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More than relations between self, others and nature: outdoor education and aesthetic experience

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Self, others and nature (environment) have been suggested over numerous decades and in various places as a way of understanding experience in outdoor education. These three elements and the relations between them appear to cover it all. But is this really the final word on understanding experience? In this paper I explore two emphases within experience expressed by Peirce that offer differing ways of understanding experience: in one emphasis self, others and nature are submerged and not discerned; in the other they appear as the three familiar and related elements. The first emphasis is phenomenological and focused on a simple whole; the other is pragmatic and concerned with a total whole (elements in a totality). The key distinction here is that between something simple (one-fold) and something total (manifold). For Heidegger the difference between these is the ontological difference, where the two differing emphases are be-ing (verb) and beings (noun); or, expressed in another way, phenomenological thinking and calculative thinking. For Dewey these two emphases are revealed as aesthetic and reflective experience, both connected via inquiry. Awareness of this difference and connection suggests that issues involving self, others and nature as elements emerge from and return to the aesthetic ways of being (or occupations) that we build through our programme design and conduct. Relations between self, others and nature are submerged within these ways of being, highlighting how our programme design and conduct does not merely concern activities (including reflective activities), but involves building ways of being.

Keywords: *Self; Others; Nature; Heidegger; Dewey; Aesthetic experience*

Some references to self, others and nature in outdoor education

Over many decades and in various places, the trinity of self, others and nature has appeared as a way of framing experience in outdoor education. Perhaps the earliest version is that expressed by Sharp in the USA. Sharp (1930, p. 45) noticed how the

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‘various problems’ experienced by participants on camps arose, ‘out of the natural process of caring for one’s self, adjusting to the environment, and enjoying activity in camp and particularly in the more primitive conditions of the small camping units, overnight camping, and outpost camps’. These problems were important educationally because they afforded ‘the primary opportunities for learning in camp life’ (1930, p. 45). Sharp categorised these problems as ‘*matters of hygiene*’, ‘*matters of nature*’, and ‘*matters of a sense of civic responsibility – the essence of citizenship*’ (1930, pp. 45–46; original emphasis). Or in more basic terms, as self, nature and others, respectively.

Mortlock in the United Kingdom also recognises the importance of self, others and nature, although nature has been replaced by the subtly different notion of the environment. He argues that ‘all . . . actions should be based within the following framework’, a framework that espouses, ‘AN AWARENESS OF, RESPECT FOR, AND LOVE OF SELF balanced against AN AWARENESS OF, RESPECT FOR, AND LOVE OF OTHERS balanced against AN AWARENESS OF, RESPECT FOR, AND LOVE OF THE ENVIRONMENT’ (Mortlock, 1984, p. 19; original capitals). Important here is achieving a *balanced relation* between self, others and environment. Similarly and more recently, Walker (1998, p. 7) advocates ‘maintenance of a conscientious balance of the 3 elements of the “self – others – nature” triangle all the time’. In Australia, Hales (2006, p. 54) likewise points to the goal of outdoor education being ‘a critical understanding of self, others and the environment’, where emphasis is placed on changing the relations between them in a particular direction. In Nordic countries, Sandell and Öhman highlight the importance of ‘a *relational perspective*’ exemplified by ‘a “deeper” ecology that acknowledges connections between the self, other species and the landscape’ (2010, p. 125; original emphasis), such as proposed by Naess (1973).

In short, many authors have embraced the relevance of these three elements and the *relations* between them for outdoor education. Walker claims that ‘every convincing analysis of outdoor education . . . comes up with some form of the “self – others – nature” triangle’ (1998, p. 6; original emphasis). There are differing interpretations, yet considerations of the relations between these three elements appear to say it all. What else is there in an outdoor education experience beyond the relations between self, others and nature? Priest (1986, p. 15) adopts this position in his suggested definition of outdoor education, where: ‘through exposure to the outdoor setting individuals learn about their relationship with the natural environment, relationships between the various concepts of natural ecosystems, and personal relationships with others and their inner Self’.

For this balanced relation to be achieved, self, others and nature have to be interacting in some way, and for them to be interacting they each have to be different (while connected). While this may seem like a common sense statement, it does raise some conundrums that go to the heart of our understanding of experience. Walker alerts us to this conundrum when he points out how, ‘the natural world is *in* us too, and in fact *is* us, in just the same way as it is in, and also is, the companions in our group. We are talking here of wholeness, of total-being awareness’ (1998, p. 6; original emphasis). The important thing to notice here is how this statement can be interpreted in a range

of ways, generalisable into two. One of these is more scientifically analytic, a concern with biophysical processes. Wholeness here can be understood as a vast totality of multiple interconnected things in relation. The other main way is more aesthetic in the sense of feeling or emotion. Wholeness here refers not to relation because there are no parts considered to be in relation. Rather, everything is simple, as one; it just *is*.

