

Education in the out-of-doors and education about the outdoors: The dilemma of two outdoor educations.

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Abstract

While from an outsider's perspective outdoor education may be considered a nice, neat and simple package that often centres on participation in a school camp or some other outdoor excursion, those of us involved with the practice of outdoor education know that it is rent by various arguments in relation to what it actually is. In this paper we suggest that there is not one outdoor education but two, a perspective informed by Dewey's notion of a larger educational confusion. By admittedly singling out particular comments made by outdoor educators in Victoria (including Somers School Camp), and supported by an interpretation of documented opinion from the USA, we present a picture of confusion in outdoor education that spans many of the dualisms in education that Dewey identified. In suggesting a way out of this confusion we follow Dewey in his call for a sound philosophy of experience.

The dilemma of two outdoor educations

There have been a number of calls made fairly recently, especially in Victoria, for us to, as Lugg (1999, p. 25) puts it, "clarify what it is that makes outdoor education

distinctive”. She frames this call as a question: “What makes it [outdoor education] significantly different from other subjects and what educational imperatives exist to compel schools and educational institutions to include outdoor education in the curriculum of the 21st century?” (p. 25). This seems like a reasonable question and request, especially considering the need for outdoor education to develop, as Lugg describes it, “sufficient substance to withstand scrutiny in the competitive, modern educational sphere where vocational outcomes and tertiary entrance scores are paramount” (p. 25). Amongst those joining Lugg in this quest are Bucknell and Mannion, two outdoor education teachers who suggest that something must be avoided if this clarity is to be achieved.

Because of our focus on developing a body of knowledge for outdoor education as a curriculum subject we deliberately avoid framing any definition from the perspective of personal development and growth in participants. Such a focus may be appropriate for extra-curricular outdoor education programs, but we believe it is not suitable for an outdoor education subject embedded within a curriculum as an equal with other, more traditional subjects.

(Bucknell & Mannion 2006, p. 39)

Bucknell and Mannion (2006, p. 40) “divide the goals of outdoor education as falling broadly into two categories: those aimed at improving social and individual skills such as leadership, self-confidence, team work and cooperation, motivation, and so on” on the one hand; “and those aimed at developing environmental understandings and awareness”. “Both of these should be recognized as important,” they (p. 40) say, “but from a standpoint of attempting to justify and establish outdoor education as a subject that rivals others in contemporary curricula, it is within the broad environmental goals that outdoor education might be able to claim a unique place.”

As Bucknell and Mannion indicate, this call forward to an outdoor education defined primarily by environmental goals is associated with the apparent need to move away from something different, an understanding of outdoor education that they suggest lacks an equivalent level of distinctiveness. The aim to create a unique body of knowledge for

outdoor education seems to renounce a form of outdoor education practiced in many school camps around Victoria, a celebrated example of which is Somers School Camp. Since the late 1950s, Somers School Camp has offered the opportunity for children in the upper primary grades to participate in a camp of about a week and a half's duration. Children come from different schools within a particular region to make up the cohort of a particular camp. Bringing together a large number of children, most of whom meet for the first time at camp, meant that "community living" (Hopkins 1961, p. 155) was a central aim of Somers School Camp from its beginning. This same notion was made clear by Morley & White (1973, p. 1031), who identified the main reason for the establishment of this camp and others in Victoria as being to "assist in the social development of a child by giving him an opportunity to experience community living in a healthy environment, and to relate to natural surroundings."

However community living can, of course, mean many things. Bob Edmends, who first joined the Somers School Camp staff in 1967 and was later principal, described the main aim of the camp in its early years as to "get the children out of the classroom, to let them have experiences outside of the normal pattern, essentially social" (B. Edmends, personal communication, July 1, 2005). Here, while not yet generally called outdoor education in Australia, was a form of education most concerned with getting children out-of-doors and away from the traditional classroom. Alan Reid, the first nature study teacher at the camp, recalls the fluidity of the earlier days when the camp timetable was very flexible. This freedom enabled teachers, especially where nature study was concerned, to plan day long expeditions with the children that best encompassed the outdoor conditions.

I remember those times being very fluid, and a very happy time, as we experimented with the timing, nature and length of activities and would thrash out day programs on the spur of the moment, usually before Assembly, with an eye on the weather and any seasonal based opportunities that might arise.

