

How educational is experience? An excursion into John Dewey's *Art as Experience*

The concept of experience by Dewey is a promising basis for educational reflection. With *Art as Experience* as a point of departure the possibilities and limitation of the concept of experience are studied. In a first step the concept is studied on an anthropological level as an understanding of the relationship between the person and her world. In a second step the concept is discussed on the basis of the distinction between “aesthetic quality” of experience and of “aesthetic experience”. In the third and last step the educational implications of the Deweyan distinction between statement and expression are examined. The analysis of *Art as Experience* shows that the concept of experience only to a limited extent does lend itself to the theory of education and needs a revision in order to be able to function as its theoretical basis.

This article aims at discussing the usefulness of the concept of experience for the theory of education. Two points of reference may be useful in this context. One is Hannah Arendt's harsh criticism of progressive education (1961). There she presents three basic assumptions which in her opinion have caused the backwardness of American education. The third of these assumptions is that “you can know and understand only what you have done yourself” (1961, 182). This assumption corresponds, in Arendt's view, to the devaluation of subject matter and to a formalised concept of teaching and learning, or, to say it with Wolfgang Klafki (1964), to a formalism with respect to methods of teaching and learning (learning to learn, project work, experiment), and a formalism with respect to skill (critical thinking, logical reasoning, language skills). In short progressive education has substituted activity for learning. The other point of reference is more recent and presented under the title “Against learning” by Gert Biesta. The author argues within the pragmatist tradition and criticises the one-sidedness of modern knowledge management which depicts the pupil as an all-mighty knowledge consumer. He argues for a revaluation of teaching. Comparing John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, 1934, with his *Experience and Education*, 1938, this reader is puzzled by the apparent distance between the concepts of experience that emerges within the two works. I

find my reading disconcerting for several reasons. Some are related to logical problems, some to the consequences for education. Logically, it is difficult to presume that a conflict is present considering the temporal proximity of the works and considering the fact that the works are the result of a life time of theoretical development which found its first synopsis and systematisation in *Experience and Nature*, 1925. It is, therefore, rather implausible that the author should have revised his concept, and if he had done so, this highly self-reflexive author certainly would have made his revision explicit and a point of discussion. My doubts about the material I am reading deepen when I find hardly any mention, observation or comment by other scholars on what to me appears to be a patent self-contradiction. If there were indeed contradictions between these works, surely many others would have commented upon them and tried to make sense of them.

The logical concerns carry some weight if we take into account the pivotal methodological role the concept of experience plays in both works and in Dewey's work in general. In *Art as Experience*, the author summarises his study by stating: "To esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is" (*LW 10*, 278). In the study of fine art, according to Dewey, the features of experience emerge in a paradigmatic way, and the author would even have called the aesthetic experience "pure" (*ibid.*) had the term not been so abused in the past. Dewey's verdict is based on the conviction that, in contrast to everyday life, aesthetic experience is unimpeded by *distraction* through external factors, undisturbed by *dispersion* through internal lack of concentration and cleared of obstacles of communication. Philip Jackson (1998) concurs when he observes that in his studies on fine art, Dewey has found the "source" for a number of key notions on experience.

Equally important is the concept of experience in *Experience and Education* which well may have had the title *Education as Experience*. Here the discussion is conducted in the juxtaposition of traditional and progressive education. Dewey states nothing less than that there is no alternative to experience in education and that education has to be based on a theory of experience yet to be developed. The fault of traditional education, according to Dewey, is not that it does not provide experiences but that these are experiences which destroy the pupils' appetite for the world and deprive them of their purpose and sense of direction. In other words, traditional experience is *non-educational* as it impedes, discourages, deflects or narrows further experience. The main challenge for the school then consists of providing *educational* experiences which lead to growth, unlock pupil and world to each other and widen the scope of further experiences. Thus, if contradictions indeed exist between the two works it would be quite a serious matter.

In addition to these logical problems there are also educational concerns. One is that in his only work on education with *experience* in its title, Dewey makes no mention of the aesthetic dimension of experience. Furthermore, the content also lacks a – for me obvious – notion derived from the study of fine art. For the aesthetically interested educator there is a nagging doubt as to whether Dewey found aesthetic experience and educational experience to be so different that there is hardly any connection between the two and that the key notions of *Art as Experience*, as far as education is concerned, can and should be discarded.