My purpose in this paper is to highlight the difference and connection between these two senses of wholeness (one a totality of multiple things in relation—the other a simply felt whole) and the important understandings to be gleaned for outdoor education. Discussion of these two senses of wholeness is significant for outdoor education because of the importance we place on relations, or relationships, as the authors mentioned above attest. Indeed Priest (1986, p. 15) argues that, ‘as experiential educators in the out-of-doors, we are one small step closer to agreement on the topic of what constitutes outdoor education, if we consider our teaching subject to be a matter of many relationships’. But there is another way of considering outdoor education, as revealed by Walker, that is more on the feeling or aesthetic side of wholeness. To further exemplify this other side I quote a lengthy ‘personal anecdote’ from Nicol (2003, p. 12):

Overlooking Loch Avon from Coire Raibeirt near the summit of Caim Gorm in the Grampian mountain range a group of outdoor education teachers sat enjoying each other’s company on a warm, sunny, late summers day. Beinn Mheadhoin filled the middle distance with its large rocky stacks dwarfing the antlike hikers walking past them. The deep glacial trench of Loch Avon stretched north westwards where it narrowed to form the headwaters of the River Avon and its embryonic meander towards the confluence with the River Spey. To the south, the rocky crags above the Shelter Stone provided an impressive foreground to Loch Etchachan. The vegetation around us seemed mature although not yet changing to autumnal colours, whilst two ptarmigan displayed their own sensitivity to the changing seasons being now a mixture of summer and winter plumage. Amongst this sublime setting one of the teachers said, ‘if you ever want to explain to people what outdoor education is all about then all you have to do is take them up here and they will see for themselves’. A sense of agreement pervaded those gathered.

If someone asked any of the group at that time to describe the essence of those shared moments they would probably have struggled to give voice to their experiences. It seemed to be more of an intuitive understanding that this is what it is all about, a feeling of oneness with self, others and the environment. Nobody disagreed with the statement probably because no-one wanted to. If any disagreement had been felt then there were sufficient critical thinkers to suggest that, ‘no, this is not what outdoor education is all about’. What remained then was a consensus that something special happened that day indicating that places such as those in the Cairngorms can create moments of clarity that have a worthwhile place in the educational process. It served as a form of legitimacy, reinforcing those shared values which professionals in any field must be reminded of now and again in recognition of their work being worthwhile (Nicol, 2003, pp. 12–13).

The aesthetically holistic way in which outdoor education is considered in this experienced situation is contrasted with a more rational or critical approach. Both seem to provide ways of understanding outdoor education, and yet they also appear to contradict each other. Via this example, Nicol highlights how ‘the debate surrounding philosophy, methodology and the relative merits of adopting a rational (cognitive) or

aesthetic (sensory) teaching approach is far from resolved, nor are there signs that answers are forthcoming' (2003, p. 13). It is to this debate that I am contributing.

My purpose, then, restated, is to provide a possible way through this conundrum by illuminating the difference and connection between these two senses of wholeness (which, as I shall show, emanate from two emphases within our understanding of existence that are also two forms of experience and two different ways of thinking). To do this I turn to Peirce, Heidegger and Dewey—philosophers who contended with allied issues in the first half of the last century. Dewey's work remains relevant to outdoor educators, as is made clear by Ord and Leather (2011). However I contend that Dewey's philosophical contributions to experience and education can be further augmented by the work of Peirce and Heidegger. Peirce's work has not, to my knowledge, made a significant appearance in outdoor education literature. Heidegger has appeared more frequently, but only relatively recently (see, e.g., Harrison, 2010; Magnussen, 2012). By bringing all three together I can articulate a philosophical position that may perhaps allow us to move beyond the impasse to which Nicol refers.

Two emphases in our understanding of existence

The two differing emphases mentioned above can be seen in the work of Peirce. According to Dewey, Peirce emphasises both interaction and individuality in his descriptions of existence: 'Existence, he [Peirce] defines . . . in terms of reaction and interaction, of resistance or brute self-assertion It is also strictly individual' (Dewey, 1935a, p. 702). These two emphases within existence—interaction and individuality—are the beginnings of two different but connected philosophies. However, for a clear understanding of what is meant here it is very important that individuality is comprehended in a way appropriate to this work. I ask that you keep an open mind on individuality, at least for the moment, and not interpret it as somehow the opposite of sociality or community. Interaction we are more familiar with, although I shall endeavour to convey the specific nuance Dewey attributed to this term.