(A. Reid, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

This fluidity allowed the children to have some input into what they were doing, rather than leaving all the decision making with the teachers. A similar focus on the child was highlighted by Terry Green, who joined the staff in 1981 and later became assistant principal. Green's first encounter with Somers School Camp was in 1974 as a visiting teacher accompanying children from his school. He noted that this visit had a profound effect on his early career and the development of his own philosophy of teaching.

Everyone is worthwhile. Everyone should have the opportunity to maximize their full potential. Its about the child – what it does for the child in all its dimensions – outdoor education does the holistic thing better than anything else in education. Teaching the child, not the subject. Outdoor education encapsulates the whole of my teaching philosophy.

(T. Green, personal communication, July 7, 2005)

As another example of this earlier understanding of outdoor education, Lugg makes reference to the *Report of the Committee to Study the Alternatives in Outdoor Education*. This committee was convened by the Education Department of Victoria in 1980 and their report was released in 1981. Amongst the nine terms of reference directing the attention of this committee, the first was “to investigate whether there exists a body of knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be described as outdoor education and, if so, what is the nature of outdoor education” (1981 p. 3). In relation to this first term of reference the committee reached a specific conclusion. “The term (outdoor education) does not include a body of subject matter,” judged the committee, “but rather a range of learning experiences designed to reinforce the development of abilities which help pupils understand the world about them and their place in it” (p. 10). Lugg singled this response out for criticism. “Cynics might paraphrase such definitions as: ‘Outdoor education doesn’t have specific content, it just involves doing activities in the outdoors’!” she admonished. Lugg classified such definitions as “somewhat outdated,” noting that “other conceptions of outdoor education have been developed and documented since.” It seemed that the call forward to a body of knowledge for outdoor education involved a concomitant move away from an earlier

form of outdoor education that did not embrace such a call. And it is in this way that the dilemma of two forms of outdoor education is suggested.

Interestingly, in its negative response to the issue of an outdoor education body of knowledge, the committee linked most of the definitions of outdoor education they had examined with a definition developed in the USA. Most “stem in some way from Smith, Carlson, Donaldson & Masters,” the committee (Education Department of Victoria 1981, p. 10) recorded. This was a popular US outdoor education text of the time which the report quoted verbatim.

Outdoor education means learning *in* and *for* the outdoors. It is a means of curriculum extension and enrichment through outdoor experiences. It is not a separate discipline with prescribed objectives, like science and mathematics; it is simply a learning climate offering opportunities for direct laboratory experiences in identifying and resolving real-life problems, for acquiring skills with which to enjoy a lifetime of creative living, for building concepts and developing concern about man and his natural environment, and for getting us back in touch with those aspects of living where our roots were once firm and deep.

(Smith, Carlson, Donaldson & Masters 1972, p. 20, cited
in Education Department of Victoria 1981, p. 10)

Any connection between the USA and Australia in outdoor education has always involved interpretation on both sides. It is impossible to conflate the various ways in which outdoor education is practiced in these two broad places. However influence of one on the other in both directions is of course still practicable, as mention of this definition by the committee attests, although this influence is always via interpretation premised on local conditions.

The dilemma posed by the existence of the two forms of outdoor education distinguished above was another issue that could perhaps be informed via reference to the documented record of opinion in the USA concerning outdoor education. By way of such an investigation it became apparent that what on the surface seemed to be a

relatively recent phenomenon, peculiar to Australia and maybe even Victoria, could be interpreted as akin to a much deeper and older issue pervading not only outdoor education but education more generally.

Dewey's identification of educational confusion

Turning to outdoor education in the USA inevitably brings one into contact with the educational and philosophical work of Dewey. An element of Dewey's work that seemed to inform this particular outdoor education dilemma was his (1931, p. 1) concern with "educational confusion": a state of confusion in education that was revealed in various dualistic conflicts; although, he (p. 3) acknowledged, "all of the conflicts are more or less bound up together." Educational confusion involved such a degree of conflict that Dewey felt it could be aptly portrayed using a military metaphor. "There is confusion due to the smoke of battle obscuring the scene from the onlooker," he (p. 2) claimed, "and there is a different confusion due to combatants losing sight of what they are doing and where they are going, a chaos of uncoordinated movements and actions." Dewey (p. 4) referred to the combatants in this battle as "traditionalists and modernists in education, although," he stipulated, "there are few, perhaps none, who go to the limit in either direction." This was a battle to secure emphasis and control, not a battle which would ever end in annihilation of one side by the other. "Such oppositions are rarely carried to their logical conclusion," he (1902, p. 10) observed. Any extremes were "left to theorists, while common-sense vibrates back and forward in a maze of inconsistent compromise" (p. 10). Dewey characterized this educational confusion as a combination of conflict and unstable compromise because he recognized that the opposing sides often existed together in the one school and sometimes within the teaching of the one teacher. In some frustration at this confused state of affairs Dewey (1938, p. 17) broadly opined that "mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of *Either-Ors*." And "when forced to recognize that the extremes cannot be acted upon, it is still inclined to hold that they are all right in theory but that when it comes to practical matters circumstances compel us to compromise" (p. 17). Dewey (1984, p. 55) portrayed this shifting compromise as the