On the other hand, the difference between aesthetic and educational experience can hardly be radical as *Art as Experience* contains a strong argument for *aesthetic quality* as a constituting dimension of experience. If this is so, then of course educational experience must also have aesthetic quality if it is experience at all. Nonetheless, the disquieting distance between aesthetic experience and educational experience remains, and I would like to study in the following what this distance is and what it means.

Methodological observations

Before I undertake this study I want to make a few remarks on the position of *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Education* in Dewey's work.

Early in 1930, John Dewey receives an enquiry from Harvard University: Would he be willing to give the William James lectures in the fall or the following spring term (Kaplan in *LW 10*)? The topic of the lectures would be left entirely to his discretion. Dewey, now 71 years old and recently retired, accepts and chooses to have a go at aesthetics. Theoretically and philosophically this is new territory for him. However, he explains his choice as being due to the lack of an approach to art on the basis of a theory of experience. The lectures are given in spring 1931, then reworked and published under the title *Art as Experience* in 1934.

Thus, Dewey's preoccupation with the aesthetic aspect of experience comes relatively late in his career, and his personal experience with art is rather limited and highly selective. His interest in fine art was aroused by the acquaintance and subsequent friendship with Alfred Barnes, an industrialist and art collector. Barnes was so taken by Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) that he distributed the work gratuitously among his employees and made time for reading during working hours. Barnes introduced Dewey to pictorial art, and together they visited museums in the States and Europe. The newly developed interest for the arts comes to the fore in *Experience and Nature* (1925) even though the aesthetic aspect of

experience here appears only in some flashes of brilliant prose. Five years later, he decides to develop the aesthetic aspect in a systematic way.

Still, there may be some truth in Harold Dunkel's comments on *Art as Experience*: "From reading Dewey one does not get the impression of an avid gallery-walker, and incessant concert-goer, or an omnivorous reader of literature. It does not seem that any of the arts ever spoke to him very directly" (Dunkel 1959, 236). Indeed, Dewey makes no reference to music, and when it comes to literature, there are only some references to romanticism. Both music and literature could have challenged Dewey's main thesis on the art object as the result of a transformative interaction and of fusion between actual observation and prior experience. Had Dewey expanded his horizon within the realm of painting, then it would have become extremely difficult to conceive of art as an instance of harmonious interaction between organism and environment.

To the scarce experience with art there comes a certain theoretical shortcoming. During his preparations for the William James lectures, Dewey writes about his efforts in order "to get some mastery of the typical philosophical and psychological theories about art and esthetic taste" adding "I have to read the literature and it is a mess in my mind, and may be in fact. All views, the most contradictory, flourish" (*AE 10*, 377). Actually, Dewey is mostly referring to art critics and artists, while there is no serious attempt at approaching or confronting the existing philosophical thought on art. Chapter 12 in *Art as Experience*, which contains an attempt at defining his position within the philosophy of art, unfolds a map invented rather for contrast to his own position than to locate himself in a recognisable philosophical landscape. Perhaps this is also one of the reasons for the rather modest reception his aesthetic has received in the philosophy of art. Even one of his most illustrious supporters, Richard Rorty (1979), is interested in Dewey rather methodologically than with respect to his philosophy of art.

There is a certain ambiguity as to the main concern in *Art as Experience*. Although the title seems to suggest a theory of art, one wonders whether the work would make more sense if read as a test run of his concept of experience on art or, perhaps as an exploration of the concept of experience by means of the study of art. Either way, Dewey seems to rest his case with respect to aesthetic experience as there is hardly a reference to aesthetic experience in the following writings and certainly not in *Experience and Education*.

Let me add a short preliminary remark on *Experience and Education*. Jackson (1998) has observed that the treatise is the first and only one connecting in its title experience and education. This is surprising, not least because experience here is so vigorously put at the

foundation of education. On the other hand, one could easily concur with Jackson that even here there is no systematic development of education founded on a theory of experience. Thus, also from the standpoint of this treatise, a comparison to *Art as Experience* is not straightforward, and the objection may always be raised that an apparent contradiction may be due to the lack of a systematic elaboration of the concept of experience in *Experience and Education*. Thus, I am aware that the following reflection stands on wobbly legs, and any conclusion would have to be drawn with some degree of reservation and greater than ordinary caution.