Peirce was an American philosopher credited as being the 'founder of pragmatism' (Dewey, 1935b, p. 338). Peirce's pragmatism greatly influenced Dewey's philosophy (Prawat, 2000), and it is the pragmatic standpoint that provides one emphasis within existence. The pragmatic standpoint suggests that the actuality of existence is action and reaction: 'interaction' (Dewey, 1935a, p. 702) or 'transaction' (1938, p. 43); 'a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment' (1938, p. 43). Transactions are generally characterised by cause–effect relations, which are the basis for science. Here self, others and nature are rationally considered as things embedded in cause–effect relations, for which a better balance is critically demanded. Dewey's work is exemplary in showing how the scientific method, dealing with the cause and effect relations that characterise transactions, is applicable to our practices. Our practices, he claims, are also founded on this relation, expressed in more instrumental terms via means and consequence. Here causes are socialised as means, and effects as consequences. In this vein, Dewey

(1933, p. 146) argues that ‘the relation of *means–consequence* is the center and heart of all understanding’.

Another aspect of Peirce’s philosophy is his phenomenology, which Dewey (1935b, p. 338) believed he pursued in ‘digging for the foundations of his pragmatism’. Peirce’s phenomenology was of interest to Heidegger,¹ who in the last months of his life ‘was reading the works of Charles Peirce, newly translated’ (Gray, 1977, p. 77). Heidegger’s interest was tweaked because he saw the similarities between Peirce’s phenomenology and his own work. Heidegger’s work (although not directly influenced by Peirce) offers an analysis of the other emphasis within existence, which is phenomenological. In contrast to the pragmatic understanding of existence as interaction or transaction, phenomenology begins with an understanding of existence as simple, so simple in fact that no parts are able to be distinguished in it; there is no awareness of cause and effect. In his phenomenological analysis Heidegger is always dealing with existence as a simple whole, which he describes using a range of concepts. But because these descriptions are always of the simple whole, they are not parts or elements related by cause and effect. Instead they are analogies. These analogous concepts are always analogous of the simple whole, such that there is a ‘*unity of analogy*’ (Heidegger, 1995/1931, p. 33); for ‘in analogy . . . what counts is relation to a one’ (Heidegger, 2008/1926, p. 134). By this, drawing on Aristotle, Heidegger means that when concepts are analogous, they revolve around one shared meaning.

Amongst the most well known of Heidegger’s analogous phenomenological concepts is ‘being-in-the-world’ (2010/1927, p. 53). Another is ‘attunement’ (p. 130) or mood, and still another is ‘understanding’ (there are many more). Thus every simple experiential whole can be described in its oneness as a mood and also as an understanding; it is both at once, as being-in-the-world. Here understanding and attunement are not related by cause and effect; they are analogous ways of describing the same simple whole. Hence ‘attunement always has its understanding’ and ‘understanding is always attuned’ (Heidegger, 2010/1927, p. 138) (Figure 1). Of course, understanding and attunement can also be thought in a pragmatic way. As such understanding can be seen to influence one’s mood, and *vice versa*, they are *related* as cause and effect. But in this way of thinking they are not phenomenological concepts; they are instead rational, critical, pragmatic.

Heidegger’s analogies are always analogous of a simple whole. In Peirce’s terms this simple whole is a type of unity characterised by a sense of oneness, where there are no parts and thus no cause–effect relations. This is ‘the oneness element of experience which involves a positive assignment of the number one, and which must be originally one, and not a total’ (Peirce, 1902, p. 734). Peirce acknowledges that ‘the word unity is seldom applied to this sort of oneness, which goes by the name of *individuality*’ (p. 734). Here (phenomenologically) individuality does not mean a separate one amongst a multiplicity of other ones that all together make up a unity in the form of a totality (e.g. the biophysical universe). Rather, it means a oneness that cannot be divided into parts or elements. *This* individuality is the simple whole of phenomenology.² If you take a look around you now and think as if *feeling* the situation in its simple wholeness, rather than analysing it as transaction(s) between various