back and forth “swing of a pendulum between extremes,” although he “admitted that the simile of the pendulum is not a good one, for the schools remain most of the time, most of the time, near one extreme, instead of swinging periodically and evenly between the two.”

Traditional education and progressive education were the labels commonly used in the USA over much of the first half of the twentieth century to represent the opposing sides in this confused combination of educational conflict and compromise. “The opposition, so far as practical affairs of the school are concerned, tends to take the form of contrast between traditional and progressive education,” Dewey (1938, p. 17) reported. In a simplistic way, progressive education was taken to designate the “new education” which emerged in opposition to the “older education,” traditional education (p. 20). Dewey (1931, p. 40) recognized that, in practical terms, “much of the conflict is due to the attempt to follow tradition and yet introduce radically new material and interests into it – the attempt to superimpose the new on the old.” This was a conflict that always played out practically in some form of compromise.

In addition to his use of the labels traditional and progressive, Dewey described this division in education by means of other terms. On the traditional side Dewey placed a focus on curriculum and subject matter; while on the progressive side it was the child and the teaching method that were most significant. This was then a division in two respects. Firstly there was a division between subject matter and method, separating lived experience into two parts. “When we reflect upon an experience instead of just having it,” Dewey (1944, p. 166) observed, “we inevitably distinguish between our own attitude and the objects toward which we sustain the attitude.” In this way “reflection upon experience gives rise to a distinction of *what* we experience (the *experienced*) and the *experiencing* – the *how*. When we give names to this distinction we have subject matter and method as our terms,” he (pp. 166-167) discerned. Secondly there was a division between “an immature undeveloped being; and certain social aims, meanings, values incarnate in the matured experience of the adult” (1902, p. 4). These social aims of the adult formed the curriculum. The developing child and the curriculum determined by adults stood problematically as two opposing sides in education.

The two forms of outdoor education equated broadly with the division in education between subject matter and method, or adult curriculum and child, that Dewey had described. The path to understanding the dilemma of two outdoor educations therefore lay in coming to terms with Dewey's way through the educational confusion.

Education in the out-of-doors

The term outdoor education emerged in the US educational vernacular a great deal earlier than in Australia, appearing through the early decades of the twentieth century, usually alongside the term indoor education. This outdoor-indoor contrast, one which paralleled the progressive-traditional division described by Dewey, was used by Zueblin (1916) to structure his descriptions of the educational advances made in the USA at the time, specifically distinguishing those that occurred away from schoolhouse and classroom and thus literally out-of-doors. Zueblin (p. 177) characterized traditional indoor education as "the Gradgrind type of school, satirized by Dickens in *Hard Times*." And while he (p. 177) promoted the advances in indoor education made by the "progressive public school," it was outdoor education that moved furthest from the tradition.

The hermetically sealed schoolhouse with rigid desks, inelastic curriculum, and impervious teacher is being rapidly supplanted by the open schoolhouse with movable furnishings and open-minded teacher. Light and air admitted freely are still not adequate for the freest education. City, as well as country, children must get into the open. Beginning with nature study in the classroom, Nature has rapidly invited the school outdoors.

(Zueblin 1916, p. 195)

Under the banner of outdoor education Zueblin (1916) included nature-study, school gardens, agricultural education, home credits (essentially academic credit for work done at home), vacation schools, open air schools (that serviced children with tuberculosis),

and further examples of educational endeavors that moved beyond the classroom door. Further exemplifying this notion of outdoor education as a collective term was the monthly bulletin of the School Garden Association of America which was titled *Outdoor Education*; the first issue appeared in October 1916. Prominent on the front cover of this first issue was a list of the educational endeavors seen to be included within outdoor education: school gardens, home gardens, elementary agriculture, rural science, nature-study; a list that closely mirrored Zueblin's.

