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What's the Problem with Dewey?

Abstract: In *Democracy and Education* Dewey has a rich conception of educational flourishing that stands at odds with the instrumentalism about learning endemic to much contemporary educational policy. And his vision posits deep dependencies between the different domains in which education is transformative: the transformation of the individual learner into an inquirer equipped to adapt in a changing environment and the transformations in the social world required for the provision of opportunities for such experiences to all. In this paper, I trace the roots of Dewey's conception in his account of inquiry. I focus on the key concept of a 'problem.' For Dewey, inquiry begins with a problem, but his concept of a problem is challenging and lacks an adequate theoretical rationale. Problems start with disruptions in our environmental engagement that figure in non-knowing encounters. Dewey needs an account of these pre-cognitive disruptions and of what constitutes their resolution. I argue that the account can be found in the aesthetics of experience. This draws upon some of Dewey's insights regarding our experience of art objects and it finds a central role for the aesthetics of experience as not only the prompt for inquiry and the unification of experience that settles inquiry, but also in what I call the 'craft of inquiry' – the very practice of inquiring. If this is right, any adequate account of learning, let alone a pedagogy fit to encourage learning, must have a central role for aesthetics as providing the conditions for the possibility of learning. A proper appreciation of Dewey signals the opportunity for a radical re-thinking of how to shape a pedagogy fit for educational flourishing – a pedagogy designed for inquirers. And it helps us understand better the deep dependencies between the projects of individual and social transformation.

Introduction

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey presents a vision of a richly liberal conception of education, one that sees education as fundamentally transformative, from the opening naturalistic conception of living things maintaining 'themselves by renewal' to the conception of education as "a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience" (MW 9: 82).¹ This is transformative on a number of different levels. It transforms the individual: in ancient Athens "custom and traditional beliefs held men in bondage" (MW 9: 272) and education needs to provide the "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of consequent experience" (MW 9: 82). However much this requires transformation of the individual, Dewey is clear that there is a social dimension to the transformative role and purpose of education. The ancient Greeks, for example, did not liberate all from the bondage of custom. Our critique of the class divisions in ancient Athens is only honest if "we are free from responsibility for perpetuating the educational practices which train the many for pursuits involving mere skill in production, and the few for a knowledge that is an ornament and a cultural embellishment" (MW 9: 265). A truly democratic society is one "in which

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1. References to John Dewey's published works are to the critical edition, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, edited by Boydston J. A., Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1991, and published in three series as *The Early Works 1882-1899* [EW], *The Middle Works 1899-1924* [MW], and *The Later Works 1925-1953* [LW].

all share in useful service and all enjoy a worthy leisure” (MW 9: 265). Education for democracy requires deep immersion in culture for all, for a “democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (MW 9: 93). And, for all this to be possible, pivotally education requires the acquisition of the higher order abilities for learning how to learn, learning how to be an inquirer, for “a society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability” (MW 9: 93-4).

Dewey’s vision is extensive and, arguably, prohibitively expensive. It is extensive for its opposition to the sort of instrumentalism about education with which we have become increasingly familiar.² For Dewey, education is about equipping people with the experiences and abilities to take part across the board in the shared enterprise of human culture, in exercises of ‘conjoint communicated experience.’ In addition, it is a conception of education that posits deep dependencies between the provision of individual transformation (personal initiative and adaptability) and social transformations (conjoint communicated experience). It is this latter point that threatens the economic viability of Dewey’s vision. In a policy climate in which service provision is measured for its contribution to the economic well-being of society, a Deweyan liberalism about education will always lose out to an economic instrumentalism that accepts a stratification of opportunities in education. Dewey’s requirement that all experience the immersion in culture on which individual adaptability depends will lose out in the competition for economic resources unless it can provide the basis for a fundamental re-thinking of the intrinsic purposes of education. That is the point of Kitcher’s (2009) well-known defense of Dewey. In this essay, I want to develop some of the tools needed for undertaking this re-thinking.

A central question must concern the nature and direction of the dependency between individual transformation and social transformation. I do not propose to decide on the issue of which, if either, is basic? There is, however, room for understanding, in a good deal more detail, the key ideas that drive Dewey’s thinking and which might help hold his vision together. A key idea in *Democracy and Education* is the concept of adaptability. It operates at both the individual and social level. It requires an ability to respond intelligently to novelty, howsoever that may arise. And although Dewey opens the book with a naturalistic sentiment of life as “a self-renewing process through action upon the environment” (MW 9: 4), that process is already conceived as an open-ended enterprise, for he says, “the living thing [...] tries to turn the energies which act upon it into means of its own further existence” (MW 9: 4).