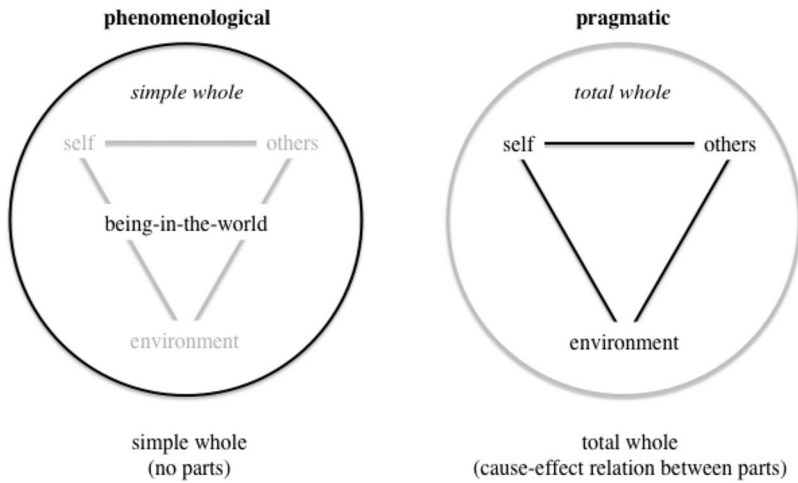


Figure 1. Two emphases in existence, one phenomenological and the other pragmatic. However, both are always of the same existence.

things, then you may begin to get a sense for this phenomenological standpoint. This is the standpoint relevant in Nicol's personal anecdote; it is aesthetic experience.³

The ontological difference

Both Dewey and Heidegger are aware of the difference and connection between these two emphases in our understanding of existence, but because each philosopher focuses mainly upon a particular emphasis (Dewey is primarily a pragmatist whereas Heidegger is a phenomenologist) they come at the issue from different sides or directions.

Heidegger (1995/1929–30, p. 358) calls the difference between these two emphases 'the ontological difference', which describes 'the distinction between being and beings'. Ontology is a word not regularly spoken amongst outdoor education practitioners; it refers to the study of being. Being is a difficult term with a range of meanings, but Heidegger is using it phenomenologically to refer to the simple experiential whole. This is '*be-ing*' (Heidegger, 1999/1923, p. 5) as a verb, not a noun. The ontological difference is that between a simple whole as *be-ing* (verb) and the parts or elements of a total whole as beings (noun). *Be-ing* (verb) is a simple whole that has no parts, while beings (noun) are related by cause–effect within a totality. So here 'the word *difference*' intimates 'that beings and Being [*be-ing*] are somehow set apart from each other, separated, and nonetheless connected to each other' (Heidegger, 1982/1940, p. 155). They are connected because they are both different ways of thinking the same experience. Heidegger highlights the ontological difference between *be-ing* and beings in order to show how these are differing emphases within our understanding of existence and experience. One is focused on existence/experience as a

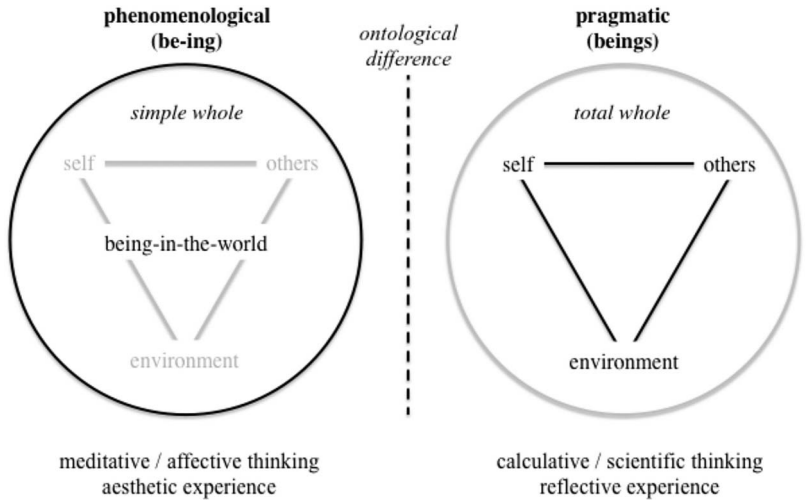


Figure 2. Showing the ontological difference between be-ing and beings as two differing emphases within experience.

simple aesthetic whole; the other on existence/experience as a total, relational whole (Figure 2).

The two emphases within our understanding of existence/experience highlighted by the ontological difference can also be aligned with two basic (different but connected) ways of thinking. Heidegger describes one as ‘calculative thinking’ (1966/1955, p. 46), which is ‘thinking in “causalities”’ (1999/1936–38, p. 102). Here thinking ‘is reckoning as deliberating’ (Heidegger, 1991/1955–56, p. 100) concerned with deliberations on cause–effect or means–consequence relations. This is the way of thinking prevalent in modern reductionist science (and modern understandings of ethics). In Dewey’s terms, this is ‘scientific thinking’ (1933, p. 199) or ‘reflective thinking’ (p. 102). Here self, others and nature are beings, existing in cause–effect relations. Such is the way in which self, others and nature are often discussed in outdoor education, where it is suggested that their relations should be approached via ‘critical reflection’ (Cosgriff, 2011, p. 60) with the aim of achieving a ‘balanced manner’ between them (Mortlock, 1984, p. 97). This thinking need not necessarily be that of a scientist, mathematician or economist; these are perhaps extreme versions. Rather it is merely thinking that begins with the notion of transaction. And this is a way of thinking that pervades everyday life, especially today.