Three decades after Zueblin's use of the term, Sharp composed one of the earliest authoritatively stated definitions of outdoor education. Sharp (1947, p. 43) described "the basic thesis of outdoor and camping education" to be: "*that which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there; and that which can best be learned through direct experience outside the classroom, in contact with native materials and life situations, should there be learned.*" At the time Sharp was writing this definition, outdoor education was evolving to encompass school camping as a major part of its practice; camping education would sit alongside the other educational endeavors considered part of outdoor education.

Sharp separated the outdoors into three regions, each having its own specific relation to the education that was occurring indoors, in the classroom. These regions were akin to three concentric circles, all emanating from the classroom or school door. The closest circle was the school yard, "the first step out of the school building," where school gardening and aspects of nature-study could successfully be engaged. This was where one could find "some of the things in nature that are pictured and described in the school-books," Sharp (1952, p. 19) noted. "First there is the earth," he (p. 19) recounted, "then, even in the poorest neighborhoods, some plant growth, a great deal of weather; and always some animal or insect life." The middle circle was the community, which lay "beyond the school yard," and comprised "government, public health, safety, law and order, business, society, industry," all of which "should be seen first-hand if any useful knowledge of them is to be gathered" (p. 19). The outermost circle was the one Sharp (p. 19) most favored: the "woods and open spaces" where school camping could occur. It was his (p. 21) firm belief that "the greatest benefits of outdoor education only

come ... when students and teacher take to the woods together.” In association with this belief Sharp advocated strongly for schools to include camping amongst their offerings to students. He held the hope that this experience of outdoor education may influence teachers and administrators to change the way indoor education was itself conducted.

Is it possible to hope that teachers and administrators finding themselves a part of a more informal and free situation in summer camps will make strenuous efforts to bring something of the spirit, interest, and opportunity of this freer kind of environment into the school? How can the experiences of camps and schools become more unified?

(Sharp & Osborne 1940, p. 239)

Sharp (1948, p. 315) believed it “educationally sound that school authorities should establish a school camp as an integral part of the total school plant,” with the school camp seen as “a necessary facility just as much as the library, the gymnasium, the auditorium, and the laboratory.” He (1943, p. 367) specifically looked forward to a time “when every school” would “have its own campsite and operate it as an integral part of the total school program.”

The expansion of this idea of experience in education continued apace, a fact made visible in a study conducted by Lewis (1975) of much of the US outdoor education literature published between 1948 and 1968. In his study Lewis (p. 3) compiled a list of seventeen hierarchically ordered “basic concepts of outdoor education” that he “formulated as the generally-accepted principles of outdoor education” emerging from this published work. At the heart of these seventeen basic concepts were the two educational issues of method, reflecting the child’s experience, and subject matter or knowledge. Lewis’s (1975, p. 3) first basic concept stressed that “outdoor education is a *method* of education. It includes the use of the out-of-doors for the study of all areas of the curriculum when the subject matter can best be learned out-of-doors.” One of the main sources Lewis used in order to construct this concept was Sharp’s (1947, p. 43) definition, a definition which did not suggest the learning of just any subject matter outdoors, only that subject matter which could “*best be learned*” there, leaving the

determination of the suitable subject matter to those involved in the construction of curriculum. In his second basic concept Lewis was more prescriptive about method. “The outdoor education method encourages the use of the environment outside the classroom and includes such experiences as field trips, excursions, vocational agriculture, and a school camp,” Lewis (1975, p. 3) advised. Lewis’s third basic concept made the focus on method unequivocal. “Outdoor education is not a separate discipline or a separate area of study such as history, English, arithmetic, or other subject matter areas” (p. 5).

Education about the outdoors

One definition of outdoor education of this mid-twentieth century period in the USA that was not directly referred to by Lewis was conspicuous because it heralded the beginning of a shift from method to subject matter in the discussion surrounding outdoor education. This definition from Donaldson and Donaldson (1958) was important because it was implicated in a further well known definition of outdoor education from Ford (1981).