Experience as unity

I commence my analysis with a short reconstruction of the main features of Dewey's concept of experience. The first two chapters of *Art as Experience* explain experience as a life process which is distinctly human and represents the most advanced mode of adaptation of the organism, of the "life creature", to its environment. *Adaptation* is to be understood as a differentiating principle of the life process and not as a mere survival mechanism. This is also what in my view Dewey's term *impulsion* suggests. Issuing from fundamental urges, needs and wants – for example "the craving of the living creature for food" (*LW 10*, 64) – impulsion is not primarily about survival but about a meaningful and exciting life: "man is more preoccupied with enhancing life than with bare living" (*LW 1*, 71). Thus, adaptation must not be understood as the process of optimising the organism's fit into a given environment and its niches but also as an increasing disentanglement from a given environment (Bellmann 2007). Moreover, in contrast to adaptation in biological evolution, experience is a "purposive adaptation" (*MW 7*, 355), an "adaptation of means to ends" (*MW 7*, 283), "not adaptation of organism to environment, but adaptation to one another" (*MW 13*, 378). The purposiveness is based on the interaction and balance between *doing* and *undergoing*. As the impulsion encounters obstacles in the environment, the organism is activated, perceives the consequences of its actions and on that basis undergoes transformations. Unlike Piaget, these transformations are not conceived of as purely cognitive but as comprising the various aspects of the relationship of the organism to its environment, especially emotions. At the heart of the concept of impulsion there seems to be a vitalistic notion of a native urge towards development and differentiation, reminding us of Sigmund Freud's *eros* (1955/1920). Thus,

the impulsion issues from the fundamental need for evolvment, the human being incessantly looking out for and inventing and constructing challenges of all kinds. To live means most and foremost to evolve, to expand; this makes experience a fundamental manifestation of life.

In the third chapter, Dewey then lays out the key traits which constitute an experience. The chapter is entitled *Having an experience*. One could start this review of the concept with *unity*. The term refers to the structure of experience, structure understood dynamically as the “ordered movement” (*LW 10*, 47) of the organism. Thus, experience in Dewey’s view is neither a random and chaotic event nor a thing of the moment but unfolds as a structure in time and space. It is complex and consists of distinct although integrated parts with a distinct beginning and an ending of *fulfilment* or *consummation*. The opposite to experience is, then, the chaotic, slack, random, disordered, indifferent, formless and purposeless.

With respect to structure, the key criteria are complexity, integration and transformation. Dewey especially emphasises integration and contrasts it with a mere mechanical succession of otherwise unrelated parts. The integration of parts means that the end of one part is the beginning and substantial basis of the following, in other words that one part evolves from the foregoing. To the internal integration of parts there corresponds the external integration. Experience is an integral part of the “stream of experience” (*MW 3*, 60), thus, pre-structured and dependent upon pre-experience and as such always a transformation and reconstruction of prior experience.

The integration of an experience must be seen in light of its complexity and scope. This is what *growth* essentially means. The logic of experience is the increment of complexity and scope and, thus, posing ever new challenges with respect to integration. Bearing scope and complexity in mind, Dewey distinguishes *ordinary* experience from *an* experience or “complete” experience, the latter involving the complexity and depths of the relationship of the organism to its world, involving the whole organism. *An* experience, thus, is vital and existential. Ordinary experience, on the other hand, is partial, instrumental, limited, like drinking a glass of water when thirsty.

What keeps the parts together and what guides and powers the thrust, in other words, what shapes experience into a unity and makes it distinguishable from and simultaneously integrated into the “stream of experience” is a “single pervasive quality” (*LW 5*, 247). This pervasive quality is, one could say, the energising and organising principle of experience. It is what an experience is about and what defines it. Dewey assigns this complex office to emotion; at least he does so in *Art as Experience*. In a series of metaphors drawn from organic life, the processing industry and magnetism (Hohr 2010), Dewey portrays the transforming

power of emotion which reaches out, sifts and selects more effectively “than any deliberate challenging sentinel” (*LW 10*, 73) suitable raw material from ongoing observation and prior experience, extracts “matter from a multitude of objects, numerically and spatially separated” (*ibid.*) and processes and assembles what is deemed of value into a new experience. Thus, emotion is the “moving and cementing” (*LW 10*, 49), “guiding”, “selecting and assembling” force (*LW 10*, 74) in experience. To say that the pervasive quality is “a general feeling tone or emotional background against which experience plays itself out” (Smith 1971, 133) is certainly putting it too mildly.

