

Philosophical Inquiry in Education

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY IN EDUCATION
The Journal of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society

Education, Experience, and Existence: Engaging Dewey, Peirce, and Heidegger (John Quay)

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Volume 23, numéro 1, 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070371ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070371ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Philosophy of Education Society

ISSN

2369-8659 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Yosef-Hassidim, D. (2015). Compte rendu de [Education, Experience, and Existence: Engaging Dewey, Peirce, and Heidegger (John Quay)]. *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, 23(1), 91–96. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070371ar>

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Review of

Education, Experience, and Existence: Engaging Dewey, Peirce and Heidegger

by John Quay, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013

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In *Education, Experience, and Existence: Engaging Dewey, Peirce and Heidegger*, John Quay introduces a problem in educational thought and offers a solution. The problem, as Quay sees it, is a confusion in philosophy and in education that stems from disagreements about priorities regarding educational goals, disagreements that result in a lack of unity in the curriculum and in the educational endeavor as a whole. Quay considers Dewey the first to identify and express this situation, quoting the latter as he argued that the confusion is marked by numerous “conflicts” in “educational tendencies” with “no general agreement as to what conflict is most important” (p. xvii). For Dewey, the major conflicts are the child versus the curriculum and individual nature versus social culture (later Quay will connect these four factors to Heidegger through Aristotle’s four causes), and Quay contends that similar conceptual and ideological clashes still exist within the educational arena, responsible for recurring “cycles of reform” (p. 7) and compromises between tendencies without a clear theory that can guide educators. Therefore, to overcome this predicament, Quay adopts Peirce’s general framework of experience, and combines Dewey’s and Heidegger’s ideas in order to offer a coherent theory of education.

Quay devotes most of the book to restructuring and clarifying Dewey’s and Heidegger’s works, and he demonstrates depth and breadth regarding the oeuvres of both of them, a challenging task when it comes to these high-caliber and prolific authors. The breadth becomes possible through Quay’s view that both Dewey’s and Heidegger’s oeuvres are continuous within themselves, without breaks or turns that change the main course of their thoughts. Quay explicitly asserts such a view: “It may be noted that my references to Dewey’s ideas on a particular issue often span a considerable period of his life. In this sense, much of Dewey’s work exhibits continuity across his career” (p. 200, note 11). A similar approach can be attributed to his attitude towards Heidegger, an attitude that acknowledges the conventional view of a “turn” in Heidegger’s thought while not framing this turn in terms of different goals of the philosophical project but rather different means to achieve the same goal:

Heidegger’s questioning of be-ing has two connected phases, often spoken of as “earlier” and “later” Heidegger. These phases coincide with two ways in which Heidegger approaches the question of be-ing. The earlier way is via the question of the meaning of be-ing (which emphasizes be-ing as *being-here*); the later way is via the question of the truth of be-ing (focusing on *be-ing* as being-here). (pp. 152-153)

While this book joins a vast volume of literature on Dewey and education, it is illustrative of a growing interest in Heidegger's body of work vis-à-vis education. As such, the book enriches the existing critical literature that analyzes over-pragmatism in education, both in practice and in research (see especially Biesta, 2010, 2015), by pointing how this excess of pragmatism might be overcome by adopting a phenomenological view alongside the pragmatic.

In the prologue, Quay sketches a helpful outline of his argument, including an interesting description of "aesthetic appreciation of existence as a simple qualitative whole" (p. xix). I find this description similar—and yet adding value—to Wittgenstein's (1965) explanation of Being. Quay also offers instructions for a do-it-yourself sketch that illustrates the conceptual framework he develops in the book. Quay continues to use visuals throughout the book with figures that assist the reader in seeing the different areas in the experiential landscape and the relations between them. This use of figures is unusual in philosophical books and especially challenging when it comes to the non-reflective, aesthetic side of the ontological difference, that is, thinking and experience that are not concrete—they do not refer to specific beings—and as such are not directly and explicitly instrumental to the resolution of problems; for drawing what is *not* a being runs the risk of being misleadingly objectifying. Quay meets the challenge successfully, also by mentioning Heidegger's warning that a diagram is "an aid for understanding, simply scaffolding around the phenomenon, scaffolding that must be torn down immediately" (p. 123).

The book itself is divided into three parts. In the first part Quay introduces and explains the confusion, as well as the need for a theory of experience that will address this confusion. Quay considers Peirce's structure of experience—the categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness—as the backbone of such a theory, and explains it as follows: "Firstness highlights the holistic sense of feeling or quality, secondness is actuality as action-reaction, and thirdness is the mediation of these interactions. All three categories together form the universal phenomenon which is our living experience" (p. 22). Quay argues that while Dewey's pragmatism "is primarily involved with secondness and thirdness ... Heidegger's phenomenology is chiefly concerned with firstness and secondness" (p. xvii).