The hallmark of the definition provided by the Donaldsons (1958, p. 17) was that it openly identified outdoor education as having both method and subject matter in the guise of “education *in, about* and *for* the outdoors.” The Donaldsons were aware of the diversity of opinion surrounding outdoor education and were looking for a way to simplify this complexity, their aim being to design a straightforward definition. “Words, especially definitive words, sometimes confuse a simple concept,” they (p. 17) pointed out. “Outdoor education is simple. It is as simple as a leisurely walk around the school grounds by a kindergarten teacher and her children,” they (p. 17) claimed. However while stressing this unified experience the Donaldsons’ definition of outdoor education also emphasized the reflective division between method and subject matter. The Donaldsons (p. 17) proffered that “outdoor education is education *in, about* and *for* the outdoors,” a statement which they elaborated into three supposedly straightforward phases: “*in* the outdoors”, “*about* the outdoors” and “*for* the outdoors.”

Donaldson and Donaldson (1958, p. 17) employed “*in* the outdoors” to convey the importance of being outdoors rather than indoors. For the Donaldsons (p. 17) *in* the outdoors entailed “learning by using the senses out where the subject matter exists.” Their (p. 17) “*about* the outdoors” phase referred to the way outdoor education could be used to supplement any indoor education that focused on things that occurred in the outdoors. They (p. 17) contrasted the indoor education example of a “typical biology unit on amphibians” during which students could “read about and discuss both the structure and function of a bullfrog,” with an outdoor education example where “the teacher who wants students really *to know* about frogs will take his students to a frog pond, where structure and function are so subtly yet firmly interrelated.” The Donaldsons then introduced the notion of a purpose for outdoor education. They considered the main justification for outdoor education to be the shift in population from a rural to a more urban existence. “Its *raison d’être* is that 20th century people have removed themselves from the land,” they (p. 17) declared, “and both they and the land are worse off for it!” With this rationale the Donaldsons (p. 17) constructed their third phase of outdoor education: “*for* the outdoors,” which they believed contained “the key word” in the definition.

For is central not only because it limits the field, but because it implies a positive and a moral approach. It strongly suggests that both the learner and the outdoors are better because of the experiences. *For* implies both a mental attitude towards the outdoors and a set of skills and abilities which will enable the learner to do something about his attitudes. Skills are not enough; neither are good attitudes without implementation.

(Donaldson & Donaldson 1958, p. 17)

This emphasis on *for* the outdoors was primarily concerned with the way in which the outdoor skills that were at the time gaining popularity in schools were to be conducted. Skills “like shooting, casting, boating, archery, and nature photography” were “integrated into physical education courses or into the school recreation program,” the Donaldsons (1958, p. 63) reported. It was skills such as these that the Donaldsons

believed should be combined with positive attitudes towards the outdoors. And while these skills and attitudes could be practised and discussed at school, it was school camping, “the apex of outdoor education” (p. 63), that best encompassed their unification in actual experience. According to the Donaldsons, school camping offered “many opportunities to teach about the outdoors, plus teachable moments in other fields such as social living, health, and work” (p. 63).

By identifying these three phases, phases that they always considered to be aspects of the unified experience of outdoor education, the Donaldsons somewhat inadvertently opened the door to these phases being considered separately as more than distinctions and subsequently as divisions. And while a subtle shift, it was to have remarkable consequences. This development was central to the work of Ford (1981, p. 12) who, in a critique undertaken more than twenty years later, selected the Donaldsons’ definition as the basis for her own “recommended definition” of outdoor education. Critically, while maintaining the Donaldsons’ distinctions, Ford shifted the emphasis from the unified experience of outdoor education commonly undertaken via outdoor pursuits in school camping, to outdoor science education where subject matter was the driving concern.

To many people in the United States, Canada, England, and Australia, outdoor education is synonymous with education for outdoor pursuits or recreational skills. Snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, winter survival skills, backpacking, fishing, hunting, and related outdoor pursuits that are physical in nature (i.e. nonmechanized) and rely on the natural environment for implementation are the sole topics On the other hand, as many or more people feel that outdoor education is outdoor science education and consists only of teaching about natural resources and their interrelationship. Between the two poles of this spectrum are many people who seem to compromise on some, albeit weak, combination of the two issues. There are also those who would not agree with either point of view, because they feel that outdoor education is not a separate subject, but rather a process of teaching (any subject) in the outdoors.