But this way of thinking is not of itself bad. Understanding experience as transaction where the relations are cause–effect or means–consequence is, of course, a legitimate and important way of understanding experience. ‘Science is one way, and indeed one decisive way, in which all that is presents itself to us’, Heidegger (1977/1954, p. 156) acknowledges. However, Heidegger (1968/1951–52, p. 26) is concerned that this way of thinking is generally accepted as the *only* way of thinking, and he therefore calls it ‘one-track thinking’. In one-track thinking there is no

sense that transaction is an emphasis within experience, for it is considered to be the only way of understanding experience. If outdoor education discourse only engaged with transactional thinking in this one-track way, then outdoor education would consistently overlook the aesthetic, feeling or emotional side of experience, thereby rendering self, others and nature as merely beings to be reckoned with and manipulated relationally, somehow outside of any more holistic consideration framed emotionally. Of course outdoor education is discussed in broader terms than transaction—emotion is central to outdoor education⁴—but there remains a level of confusion in our discourse because the distinction addressed by Peirce, Heidegger, and Dewey is not clearly perceived.

So there is, of course, another way of thinking—one that does not begin with an understanding of experience as transaction between things. This way of thinking begins with an experiential emphasis on be-ing as simple whole, sometimes ambiguously described as living experience. Heidegger refers to it as ‘the empowering experiencing of living experience that takes itself along’ (2000/1919, p. 99); or as a ‘knowing awareness’ (2006/1938–39, p. 100) of living experience. Dewey (1891, p. 282) also perceives this understanding of experience, referring to it as ‘aesthetic experience’:

Esthetic⁵ 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 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 (Dewey, 1934, p. 274).

Dewey regards ‘the uniquely distinguishing feature of esthetic experience’ to be ‘exactly the fact that no . . . distinction of self and object exists in it’ (1934, p. 249). Here ‘organism and environment cooperate to institute an experience in which the two are so fully integrated that each disappears’ (p. 249). Aesthetic experience is thus not experience as transaction; it is not concerned with cause–effect or means–consequence relations. ‘All the elements of our being that are displayed in special emphases and partial realizations in other experiences are merged in esthetic experience’, Dewey (1934, p. 274) argues. ‘And they are so completely merged in the immediate wholeness of the experience that each is submerged: it does not present itself in consciousness as a distinct element’ (p. 274). Importantly this submersion is not simply to that of an imperceptible reciprocity; it is to acknowledge a different way of thinking and experiencing.

Aesthetic experience is ‘immediate experience’ (Dewey, 1916a, p. 255), ‘direct experience’ (p. 272). It is perceived not in calculative thinking, but in what Dewey describes as ‘affective thought’ (1926, p. 3) or ‘qualitative thought’ (1930, p. 18). Heidegger calls this ‘phenomenological thinking’ (1971/1953–54, p. 30) or ‘meditative thinking’ (1966/1955, p. 46). Heidegger’s meditation is on living experience as be-ing, as simple whole. He is not looking for parts or elements, but for ways of

describing the simple whole in its oneness, thereby resulting in numerous analogies. Here Heidegger differs from Dewey, in that Dewey does not perceive a way of further thinking aesthetic experience beyond an awareness of it in affective or qualitative thinking. Indeed Dewey considers aesthetic experience to be ‘naïve’ (1929, p. 87), because for Dewey analysis is always scientific and based on transaction. So Dewey does not contemplate a phenomenological analysis in the way espoused by Heidegger. Affective or qualitative thought highlights awareness of the simple aesthetic whole for Dewey, but not its phenomenological analysis. Therefore, in contrast to pragmatic transactional thinking that is concerned with the cause–effect relations between things or beings (realising the relationality of self, others and nature), meditative phenomenological thinking is a more developed form of affective thinking, the aim of which is to describe be-ing, living experience, in its simple wholeness. The results are analogous phenomenological concepts, such as being-in-the-world.

However, grasping direct aesthetic experience, immediate experience, living experience, is not necessarily easy; not because it is complex or complicated but because it is so simple, so simple in fact that we tend to overlook it—as we consider thinking to be primarily reflective, and experience to be chiefly about transaction. Dewey (1921, p. v) points out that, ‘the most difficult thing in the world to learn to see is the obvious, the familiar, the universally taken for granted’. However it is crucial to my argument that the reader grapples with this difficulty personally, just as if learning to swim.

