benefit from revisiting Dewey's call for a 'coherent theory of experience'. Illuminating 'a new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice' (p. 5) in this way will help reconcile perceived dichotomies between various sub-disciplines while making outdoor studies, writ broadly, a more potent source of educational and ecological reform (see e.g. Knapp, 1997; Piest, 1986).

Reflective experience

A major contribution Dewey makes to a philosophy of experience is to insist that thinking is also experience; 'reflective experience' (1929, p. 7). This repositions experience as more than just doing. Experience now holistically embraces life itself, or vice-versa: 'we use the term "life" to denote the whole range of experience' (1916, p. 39). More than thirty years later, Dewey reiterated that he had always intended experience 'to designate, in a summary fashion, all that is

distinctively human' (1981, p. 331). Living experience comprises both reflective experience and another mode of experience, referred to (from within the perspective of reflective experience) as 'pre-reflective' (1933, p. 106) or 'post-reflective' (p. 107). Pre-reflective and post-reflective are the 'two limits of every unit of thinking', and can be described in more detail as 'a perplexed, troubled, or confused situation at the beginning' of reflective thinking, and 'a cleared-up, unified, resolved situation at the close' (p. 106). In between are the 'general features of reflective experience':

They are (i) perplexity, confusion, doubt, due to the fact that one is implicated in an incomplete situation whose full character is not yet determined; (ii) a conjectural and anticipatory – a tentative interpretation of the given elements, attributing to them a tendency to effect certain consequences; (iii) a careful survey (examination, inspection, exploration, analysis) of all attainable consideration which will define and clarify the problem in hand; (iv) a consequent elaboration of the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and more consistent, because squaring with a wider range of facts; (v) taking one stand upon the projected hypothesis as a plan of action which is applied to the existing state of affairs: doing something overtly to bring about the anticipated result, and thereby testing the hypothesis. (Dewey, 1916, p. 176).

While organised in a series of steps, these features of reflective experience 'do not follow one another in set order' (1933, p. 117). Pre-reflective experience can be seen in Dewey's account of reflective experience at point (i). Beyond this point, 'two types' (1916, p. 169) of reflective experience emerge, which can be discerned 'according to the proportion of reflection found in them'. The less reflective type involves steps (ii) and (v), meaning that steps (iii) and (iv) can potentially be disregarded. Following (ii) and (v), 'we simply do something, and when it fails, we do something else, and keep on trying till we hit upon something which works' (p. 169). Dewey referred to this as 'trial and error' (p. 170).

But trial and error does not always work, and if such efforts do not resolve the issue, a more 'regulated' (1929, p. 7) type of reflective experience might be required, which means embracing steps (iii) and (iv): 'it is the extent and accuracy of steps three and four which mark off a distinctive reflective experience from one on the trial and error plane. They make *thinking* itself into an experience' (1916, p. 176). Here we think more carefully about the problem and we call on knowledge gleaned elsewhere. Dewey, however, recognised a trap with such thinking: it may become disconnected from practical situations in life – "'abstract" when that word is used in a bad sense to designate something which exclusively occupies a realm of its own' (1929, p. 9). In order to guard against this, Dewey stressed that we must always return from this regulated type of reflection back to concrete trial and error – to try out our newly formed ideas in practice, otherwise it remains abstract. 'We never get wholly beyond the trial and error situation. Our most elaborate and rationally consistent thought has to be tried in the world and thereby tried out' (1916, p. 177).
The implication for outdoor studies is to view thinking as a 'mode of experience' (1929, p. 19) – reflective experience – which occurs as movement between a range of possible reflective options that fall into two broad types: a practically oriented type (which could be called *absorption in practice*) and an abstract theoretical type (which could be called *the practice of thinking* in the way 'thinking' is conventionally understood – see Lave, 1988; Quay, 2003). However, and importantly, these types do not simply offer a choice – rather, the practical type of reflective experience is always the base from which the abstract type emerges and returns, if it is engaged at all – and *both* are reflective experience.

Aesthetic experience

Reflective experience alone offers very little about the 'pre-reflective' or 'post-reflective' states we occupy in life, from which reflective experience emerges and returns, just as the more abstract type of reflective experience is rooted in a more practical type of reflective experience. For 'cognitive experience is rooted in a mode of experience that is not reflective: *aesthetic experience*. For 'cognitive experience must originate within that of a non-cognitive sort' (Dewey, 1929, p. 23).