(Ford 1981, p. 69)

Ford began with a consideration of these phases as more separate than connected, thereby raising the problem of how to synthesize them. As a consequence Ford turned not to experience, where they were actually unified, but to the subject matter first. It was in education *about* the outdoors that the difference between Ford and the Donaldsons emerged most clearly. “Education *about* the outdoors dictates subject matter,” Ford (1981, p. 12) acknowledged, “and has thus produced controversy.” “On this topic, outdoor educators are divided,” she (p. 12) opined, “some believe that outdoor education *must* be about outdoor resources and/or outdoor skills, whereas others feel that outdoor education is not a subject, but a *location* and a *process* whereby one can learn any subject [matter] through the outdoors.” As location and process, such as in school camping, experience was never able to be neatly confined to addressing only one particular area of subject matter. However beginning with the division between the Donaldsons’ phases placed subject matter, the experienced, apart from experiencing and seemed to allow for its predetermination. As such the experienced could be addressed antecedently to the experiencing, enabling subject matter, education about outdoor resources and/or outdoor skills, to seemingly dictate the nature of the students’ experiencing, the method.

From Ford’s (1981, p. 12) perspective, “education *in* the outdoors” defined “the location” of what she described as an “educational process” that she detailed in her (p. 91) teaching progression for outdoor education, a progression which involved “problem-solving processes” as a principle method. However these problem solving processes were only introduced to students following the acquisition of subject matter relevant to an understanding of ecology; the outdoors as subject matter was defined antecedently by ecological relationships. “After gaining an understanding of what occurs in every ecosystem,” Ford (p. 91) stipulated, “the learner is prepared for and ready for outdoor education activities that teach the application of knowledge of the environment to the solution of problems related to it.” The subject matter of outdoor education was the outdoors as environment, as ecosystem, encountered via a method that involved students making observations and recordings where they applied the theory that they had learnt previously. This was one interpretation of “using the senses out where the subject matter exists,” as the Donaldsons (1958, p. 17) had advocated,

although Ford recommended that scientific knowledge of the environment had to be learnt before venturing forth beyond the classroom. Once this subject matter was mastered, then the wise use of the outdoors could be discussed, presented in the form of problems that required solutions mainly in the realm of ecology but also in ekistics, that “broad study of the physical, social, and cultural interaction between people and their environment” (Ford 1981, p. 107). Ford acknowledged “the most commonly used problem-solving activities” to “relate to soil, water, trees, and animals.”

In what seemed to be further agreement with the Donaldsons, Ford (1981, p. 12) declared “education *for* the outdoors” to imply “a reason for teaching.” On the surface she continued to emphasize what the Donaldsons had identified as skills and attitudes although she developed these by employing two supposedly comparable terms: use and understanding. Ford (p. 18) believed the purpose of outdoor education to be “to develop lifelong knowledge, skills, and attitudes for using, understanding, and appreciating natural resources and for developing a sense of stewardship for the land.”

For *use* of the outdoors: wise use for leisure pursuits; wise use for economic purposes. For *understanding* the outdoors: understanding the relationship of natural resources to world survival; understanding the importance of a sense of stewardship; understanding our historical and cultural heritage (as read in the outdoors); understanding the aesthetics of the outdoors.

(Ford 1981, p. 13)

While Ford’s description of education *for* the outdoors seemed to closely accord with the Donaldsons’, the central difference between their definitions was to be found here in *for* the outdoors. In their descriptions of education *for* the outdoors the Donaldsons had identified skills and attitudes that were aspects of each student’s experience of outdoor education in school camping; they retained the association with the camping experience. Ford, however, developed *for* the outdoors such that skills and attitudes became use and understanding, terms that were interpreted in an adult way as adult purposes and which were primarily concerned with learning a predetermined curriculum. This knowledge would then be applied to solving problems concerning the outdoors, ecological and

ekistic problems that were typically identified by adults. For Ford understanding was primarily an epistemological term in the traditional sense, where the acquisition of scientific knowledge about the outdoors as environment was the main aim. Use was similarly a term more concerned with broader community practices determined by adults than with the life experience of a child or young person.

Ford (1981, p. 13) attempted to overcome this disagreement by encompassing all possibilities for outdoor education in her claim that “outdoor education may be viewed as a process, a place, a purpose, and/or a topic.” While acknowledging it as weak, she (p. 18) aimed to master this debate through a compromise by proposing “a holistic approach, which synthesizes knowledge, skills, and appreciation of natural resources as well as recreational pursuits that depend on the resources for their very existence,” although the nature of this synthesis was weighted heavily towards subject matter. While Ford (p. 18) claimed that the “many definitions of outdoor education and outdoor recreation” were based on a particular philosophy: “that outdoor education is learning about the interrelationships of natural resources and outdoor recreation skills in an outdoor setting,” her exemplification of how this interrelationship would be handled in a teaching situation belied her stated intentions. For Ford outdoor education did possess a body of knowledge that could be applied antecedently as subject matter in domination of method, a position which changed the character of outdoor education from outdoor pursuits in school camping to outdoor science education. In this way Ford (p. 69) argued “that outdoor education *is* a subject.” Outdoor education was primarily education about the outdoors.