The second part of the book is aimed at constructing a coherent theory of experience by combining Dewey's pragmatism and Heidegger's phenomenology. While Dewey explicitly acknowledged and drew on Peirce's work, Quay uses Heidegger's philosophy since he finds difficulties in Dewey's search for a complete experiential philosophy: "Dewey's coherent theory of experience remains limited by his understanding of time as temporal continuity. Heidegger's phenomenological analysis is not limited in this way, and it therefore offers a way forward beyond this impasse" (p. 69). Dewey acknowledged the "difference ... between aesthetic and reflective experience," but he "did not fully comprehend it because he approached it primarily from a pragmatic perspective in reflective experience" (p. 70). Quay believes that Heidegger "[perceived] (what Dewey [called]) affective or qualitative thinking as another way of comprehending existence" (p. xxi), and therefore he draws on Heidegger to complete what Dewey was not able to because for the latter aesthetic experience is "'naïve experience' in the sense that, because it is non-reflective, it cannot be analyzed" (p. xx).

By positing Dewey's pragmatism and Heidegger's phenomenology side by side within Peirce's structure, Quay does not mean to imply that the two thinkers are opposed to each other; rather, this picture is meant to convey how they complete each other. This view is essentially different from the one taken by Rorty (1976) who identifies incommensurable or incompatible differences in their work:

One of Heidegger's strongest feelings, and one which places him very far from Dewey indeed, is that ages, cultures, nations, and people are supposed to live up to the demands of philosophers, rather than the other way around. (p. 295)

Rorty's observations suggest that Quay's project might be problematic if the reader concludes from Dewey and Heidegger's shared interest in experience that they also shared the same intellectual aspirations. At the end of the day, Dewey and Heidegger had fundamentally different visions about the place and role of philosophy and consequently about how we should conduct our lives. Integrating Heidegger's thought within a broader framework, and suggesting that he stood up to the challenge where others had failed without highlighting the unique and radical features of this thought, might result in missing the potential in Heidegger's work to enable us to think differently about education altogether. For that reason, Quay should have been more cautious in juxtaposing Heidegger with Dewey in order to better prevent faulty inferences that could constrain the educational contribution of Heidegger's phenomenology.

In the third part of the book Quay returns to education and offers a way out of the confusion presented earlier, based on a unified understanding of experience that does not separate different elements or components. Quay's strategy is to make connections between Dewey and Heidegger through Aristotle. First, he extends Heidegger's association between Aristotle's four "causes" (material, formal, efficient, final) and a phenomenological structure that Heidegger calls "the fourfold" to "a connection between Aristotle's four causes and the four goal areas of education," or "four ideological interest groups," or "four curriculum ideologies" (p. xxii): social efficiency, social reconstruction, scholar academic, and learner centered. Next, Quay sees Dewey's four factors of educational conflict (child, curriculum, individual nature, and social culture, respectively) as four causes, parallel to Aristotle's. Then, he extends the quadruple Heidegger-Aristotle association towards these four Deweyan causes, while constructing each curriculum ideology from a combination of two causes (for example, social efficiency is an accentuation of curriculum and social culture). Through these associations Quay is able to apply Heidegger's phenomenological unity of the fourfold to Dewey's four factors that create the confusion in education, but in order to complete this linkage he needs an educational unifying concept.

Quay finds this concept—his leading idea for resolving the confusion—in Dewey's notion of occupation. By implementing the theory of experience and applying the unity constructed by Heidegger, Quay is able to "charge" occupation with phenomenological meaning: "[O]ccupations are both phenomenological and pragmatic. They are aesthetic, place of be-ing, gifted by phenomenological fourfold, but they are also pragmatic and open to planning" (p. 171). Thus, Quay is also able to explain why education through occupations is not vocational education, and as such provides a convincing argument about how to integrate practical disciplines within schooling without making this integration a kind of professional training. This positions him in contrast to some theorists who have articulated supportive calls for vocational education (for example, Billett, 2011; Winch, 2000). Quay's modification of Dewey's notion of occupation joins Masschelein and Simons' (2013) call to address subject matter not as a ready-made and objectified body of knowledge to be transmitted to students but rather as an educational point of reference. Quay adds a phenomenological layer that links, or fuses, the practical with the ontological: "Interactions between occupations potentially result in awareness that there is more than one way of doing things or knowing things (and that there is more than one way of be-ing)" (p. 190).