[A]esthetic experience is experience in its integrity. Had not the term 'pure' been so often abused in philosophic literature, had it not been so often employed to suggest that there is something alloyed, impure, in the very nature of experience and to denote something beyond experience, we might say that [a]esthetic experience is pure experience. For it is experience freed from the forces that impede and confuse its development as experience; freed, that is, from factors that subordinate an experience as it is directly had to something beyond itself. To [a]esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is. (Dewey 1934, p. 274; *italics added*)

Based on Dewey's claims, aesthetic experience is a crucial mode of experience to grasp. A key characteristic of aesthetic experience is that it concerns 'experience as it is directly had' – which is different than reflective experience. In its Latin roots, reflect means to bend back, and reflective experience bends experience back on itself, looking back at things that have happened, or projecting ideas forward to things yet to come. But, as bending back, it cannot grasp the present moment. This is what aesthetic experience is – experience of what is going on in the immediate present. Understanding aesthetic experience, however, is more difficult than understanding reflective experience. Perhaps the main reason for this is our familiarity with reflective thinking – as in the action-reflection cycle – such that thinking of experience (or learning) in a way that is not reflective seems impossible. But, ironically, we are doing it all the time, without really noticing. This is the mode of thinking Dewey called 'qualitative thought' (1930, p. 18) or 'affective thinking' (1926, p. 3). Merely because aesthetic experience is not reflective experience does not mean no thinking is occurring, just a different mode of thinking – an immersive awareness of the present.

Qualitative affective thinking is of experience as it is directly had: aesthetic experience. It is, in contemporary language, thinking in practice rather than thinking about practice. Moreover, Dewey uses words like *aesthetic*, *affective* and *qualitative* because he is referring to something emotional. Thinking in practice is a felt awareness of the immediate present: a felt awareness as you are living it, not bending back on itself as in reflective experience. Importantly, aesthetic experience is where we usually live: in the present. It is also where the problems and issues emerge that induce us to engage with reflective experience, and where we return to after reflective experience. Just as aesthetic experience is a mode of thinking, it is a mode of doing, but in a different way to reflective experience. Martin Heidegger's philosophy helps in understanding this difference, particularly his early work and the notion of *being*.

Being, doing and knowing

Reflective experience incorporates two emphases. First is *regulated* reflection, which is concerned mainly with knowing things, with knowledge about practice. Second is concrete doing, or thinking as working in practice. Both types of reflective thinking are important, and both work together; their distinction can never be clear-cut.

Of course, thinking about how something will work and then organising resources to increase the chances of success is one way of understanding concrete doing. But doing is more

than just working things out; much of doing in life occurs as getting on with things in the present, in aesthetic experience, where there is no 'breakdown' that needs addressing (Koschmann, Kuutti, & Hickman, 1998). In aesthetic experience, both doing and knowing disappear as specific, separable emphases; they are 'submerged' (Dewey, 1934, p. 274) in aesthetic experience. (The narrower concept of 'flow' might help grasp this notion – see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990.) This submersion is an essential quality of aesthetic experience. In Heidegger's terms this character is best understood as simplicity, which here means holistic: no separable parts. And, if aesthetic experience is simple, then reflective experience is multiple. Being simple, aesthetic experience never involves separating the whole into parts – the whole is primary. The multiple, in contrast, deals with the relations between parts as separable things/concepts/ideas – now the separate things are primary and we contemplate their relations with one another.

When something is declared to be simple, this often is thought to mean 'easy'. But not so with aesthetic experience. Heidegger stresses the difficulty in comprehending the simple. 'The simple . . . is our name for what is inconspicuously the most difficult, which, when it occurs, appears to everyone immediately and ever again as the easiest and most accessible; yet it remains incontestably the most difficult' (1994/1937–38, p. 13). This difficulty, as stated earlier, relates to the seeming naturalness of thinking as reflection, as the bending back of experience so as to be focused on it, scrutinising it – where we see a multiplicity of separate parts in relation with one another. It is much easier to think about separate and multiple things: 'the multiple is the easy – even where concern over it seems toilsome. For progress from one thing to another is always a relaxation, and it is precisely this progress that is not allowed by the simple' (p. 13). Thinking qualitatively, affectively – a feeling awareness of the simple whole – is so different that it is more difficult to comprehend.