Dewey’s call for a coherent theory of experience

Of course, neither education in the out-of-doors nor education about the outdoors, when one is considered without the other, could ever be an answer to educational confusion. The call for a firmer definition of outdoor education as a body of knowledge cannot resolve the confusion in outdoor education, the same confusion reaching into the heart of education itself. In many ways it is simply another chapter in the ongoing conflict,

another shift in the unstable compromise that characterizes this confusion. Education cannot be about method or subject matter, child or curriculum, when these features of education are considered separately, dualistically. However this does not, of itself, provide a way out of this confusion. Dewey saw that neither traditional nor progressive forms of education, conceived in the narrow way that characterizes most conflicts, could provide a way forward. He saw both as problematic and standing in the way of a deeper understanding.

Those who are looking ahead to a new movement in education, adapted to the existing need for a new social order, should think in terms of Education itself rather than in terms of some -ism about education, even such an -ism as “progressive education.” For in spite of itself any movement that thinks and acts in terms of an -ism becomes so involved in reaction against other -isms that it is unwittingly controlled by them.

“Instead of taking one side or the other” in this ongoing conflict, Dewey (1938, p. 5) pursued “a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties.” Seeking this deeper level did not involve attempts “to bring about a compromise between opposed schools of thought, to find a *via media*, nor yet make an eclectic combination of points picked out hither and yon from all schools,” he (p. 5) clarified. Rather, “it means the necessity of the introduction of a new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice” (p. 5). Dewey (p. 90) considered “the fundamental issue” not to be one of “new versus old education nor of progressive against traditional education but a question of what anything must be to be worthy of the name *education*.”

Key to finding a way out of educational confusion was Dewey’s (1938, p. 20) notion of the “intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.” What was required was “a correct idea of experience” (p. 20). In other words, Dewey (p. 91) sought to emphasize “the need for a sound philosophy of experience.” And while it is beyond the scope of this paper to describe in detail the “coherent *theory* of experience” that Dewey (p. 30) put forward in answer to the need

he had identified, suffice it to say that this understanding of experience requires more than a cursory or partial engagement with Dewey's philosophy. As Schwab (1959, p. 139) identified, "most of what has been said by and for educators in the name of Dewey has consisted of distorted shadows and blurred images of the original doctrine – epitomes, diverse in content and tending to oppose or exclude one another." Schwab distinguished "two significant similarities" within these epitomes, these miniature representations that carved up Dewey's multifaceted but interconnected original work into smaller pieces.

In Dewey's original statement, the members of a numerous set of terms were placed in new and fruitful relationships to one another: time, fact-idea, change, freedom, organism-environment, experience, individual and society. In each epitome, on the other hand, only one or two of these terms appear, and conclusions about the character of education are drawn from them alone. Thus each epitome inflates what was part of the original into an alleged whole.

(Schwab 1959, p. 139)

"The second uniform feature of the epitomes follows from the first," Schwab (1939, p. 139) continued. Each miniature focused on only "one or two terms" in Dewey's work and as such presented them as "merely isolated terms rather than members of their original related set" (p. 139). In doing so these terms were "rendered with a specious simplicity and ambiguity to make the oversimplified statements of doctrine plausible" (p. 139). "The result," Schwab (p. 139) noted, was "to confuse or suppress reflection on the matters presented by the terms." This piecemeal approach to Dewey's philosophy of experience did not enable the richness of his work to shine through, leaving it as seemingly another confused attempt to overcome the larger educational confusion.

Dewey's call for a sound philosophy of experience, and the work he did to move such a philosophy forward, is the understanding required in order to begin with a connected outdoor education rather than two conflicting forms; an outdoor education that doesn't split across subject matter and method, curriculum and child. But, as Schwab insists, hearing this call is only the first step, and much work is required in order to grasp the

whole that Dewey was attempting to communicate. All involved with outdoor education take pride in our awareness of the intimate connection between education and experience. What we need, as Dewey urged, is a better understanding of experience.

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