Heidegger uses swimming as an example because it cannot be learnt as a set of concepts separate from experience: ‘We shall never learn what “is called” swimming . . . or what it “calls for”, by reading a treatise on swimming. Only the leap into the river tells us what is called swimming’ (1968/1951–52, p. 21). Without making this leap, ‘one is supposed to learn swimming, but only goes meandering on the riverbank, converses about the murmuring of the stream, and talks about the cities and towns the river passes. This guarantees that the spark never flashes’ (Heidegger, 1984/1928, p. 7). For the spark to flash you must engage with affective thinking in contrast to scientific thinking. You can do this by embracing the simple whole of your experience, not by reflectively analysing it and seeing parts in transaction, but by being aware of it, by feeling it as a simple whole. Look up from this text and *feel* this. This is affective thought, qualitative thought. When you are aware of this phenomenological standpoint, you will find it possible to move between phenomenological and pragmatic standpoints by shifting your awareness, your thinking, from simple aesthetic whole to parts within a transacting totality, and back again. Referring again to Nicol’s anecdote, you can perhaps see how the description he provides is aesthetic, more poetry than prose, inviting the reader to share in the experience directly, rather than via a reflective analysis.

The ontological difference as passageway, navigated via inquiry

We must remember that these two standpoints, phenomenological and pragmatic, are differing emphases within existence/experience, separated and conjoined by the

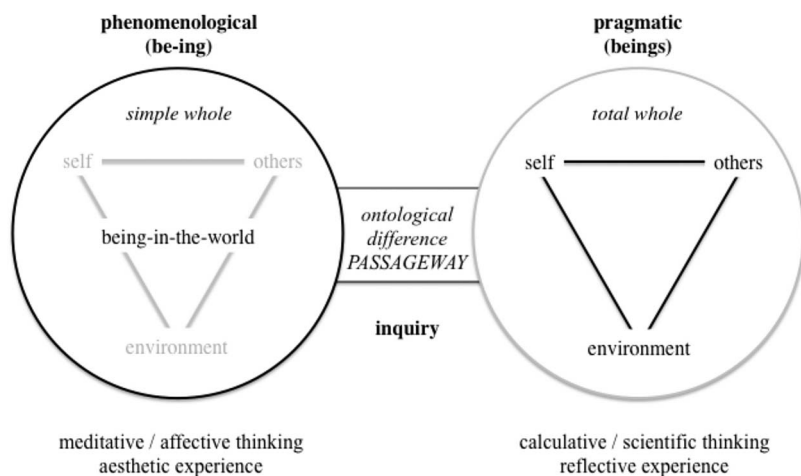


Figure 3. Inquiry is the movement, via the passageway of the ontological difference, involving aesthetic experience and reflective experience.

ontological difference. The ontological difference can therefore be described as ‘a passageway’ (Heidegger, 1999/1936–38, p. 328) between them. Using Dewey’s terms, it is a passageway between aesthetic and scientific experience, exemplified in his theory of inquiry wherein reflective experience emerges from and returns to a ‘non-reflective’ (1916b, p. 137fn) aesthetic experience. Inquiry is central to education, and of course to outdoor education. For Dewey, the usual instigator of movement through this passageway is experience of a problem emerging in aesthetic experience to be addressed in reflective experience, with the solution offering a return to aesthetic experience (Figure 3).

Dewey’s pragmatic theory of inquiry, although mainly focused on reflective experience, highlights how this reflective experience emerges from a ‘pre-reflective’ (1933, p. 106) situation, to return to a ‘post-reflective’ (1933, p. 107) situation. The pre-reflective and post-reflective are both described by Dewey in a qualitative affective way: ‘a perplexed, troubled or confused situation at the beginning and a cleared-up, unified, resolved situation at the close’ (1933, p. 106). Here the pre-reflective, post-reflective, non-reflective situation is of aesthetic experience and affective thinking. But via reflective thinking this aesthetic experience can be changed, altered, adapted, in a process that we commonly call experiential learning. Experiential learning involves movement across the passageway of the ontological difference from aesthetic experience and affective thinking to scientific experience and reflective thinking. In this move the simple whole is rendered into its parts, elements, beings, as related by cause and effect. These relations can then be reorganised such that the return to aesthetic experience is return to a different aesthetic experience. This is reflected in Dewey’s (1916a, pp. 89–90) ‘technical definition of 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’. Thus aesthetic

experience is not ignorant, foolish or unintelligent; rather, *'intelligence'* is 'the product and expression of cumulative finding of the meanings reached' (Dewey, 1939, p. 521), through educative inquiries.