One could wonder why in this explanation Dewey chooses not to use the term *situation*, which he developed in *How we think* (*LW 8*). Although situation refers to thinking and inquiry, it surely must apply to experience as a whole as well. Situation then would mean the anticipation of the whole in an experience, the whole and the parts defining each other progressively. The unity of experience is not something which appears suddenly at the moment of consummation and fulfilment but is present as an organising force, as a growing realisation of the whole right from the start. True enough, experience is open-ended, but there could not be a sense of direction without the situation, without the anticipation of the whole. While anticipation is emphasised in *Art as Experience*, the concept of situation may have had too strong a cognitive ring about it. The problem with the concept of emotion, on the other hand, is that it seems to imply a high degree of intelligence with all the prospecting, selecting, extracting, organising, assembling and guiding going on.

A salient quality of the structure of experience is its progressive transformation and definition: “an experience [...] does not know where it is going” (*LW 10*, 66). What an experience is about and its final goal are not defined from the start but emerge and reveal themselves as the experience runs its course and becomes ever more clearly defined. The circular movement between the anticipation of the whole and the successive emerging and definition of the parts in experience has a surprising analogy in continental phenomenology and hermeneutics (Engler 1992).

The unity itself, however, is “neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual” (*LW 10*, 44), as these terms designate “phases” of experience. They are present in every experience even though the emphasis may vary. This is indeed one of the decisive features of the concept of experience as it synthesises action, emotion and cognition and underlines their original unity in the life process.

Thus far, Dewey’s argumentation moves on the level of anthropological reflection. Experience is here understood as a new level and mode of adaptation in the dealings of the

organism with its environment. It is synonymous with the human “life-form”, with culture. All aspects of action as far as they involve cultural adaptation are thus by definition experiential.

Bearing this in mind, the central role of experience in *Experience and Education* becomes both understandable and necessary. Education, then, is an essential part of the cultural adaptation process identified by Dewey as experience. Consequently, it is rather inevitable and hardly controversial that education should be based on a theory of experience.

With respect to education, however, this makes it necessary to narrow the definition of *educational*. It may not be sufficient to define educational experience as an experience which leads to growth and which widens the scope of further experience as this is a validity criterion of culture in general. The criterion allows for the distinction between cultural features which promote differentiation and integration and features which do not or even impede development, but it does not identify the specific role of education in cultural development. Obviously this lack of clear distinction makes the answer to our question, whether and to which extent educational experience is aesthetic, more complicated.

Aesthetic quality of experience

Dewey distinguishes between *aesthetic quality* of experience and *aesthetic experience*. Whereas aesthetic quality is a necessary dimension of any experience, aesthetic experience is the epitome of the aesthetic quality as represented in the fine arts. However, the concept of aesthetic quality is not easy to pinpoint.

As a first approach, one could say that aesthetic quality is the measure of the structural quality of an experience, the measure of its completeness, clarity and integration. The more integrated the parts, the clearer the transformative reconstruction of prior experience, the deeper its rootedness in the structure of experience, the more “absorbing” its finality, the more aesthetic it is. This is, I think, the reading of Jackson (1998), where aesthetic experience is illustrated in a series of instances of revolutions in perception, of radically new outlooks on the world. This notion of the aesthetic reminds one of the aesthetic program of the German romantics like Novalis who demanded a romanticisation of the world: “The world must be romanticised. Thus one may find the original meaning. To romanticise is but a qualitative potentiation. ... By giving a high meaning to the common, a mysterious appearance to the ordinary, the dignity of the unknown to the known, the illusion of infinity to the finite, I

romanticise it” (Novalis, alias Friedrich v. Hardenberg). Indeed Dewey also calls the aesthetic a “clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience” (*LW 10*, 53). In the instances, which Jackson discusses, time seems to be suspended and the world is holding its breath, and when the experience has passed, nothing is the same ever after. In its depth, aesthetic experience is comparable to religious experience, distinguishable, perhaps, only by its lack of any special emphasis on personal integration and all-connectedness.