One way Heidegger described this simple whole of experience is as 'being-in-the-world' (1996/1927, p. 49). This is where we actually live, in the moment. With this awareness we can then reflect on experience more generally and see that life comprises 'various ways of being' (1985/1925, p. 295). In this sense we sometimes talk about multiple identities being available – but this representation tends to objectify being-in-the-world to the extent that we lose sight of living experience. Referring to *ways of being-in-the-world* conveys the holistic nature essential to understanding aesthetic experience. All aspects that are discernible in reflective experience are – in Dewey's terms – submerged in aesthetic experience to the extent that we are not aware of them, like *self, others and nature* (Quay, 2013a). This means that each way of being-in-the-world has its associated ways of doing and ways of knowing, which are then discernible through reflective experience. But in aesthetic experience, being-in-the-world, the whole is primary; doing and knowing merge and are never separated out as they are in reflective experience (see Figure 4.1).

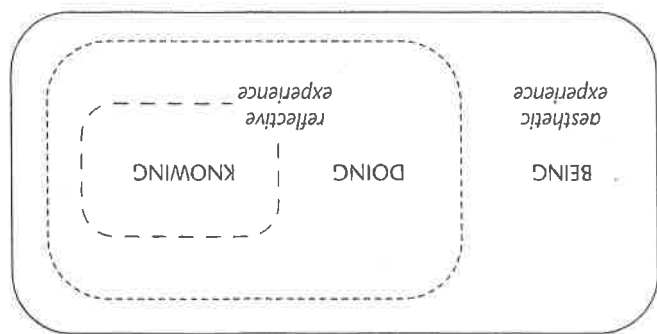


Figure 4.1 Being, doing and knowing are whole in aesthetic experience

Experiential learning and experiential education

So what does this mean for outdoor studies? Integrating Deweyan pragmatism, which has never been seriously explored in outdoor studies, with Heidegger's phenomenological notion of *being* offers a theory of experience which possesses a coherence that can further illuminate two of the core beliefs in outdoor studies: one concerning experiential learning, the other experiential education. First, it opens up commonly accepted models of experiential learning centred around action-reflection cycles. It offers 'a new order of conceptions' (Dewey, 1938, p. 5) that provides a different way of comprehending what happens in *experience* – that is, as immersed in various kinds of practice including reflective practice. Second, this new order of conceptions – a new way of comprehending doing – should lead to 'new modes of practice' (p. 5). This is not to suggest wholesale change, rather some realignment of current applications, based on shifting understanding.

Experiential learning

The more coherent theory of experience offered here is premised on two basic modes of experience, aesthetic and reflective; both are essential to learning. This represents two key advances: (1) reflection is experience, rather than being other than, or coming after, experience; and (2) experience *always* involves thinking, with aesthetic and reflective experience espousing different modes of thought. These advances, in our view, place a special premium on returning to 'experience' – i.e. to doing – as a core educational concern, rather than privileging 'reflection' as the source of learning. This said, a further development is awareness of a distinction between two connected types of reflective experience: a more concrete type focused on *doing* and a more abstract type focused on *knowing*. This belief, the representation of reflection as a simple cycle by proposing that a more precise description requires both types, each with its own variations shifted between in myriad different ways. This movement is premised on the notion that abstract reflection is itself rooted in concrete reflection, otherwise it becomes disconnected and is then abstract in the negative sense that Dewey recognised – a kind of self-absorption. A further key advance is the identification of aesthetic experience. No longer is experience just doing (as in the action-reflection cycle). Now it can be understood to embrace *being*, as being-in-the-world. Experience is being, doing and knowing. Doing and knowing become explicit in reflective experience, their relation being the object of thought. Yet doing and knowing are rooted in being; they are submerged in aesthetic experience, or being-in-the-world. We can comprehend this reflectively by saying that knowing is rooted in doing, which is rooted in being (see Figure 4.1). Change to any one is a change to all three. In this sense ways of being are ways of doing are ways of knowing.

Experiential education

The purpose of reflective experience is to change being; it is not just knowing and doing that are altered. This change is learning (again, in contemporary terms, this means learning necessarily entails changes to identity – see Seaman & Rheingold, 2013). But learning through being-in-the-world involves more than an individual mind; it involves self, others and environment submerged in holistic aesthetic experience (Quay, 2013a). In reflective experience, self, others and environment are culturally organised for encounter by young people – by 'experience' in education', Dewey (1938) means for us to consider the way experience, as we have discussed it here, is situated in the context of *being* as it is organised culturally.

the pre-human, appear as expert-militarily, terms this is. And, aesthetic multiple, now the t so with the similarity appears to necessarily seem to be on it, it is much concern: it is pre-tively – a end. re-world? as we can of being? available – e sight of ssential to re are – in ; of them, world has reflective doing and ure 4.1).

In his 'technical definition of education' (1916, pp. 89–90) Dewey describes education as 'that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience'. In other words, education involves reflective experience that reconstructs or reorganises being. This change to aesthetic experience should have consequences for subsequent experience (the problem is resolved and if a similar situation is encountered again it may no longer present as a problem). This process of perpetual change defines Dewey as a progressive educator.