Outdoor education and ways of be-ing

The changes made to aesthetic experience via reflective experience (through inquiry) are changes made to a way of being-in-the-world. The aesthetic way of be-ing has been changed via reflective experience. This points to how our experience is constituted by 'various ways of *being*' (Heidegger, 1985/1925, p. 295), a phrase that translates into Dewey's terms as 'occupations' or 'vocations' (1916a, p. 359). Higgins (2005, p. 447) points out that 'what is important about Dewey's conception of vocation is that it is qualitative'. Hence 'Dewey's discussion of vocation opens onto his treatment of aesthetics' (p. 449). Dewey (1916a, p. 361) stresses the importance of an 'education *through* occupations' as he believes that this form of education 'combines within itself more of the factors conducive to learning than any other method'.

Here it is important to reiterate the point made earlier about individuality. Aesthetic experience, circumscribed reflectively as an occupation or way of being, is not individualistic in the manner in which we usually understand that term. Indeed Dewey (in an attempt to capture an aesthetic aspect of occupation) reflectively described 'an occupation' as 'the only thing which balances the distinctive capacity of an individual with his [*sic*] social service' (1916a, p. 360). Likewise Nicol (2003, p. 13) portrays the aesthetic experience in the Grampian mountain range by saying: 'it seemed to be more of an intuitive understanding that this is what it [outdoor education] is all about, a feeling of oneness with self, others and the environment'. Aesthetic experience is not individual or social but both, and neither is it natural in a sense excluding self and others. Here Nicol expresses an aesthetic interpretation of an occupation, a being-in-the-world, which could be described, very broadly, as being-an-outdoor-education-participant.

I contend that this insight reveals the importance of understanding outdoor education programme design and conduct in aesthetic terms via ways of being or occupations. For *it is the various ways of being, created through programme design and conduct, which form the basis for any reflective analysis which occurs during an outdoor education programme*. These are the aesthetic experiences we are attempting to work with, involving our participants, the experiences they will be living. In such attempts we reflectively recognise that we are positioning self, others and nature in certain ways, but that this reflective recognition is connected with a holistic aesthetic awareness (wherein self, others and nature are submerged) achieved through the passageway of the ontological difference.

It is in these occupations as aesthetic experiences that participants encounter the problems that will require reflective experience, inquiry. Such reflective experience can be as straightforward as trying different options until one works (trial and error), or it can be as expansive as to bring knowledge gained through other occupations to bear on the problem at hand. The important point is that the origin and end point of

inquiry are both aesthetic experience; they are referenced by the occupation, the way of being. In this sense, any reflective experience is always underpinned by an aesthetic experience.

Yet we can sometimes overlook the important educational contributions that our programme design and conduct make to aesthetic experience, seeing a programme as merely a logistical compilation of activities, with the educational benefit occurring only via reflective experience (one-track thinking). This logistical perspective goes hand in hand with overly simplistic notions of ‘an “action-reflection” cycle’ (Joplin, 1981, p. 17) model of experiential learning, where the action component is equated to doing and nothing more. It is towards a better understanding of this action, this doing, that aesthetic experience contributes, while also offering a deeper way of considering experiential learning.

A number of recent critiques have problematised this action–reflection cycle as a model of experiential learning (see, e.g., Brown, 2009; Seaman, 2008). And I acknowledge that the connection between aesthetic and reflective experience through the passageway of the ontological difference could be construed as a cycle. A cycle is a form of relation. But the ontological difference is much more than a cyclical relation. The ontological difference is a passageway between two different forms of experience and thinking. It is this difference that is at the heart of comprehending experiential learning.

Walker’s (1999) awareness of the importance of occupations is made clear as he describes the outdoor education project he has been involved with in Chile—occupations such as ecotourism guide, environmental educator, silviculturist, and youth trainer have been central to its success. In school-based outdoor education the ways of being or occupations included in a programme may include expeditioner, backpacker, canoeing partner, climber, belayer, group member, cook, tent partner—just to name a few of the more traditional ones, and naming them in a very unadorned (prosaic, not poetic) way. Now think of the impact on the aesthetic experience caused by reflectively altering some of the variables we commonly associate with these occupations: the time available, the type of equipment, the distance to be covered, the level of physical difficulty, the group size. Also reflect on the different ways these occupations could be combined, and again cross through the passageway of the ontological difference to see/feel what this might mean to aesthetic experience. And there are of course many other variables beyond our direct control that we could consider, such as the weather. In addition we know how important the attitude of the educator is to maintaining morale in difficult situations: a kind word here, a smile there—all effect the affect. But this is not merely to help people feel better. All of this is a co-crafting of aesthetic experience: of the mood, of attunement, which is also understanding. Such shaping of aesthetic experience, of ways of being, of occupations, is the art of teaching. And this art goes hand in hand with reflective experience, the science of teaching.