Had the criterion of structural quality been the only one for aesthetic quality, it would be easy to understand why it would not be considered in the context of education. Bearing the examples given by Jackson in mind, we are talking of outstanding moments in a person’s life, whereas school is a process of steady work stretching over years.

However, Dewey provides other criteria for aesthetic quality as well when he states that in an aesthetic experience “the material is not employed as a bridge to some further experience, but as an increase and individualization of present experience” (*LW 10*, 128). Thus, the aesthetic of an experience is related to the uniqueness of any given situation and to the intensity in which it is perceived and related to the disregard of the potential usefulness of the experience at hand. In this perspective, the aesthetic is moving toward the Aristotelian *phrónesis*, and in this context one may see the term *aesthetic phase* (*LW 15*, 98), which implies that immediacy, the appreciation of the here and now, is the aesthetic aspect which makes an event into an experience. Experience, then, is lived experience.

Dewey uses these criteria to highlight the difference between the fine arts and science. While science ends in a “self-sufficient deposit” (*LW 10*, 61), i.e. a result which may be detached from the process from which it originated, and used as a tool or substance in subsequent work, the aesthetic has an “absorbing finality” (*LW 1*, 71). This is the reason why Dewey denies the scientific and the practical the designation *aesthetic experience*. Even though these activities need *aesthetic quality* to qualify as experiences, they are not *distinctively* aesthetic because they have dominating instrumental motives. They are primarily carried out for future benefit, and to this extent they are *anaesthetic*.

In this perspective, an event is experience only to that extent to which it opens up the unique qualities of an event in the present and renders it meaningful. Then the structural qualities above are just a precondition of the aesthetic while experience is connected to “full” time (Gadamer 1986), to the uniqueness of the here and now, to action performed for its own sake, and it is contrasted by “empty” instrumental time, by the recurrent pattern of routine and by action performed for future use and benefit. Again the analogies to continental

phenomenology and hermeneutics are apparent. For instance, one could argue that Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1975) is motivated by the interest in the uniqueness of human understanding as opposed to the interest in the recurrent pattern and scientific rule. Its title might well have been: truth without method.

In an alternative understanding, however, the aesthetic could be identified with the consummatory phase of experience. Dewey calls it "the absorbing charm of contemplation" (*LW 1*, 250). This aspect also becomes most clear in the comparison between art and science. While science, in Dewey's view, is characterised by its emphasis on problems, by the restless search for questions to be answered, even though obviously interested in the solutions as well, art is characterised by its emphasis on resolution, by the appreciation of the restored balance between organism and environment in the fulfilment of an experience. In the aesthetic phase, then, the person is, for a passing moment, in harmony with her world. This motif has been known since Romanticism where, for example, Schiller (1967, 15) conceives of the aesthetic as a sensuous token of the possible reconciliation of sense and reason. According to Dewey, this notion assumes a naturalistic stamp where the aesthetic appears as a token of the fundamental harmony between organism and environment, between person and world.

Perhaps one can summarise the various aspects of the aesthetic quality using the term *immediacy*. Thomas Alexander (1987) has given a clarifying elaboration of this quality. One misunderstanding has been counteracted by Dewey himself (*LW 10*) when he points out that immediacy does not mean the absence of mediation, the lack of thought and language. On the contrary, prior experience is the precondition of experience as it is mediated by language. The immediacy of experience is therefore a mediated immediacy.

One should also keep in mind that Dewey is meticulous in pointing out that the immediate and the instrumental are not mutually exclusive aspects of action. The instrumental purpose of an action does not prevent it from being intrinsically meaningful and vice versa. Even though there is a degree of competition between these aspects and the emphasis may vary, there is no contradiction between them. However, these aspects are also quite independent of each other. On the one hand, there are purely instrumental actions which Dewey calls *routines* and which are the opposite of experiences. On the other hand, there are self-contained experiences without any further instrumental usefulness, like the works of fine art.