With this definition, any experience that involves resolution of an issue could be described as experiential learning and experiential education. However, Dewey highlights the important distinction between learning and education. He notes: 'experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other' (1938, p. 25). For Dewey, education is associated with growth in a much broader sense than just physical growing. 'Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience' (p. 25). Growth is growth of further experience – and that is what education supports.

Two important factors concerning the connection Dewey draws between growth and education are significant for outdoor studies. (1) The growth of further experience requires more than just specialisation in one or other ways of being, as if ways of being can be treated separately and compartmentalised. (2) The 'further experience' Dewey speaks of is not the remote future of adult life. Instead it is the future within aesthetic experience, the expansion of possibilities for performance *within* a particular way of being – the transformation of future practice. These two factors have implications for asserting new modes of practice (as Dewey put it), or at least reinforcing the best of what professionals within various kinds of outdoor studies are already doing. Outdoor studies – written broadly – is well positioned to problematise being and facilitate its reorganisation. Outdoor studies historically have reflected diverse concerns in and out of formal schools (Quay & Seaman, 2013). The rich array of contemporary practices can enable interrogation of many different ways of being: being a bushwalker, being a field geologist, being a woman in the hypermasculine world of high-altitude mountaineering, being a member of an indigenous community. Outdoor studies shares concerns with, and can educationally craft, these ways of being such that issues may arise that draw received ways of being into question.

The second factor, concerning 'further experience', is made forcefully when Dewey connects the notion of mis-educative experience with traditional forms of schooling. 'Young people in traditional schools do have experiences,' he acknowledges. 'The trouble is not with the absence of experiences, but their defective and wrong character – wrong and defective from the standpoint of connection with further experience' (1938, p. 27). The problem is that the further experience typically defined within traditional schooling is to achieve a job in adult life: education then becomes career preparation – and this preparation takes the form of knowledge (knowing) acquisition and skill (doing) development, while ignoring being.

Yet this future, while able to be abstractly anticipated (reflected upon) by young people, does not often play a significant role in their immediate, aesthetic experience. In other words, while adult jobs are in the future, this future is so remote that it does not strongly influence the present – it is unavailable as a way of being. Dewey points out that goals must be tangible, otherwise they are literally outside the field of view. He thus speaks of how we always work towards 'ends-in-view, or purposes of which we are aware' (1933, p. 17). These purposes – seen from *within* young people's experience – must characterise aesthetic experience in order to possess educative potential. Even in traditional forms of schooling, the ends-in-view of aesthetic experience are not adult jobs, but rather the assessments (assignments/exams) by which students are measured.² These can only characterise various ways of being a student (for example, in science or history) aimed at preparation for adult life beyond school. However preparation of this sort is so focused on

knowing and (less so) doing that being is ignored, resulting in the creation of student ways of being that do not connect well to the growth of further experience – in the lives of young people. Thus Dewey declared: “preparation” is a treacherous idea (1938, p. 47). Outdoor studies has an advantage in this regard, because, as a field-based enterprise, it is inherently much more attuned to aesthetic experience. Educators involved with outdoor studies seem to have a much better awareness of the inherent connection between being, doing and knowing. But this awareness, while visible in practice, has not become a well-developed facet of outdoor education theory or practice, partly because of impoverished models of learning and its relation to experience.

Conclusion

Outdoor studies prominently engages with the notion of experience, whereas in science, mathematics or the humanities subjects it is scarcely considered. And, when it is, it usually involves attempts at making disciplinary studies more relevant, trying to connect abstract theory with concrete practice. Yet *being* remains systematically overlooked – as if it can be deferred until young people leave school. Outdoor studies is far ahead of these traditional forms of schooling in that it inherently recognises being, but up to now has lacked the conceptual framework through which to convey this understanding. As a consequence, in distancing themselves from traditional forms of schooling, outdoor educators have unwittingly reproduced the educational confusion that has plagued reforms for many years (Quay & Seaman, 2013). The way forward and out of this confusion lies in a sound philosophy of experience, which will enable viewing traditional and progressive forms of schooling through the same lens – and so to further development of outdoor studies, and education more generally.

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Notes

- 1 Dewey speaks of these as occupations, accounts of which are accessible in Quay (2013b, 2015), Quay and Seaman (2013), and Seaman and Nelsen (2011).
- 2 As such they can be classified as misrepresentations of mature disciplines (Popkewitz, 2007).

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