In conclusion may I say that I consider self, others and nature to be important elements for us to work with in outdoor education. But their foundational position in philosophical discussions of outdoor education belies an emphasis in our thinking

towards the reflective. Here we see a totality of things in relation, categorised as self, others and nature. Balancing relations between them is important; however, by critically assessing this balance we are thinking and experiencing reflectively. When thinking affectively and experiencing aesthetically, we are not concerned with this balance, whatever it may be. We are simply existing in a particular way of being. We may address problems that occur in this way of being via reflective experience, but as such we rarely think of these as problems of self, others and nature—unless we are outdoor educators (or a certain type of philosopher). Self, others and nature remain categories that we use reflectively to encompass the multiplicity of things existing in relation in a totality. To really understand the living experiences of the participants in our programmes we have to envision them, feel them, as aesthetic experiences. Then we may perhaps be better placed to consider the problems that could emerge and the ways in which reflective experience contributes to the ongoing process of resolution—as changing aesthetic experience—which is at the same time a reorganisation of the relations between self, others and nature.

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Notes

1. Of course, many other philosophers besides Peirce and Dewey have been involved with pragmatism (James, Rorty, etc.), and numerous others besides Peirce and Heidegger have engaged with phenomenology (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, etc.), but it is my contention that the works of Dewey and Heidegger, when brought into conversation via Peirce, offer an interesting way to illuminate our understanding of the two differing standpoints, and the way that they work together in experience.
2. The work of Abram, which builds on that of Merleau-Ponty as well as Husserl, is sometimes cited in outdoor education (see, e.g., Cohn, 2011; Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Wattchow, 2007, 2008). However, it would be difficult to use Abram's work to prosecute my argument in this paper as he does not clarify the ontological difference, instead employing terms that more closely align with transaction, such as 'intertwined' and 'reciprocate' (Abram, 1996, p. 33), in attempts to convey a simple aesthetic whole. Heidegger asks:

Why is it that we stubbornly resist considering even once whether the belonging-together of subject and object does not arise from something that first imparts their nature to both the object and its objectivity, and the subject and its subjectivity, and hence is prior to the realm of their *reciprocity*? That our thinking finds it so toilsome to be in this bestowal, or even on the lookout for it, cannot be blamed on the narrowness of contemporary intellect or resistance to unsettling or disruptive views. Rather we may surmise something else: that we know too much and believe too readily ever to feel at home in a questioning which is powerfully experienced. For that we need the ability to wonder at what is *simple*, and to take up that wonder as our abode (1975/1946, pp. 103–104; emphasis added).

Here I am not attempting to discredit the work of Merleau-Ponty, or of Abram, but merely to highlight how the language used (at least in English translation) creates difficulties for drawing out the ontological difference as described by Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty's (1968/1964) notion of 'flesh' as existential unity is a pointer towards the simple that Heidegger is seeking, but it remains accompanied by terms such as 'intertwining' and 'chiasm' that continue to cloud the interpretation.

3. Nicol (2003, p. 13) speaks of 'un-interpreted aesthetic experience'. However, following Heidegger (2010/1927, p. 144), I understand every experience as 'always already . . . interpreting'.
4. Many empirical investigations of outdoor education refer to the feelings of participants (see, e.g., Boniface, 2000; Campbell, 2010; Wolfe & Dattilo, 2007), yet, due to the empirical nature of these studies, the feelings involved tend to be analysed reflectively. In a comment on aesthetic experience that highlights the difference between aesthetic and reflective experience, Dewey (1934, p. 42) argues that 'experience is emotional but there are no separate things called emotions in it'. Separate emotions are discernible if experience is reflected upon pragmatically (experience is transactional), but from a phenomenological standpoint this experience is simply attuned in a certain way.
5. Dewey uses both 'aesthetic' and 'esthetic' spellings of this word. When in quotations I remain true to Dewey's original spelling, but outside specific quotes I use 'aesthetic'.

Author biography

John Quay is a senior lecturer in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Before moving to work in tertiary education he taught outdoor education in secondary schools for 10 years, and was at one stage president of the teachers' association for outdoor education in Victoria. His research interests continue to be sustained by an awareness of the divide between academic (core-curricular) and non-academic (extra-curricular) within schools—a division that positions outdoor education in a particular way—and the search for an understanding that can move beyond such a division. This problem has taken him into the realms of educational philosophy and curriculum theory. He believes that outdoor education practice can benefit from the sharing of relevant forays into these broader discourses.

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