With the criterion on immediacy we seem to find ourselves in the midst of progressive education, which in Dewey's view is characterised by moving the main attention from the past and the future, which is the emphasis of traditional education, to the present and to the

physical place. Education means – or should mean – first and foremost living in the full here and now. Progressive education strives for the restoration of meaning in the ongoing life of the pupils. The past and the future are not irrelevant but are of secondary importance.

Nonetheless, despite this patent congruity between the aesthetic and the educational, Dewey does not mention any aesthetic quality in his reflections on progressive education.

The reason may lie in the notion of individualisation and the absorbing finality. In *Art as Experience*, a concept of experience emerges where these aspects begin to dominate. In other words, while the purely instrumental action is reduced to *blind routine*, the purely self-contained, the perfectly *rounded out* event, which disregards usefulness, is not only experiential but represents the “complete” and “pure” experience. In a way, it is the ideal experience, sheer and pure living appreciation of the here and now. The lack of completeness of any given experience and the reason for not being an aesthetic experience, on the other hand, are due to its instrumentality, due to the perspective of future usefulness and benefit. The emerging partiality for the body and for sensuousness must endear Dewey to anyone who is educated and trained to sacrifice the present for the future, to suspend life for the broken promise of a reward never to come. For a theory of education, however, this concept of experience could become a problem, education being in its logic an instrumental undertaking and thus, anaesthetic. Even though it is highly desirable and perhaps unavoidable that the pupils do not stop living – the reader may excuse the flippancy – when entering the school, surely, education is undertaken for the individual and societal benefit, for future usefulness. The *raison d'être* of education is learning and coping and, thus, by definition it is systematically deviating from the ideal of experience.

Considered from that perspective, it becomes plausible that the aesthetic might not be prominent in Dewey's reflection on education. Education would by definition represent an ordinary partial experience and could and should never aspire to be an aesthetic experience. Education could not possibly aim at the exclusive individualisation of experience as this would exclude learning, i.e. acquiring tools for mastering future situations. It can be noted here that while immediacy does not conflict with instrumentality and learning, individualisation probably does. Even so, immediacy and *artistic structure* are necessary preconditions of experiential school work. On the one hand, there can be no instrumental gain without or outside experience. On the other hand, the educational relationship is established by and through the concern for instrumental usefulness which threatens the immediacy. Has Dewey realised and addressed this basic inconsistency of educational experience and proposed a possible resolution? Even so many scholars interested in education have rightly

pointed out that Dewey's concept of experience highlights the aesthetic quality of school work (Garrison, 1997, Granger 2003, Hansen 2006).

Expression as medium of experience

The problem becomes more poignant when considering Dewey's theory of meaning. In *Art as Experience*, he introduces the distinction between expression and statement which simultaneously serves as a distinction for experience. "Statement sets forth the conditions under which an experience of an object or situation may be had" (*LW 10*, 90). It carries meaning in the sense that a signboard carries meaning by pointing toward places where an experience may be had. It does not, in itself, mediate experience because it is based on words, signs and symbols which do not have an "intrinsic quality of their own" (*LW 10*, 45). Their reference is purely external. While the statement leads to an experience, expression "constitutes one" (*LW 10*, 91).

Dewey has been careful to distinguish his concept of expression from that of romanticism. Expression is not the overflow of emotion, is not "emotional discharge", but articulation of purpose. As an example, Dewey uses the cries of the infant. At first the cries are just a "manifestation", a symptom of discomfort. But the moment the infant realises that the cries cause a desirable change they become "means and media" and thus become expressive of a purpose. From this, the variety of form languages develops, and these are the tools of expression. Dewey proceeds by distinguishing between expression as act and as object, which is the result of the act, and underlines that act and object are organically connected. As an object, expression has *inherent* meaning; it has meaning as a *possession*. Such an object does not need a "code or convention of interpretation" (*LW 10*, 89). It operates in the dimension of experience itself and as such is comparable to any physical object in the world, as, for instance, a "flower garden" (*ibid.*). An expression is thus not just a carrier of experience comparable to a lorry carrying various goods but comparable to a woman with child (*LW 10*, 122). Thus the relationship between expression and experience is unique, intimate, cognate and generative. Indeed, expression is more than the random object of everyday life. In a way it represents a super-reality because it is constructed and arranged in order to offer, facilitate, make possible, invite and communicate a better, clearer, concentrated and intensified experience.