The phenomenological layer added to Dewey's pragmatism makes the offered theory of experience more durable in the face of attempts, stemming from economic interests, to distort Dewey's notions of growth and social renewal. Quay is sensitive to such distortions:

Dewey's endeavor to promote his version of an "education through occupations" was seriously derailed at the time by those promoting vocational education understood via the social efficiency ideology.... Dewey was justifiably concerned that his more subtle understanding of education through occupations would be misinterpreted "in theory and practice as trade education: as a means of securing technical efficiency in specialized future pursuits." (p. 168)

Thus, Quay is aware of the instrumentalism guided by “the Social Efficiency ideology” (p. 164). For example, he quotes Kliebard (2002) who argues that “principles of efficiency were introduced ... to make the curriculum as a whole socially efficient by ensuring that whatever children and youth studied would relate directly to their ability to function in their future adult roles” (p. 164). Quay also mentions Dewey’s acknowledgement that the social efficiency ideology renders his notion of occupations “an instrument of perpetuating unchanged the existing industrial order of society, instead of operating as a means of its transformation” (p. 169).

However, it seems that generally Quay does not perceive social efficiency as exceptionally influential compared to the other three ideologies that generate the educational confusion (social reconstruction, scholar academic, learner centered); in Chapter 7 the four ideologies are presented in a symmetrical manner. Such a presentation blurs the fact that the social efficiency ideology—supported by “machination” or “enframing,” the governing calculative way of being as characterized by Heidegger—has gained, since Dewey, a prominent and deep influence in schooling. In this sense, Quay’s choice of the term “confusion” for the predicament of schooling is questionable. Perhaps he is influenced by his definition of the pre-reflective experience, following Dewey, as “perplexity, confusion, doubt, due to the fact that one is implicated in an incomplete situation whose full character is not yet determined” (Figure 2.1, p. 28). In any case, today’s schooling is governed by the tendency of “enframing” to control and optimize, which pragmatically takes the form of neo-liberal ideology. Quay might be right that “the way through the confusion engendered by the four causes is to avoid emphasizing any particular cause or causes and to instead focus phenomenologically on the aesthetic unity of the fourfold as onefold” (p. 182). However, the hold of the instrumental social efficiency cause has become a prevalent reality such that alternatives—including non-pragmatic or non-reflective ones—are hardly entertained or are pushed to the margins. As such, the social efficiency cause is the strongest challenge to the phenomenological treatment of education.

What makes the social efficiency cause so problematic is the aggressiveness exerted by forces that act on its behalf. This aggressiveness stems from a struggle between market forces as well as other social forces that seek power in society and to that end are assertive and persistent in their attempts to penetrate schools (see, for example, Norris, 2011), eventually managing to divert schooling from educational aims, each force pulling in its own direction. Thus, disregarding the dominance of the social efficiency cause prevents Quay from inquiring into the decisive political origins of the contemporary educational predicament.

Broadening the discussion toward the social, political, and economic contexts of education would have been beneficial in several ways. The political dimension is especially pertinent to Quay’s attempt to characterize “occupation” as a comprehensive organizing factor for schooling in Chapter 8. For, without considering political attempts to influence education, Quay’s educational adaptation of Heidegger’s “place of be-ing” as “aesthetic interpretation (phenomenologically ‘deconstructed’) of Dewey’s sense of occupation” (p. 171) is still too fragile and is susceptible to instrumental manipulations by self-interested forces that perceive students as “human capital” (Apple, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). And indeed, Quay mentions “the great difficulty Dewey had in distinguishing his sense of occupation from that espoused within the social efficiency ideology by way of vocational education” (p. 171). Further exploration of political and economic interests underlying Dewey’s difficulty is needed in order to moderate their contemporary influence on the curriculum.

Scholars in different areas of education, and especially philosophers and sociologists of education who are concerned about an increasing distance between philosophy and the concrete aspects of education, should pick up the task of bringing forth and addressing the political aspects that are at the roots of the confusion over education. This important task would assist in translating the theory of education constructed in the

book's third part into practical measures in terms of policy, curriculum, and administration. Quay does suggest, admittedly, that "educational confusion cannot be overcome without addressing the organization and administration of the life of the school as a social institution" (p. 186), but he does not discuss explicit implications that would be of interest for policy makers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators.

Furthermore, connecting the unified view of education to social, political, and economic contexts would make it easier to convey the phenomenological ideas to educators who are not familiar with Heidegger's work. Consider, for example, the following condensed sentence: "Being-a-teacher as a way of being is constituted phenomenologically via possible modes of being-with" (p. 175). As this book will be useful mainly for those with a certain grasp of Heidegger—an unreasonable expectation from teacher educators, for example—it is necessary for philosophers of education to demonstrate how these "modes of concern" are reflected in the classroom and in the teacher's relationships with colleagues and with administration.

Quay's book is an important contribution to efforts to envision education not captured in a pragmatic worldview. The book is especially valuable for those who look to draw on Heidegger's philosophy for education and attempt to situate this philosophy in relation to explicit philosophical frameworks for education. The wealth of primary sources Quay shares with his readers makes the book beneficial mostly to those who have some background in Dewey and Heidegger's work.

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