The distinction between statement and expression and its consequences may become clearer when Dewey compares the fine arts with intellectual activity: “The material of the fine arts consists of qualities; that of experience having intellectual conclusion are signs or symbols having no intrinsic quality of their own” (*LW 10*, 45). Obviously Dewey is relying on there being something like intellectual experience and intellectual art. The sharp juxtaposition of statement and expression, of symbol and form, however, makes it difficult to understand how the material consisting of signs and symbols could give rise to an experience at all. Likewise, even though he holds that the poem is operating in the dimension of experience itself, he does not explain how the material of the poem, consisting of statements and words, can possess qualities. He claims that the logic of the poem is “super-propositional”, but how this logic can issue from words and statements remains unexplained and implausible.

Expression is not only the exclusive medium of experience but also the exclusive medium of communication. Signs, symbols and words remain of course important as they offer information about and point towards places where experiences may be had. But, having barely external references, they cannot communicate experience. True communication, i.e. making common and sharing experience, is only possible through expression as only expression operates in the dimension of experience itself. This represents a decisive qualification of Dewey’s *communicative turn* which Biesta (2006) discovered in *Democracy and Education* (1916, *MW 9*). It explains participation in shared activity which constitutes communication as expression.

Bearing the notion of individualisation in mind, however, one could raise doubts as to the communicative power of expression. As a matter of fact, Dewey has radicalised the notion of individualisation to the point where he holds that it would be meaningless to ask the artist what the art object means. To explain the futility of such a question one should expect that Dewey would posit the purely external reference of word and statement. Surprisingly enough, this is not the reason given. Instead, he explains that the artist will experience the creation differently every time he or she perceives it. Thus, each act of perception is an individualised act of experience. Would the consequence of this state of things not be that there is no communication of experience but only of information? We could share the information of places where an experience may be had while the experience itself would be not only subjective but individualised and forever beyond any attempt at making it common.

Either way, the distinction between statement and expression creates a risk that education not only is constituted as a partial, incomplete experience, but is not experience at all. Surely, Dewey argues for a re-naturalisation of education, which is commendable and also,

to a certain degree, possible. But try as one may, the main bulk of education is based on words and pictures, not on the objects themselves. This is not a result of incompetence, ill-meaning or ill-conceived school education but – if one may be permitted to say – the logic of the institution which is based on the de-naturalisation of learning processes. Is the path from the everyday life experience of the pupil towards the “organisation of subject-matter”, recommended in *Experience and Education*, not a path which leads from the realm of experience into the realm of signboards? As a matter of fact, a strange inversion presents itself through the distinction of expression and statement. It seems that one would need knowledge (of signboards) to be able to have experiences, unless one stumbles over them by sheer accident, while after having had an experience, it seems a bit pointless to care about the corresponding knowledge (of signboards).

In view of the risk that there is no such thing as educational experience, it is surprising that Dewey in *Experience and Education* does not address the issue of expressiveness at all. On the other hand, it is quite out of the question to disregard the concept since the term, far from being a slip of the tongue, is developed over two key chapters in *Art as Experience*.

The problem of meaning has, however, all but vanished in *Experience and Education* as has the emphasis on immediacy or even unity. There is no distinction between partial experience and complete experience, no distinction between expression and statement and no problem of communication. Of the structural reflections in *Art as Experience* there remain the contrasts between purpose in experience as opposed to the lack of purpose in random activity and the contrast between degrees of scope, whether an experience opens up, narrows down or even impedes future experience.

There may be no inconsistencies between the concepts of experience in *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Education*. There are, however, serious gaps in the foundation of education. One problem is found in the distinction between expression and statement and a corresponding lack of differentiation of the concept of experience, another in the lack of analytical concepts which could cast light on the nature of institutionalised learning, on what happens when experiences are lifted out of their natural context and relocated in the school environment. In *Experience and Education*, experience seems to be reduced to transformation of the cognitive structure which may already reside in the notion of the constituting interaction between doing and undergoing. Undergoing, after all, is based on the cognition of the causal relationship between action and its outcome.

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