This suggests the project of timely adaptation to the contingencies met with in the environment is the individual’s project and demands of the individual the wherewithal to respond to happenings with imagination. And that thought is key to the statement of educational values much later in Chapter 18. Dewey there remarks,

2. See Nussbaum 2009 for a recent appeal to Dewey for the resources to combat the instrumentalism rampant in much educational policy.

play-activity is an imaginative enterprise. But it is still usual to regard this activity as a specially marked-off stage of childish growth, and to overlook the fact that the difference between play and what is regarded as serious employment should be not a difference between the presence and absence of imagination, but a difference in the materials with which imagination is occupied. (MW 9: 245)

He goes on:

The emphasis put in this book [...] upon activity, will be misleading if it is not recognized that the imagination is as much a normal and integral part of human activity as is muscular movement. (*Ibid.*)

I want to suggest that at the heart of Dewey's key concept of adaptability is the imagination; that the heart of what it is to be an inquirer responding to problems is to be a subject with imagination. It is the imagination that is the key driver to the transformations at stake in education. It is the imagination that holds together the different strands of Dewey's liberalism.

If we endorse Dewey's rich liberalism, we have a tool for a critique of the managerialism about educational policy found throughout Europe. But with what right can we endorse Dewey's liberalism? I shall trace the case for Dewey's liberalism back to his conception of inquiry. I want to argue that a proper appreciation of Dewey's model of inquiry lays the foundation for a radical underpinning of his richly liberal conception of education.

Here is a simple way of setting out the trajectory I want to explore:

- For Dewey, learning is the activity of inquiry.
- Inquiry starts with a problem (it is historically rooted).
- Inquiry ends when the problem is solved.

Adaptation is done in response to problems, and comes to rest (for the time being) when the problem is solved. So education should be geared to solve problems, not serve the economy, nor the instrumental targets set by modern managerialism. But what are problems and what are Europe's problems re education? There are multiple potential answers to the latter question, many of which are important, but I want to concentrate on the former question, for I think that our key theoretical problem is that we have no detailed and cogent account of how to answer that first question:

- What is a problem?

Furthermore, I want to suggest a reading of Dewey on problems that provides a radical critique of much extant thought on education and the conditions for learning: problems start at a level of experience properly called the aesthetic.

Others have marked out some of this path, but thus far the role of the aesthetic of experience has not been accorded the full seriousness and importance it warrants.³

3. See Alexander 2012, 2014 and Leddy 2015, although neither quite capture the central role for the aesthetic that I envisage.

On the approach I pursue, the aesthetic is not merely an important element of experience that figures in both the drive and consummation of inquiry, it is the condition for the very possibility of inquiry. The idea of inquiry does not make sense without an account of its origins, its practice and its resolution in the aesthetic. If this is right, at the heart of any credible pedagogy there must be an account of the role of the aesthetic as the driver, vehicle and consummation of inquiry.

Dewey sees inquiry starting with what, for want of a better label, we might call an 'itch'; it's the sense of irritation, of things being not quite so. It's the sense of unease that all is not right, our place in the environment is out of kilter. Inquiry concerns the dynamic that takes us along a trajectory defined by "the rhythm of loss of integration with the environment and recovery of union" (LW 10: 20-1).⁴ As Fesmire (2015: 87) explains the dynamic: "Reflective thought is provoked by a hitch in the works, when an unsettled world stops being congenial to our expectations."

The 'itch' is the irritation, the sense that things do not fit. It prompts inquiry, which is resolved when a sense of fit is recovered. But the recovery of a sense of fit is also a recovery that equips us with meaning and understanding, a conceptual grasp of how our problems got resolved. The sense of fit cannot, therefore, be wholly isolated from those cognitive processes that provide understanding. We need an account of how the aesthetics of experience, although outwith the range of a conceptual and knowing experience of things, nevertheless provides the condition for the possibility of an inquiry that issues in conceptual knowing, no matter how much we might also want to insist that inquiry's closure is only properly delivered by a renewed sense of fit that settles the initial itch. On the reading of Dewey I offer, the aesthetic, while not itself part of a knowing experience, is nevertheless the element of experience that makes knowledge gathering possible. The aesthetic needs therefore, notwithstanding its separateness from the field of a knowing experience, to be capable of integration within the whole of the cognitive apparatus (broadly conceived) of the mind's engagement with the environment. On my reading, the role of the aesthetic in Dewey's account of inquiry is as a transcendental condition for knowing encounters.

It is important to Dewey that this sense of itch falls outwith the frame of our conceptual take on things. It is a sense of itch that makes things salient. It is, however, difficult to see how this notion of salience can make sense without the idea of the 'itch' being a disturbance within a patterning to experience. At the same time, the sense of patterning is not yet a conceptual patterning. To make sense of this idea we need the resources for attributing a patterning to experience, something that can be disrupted. This is what people mean when they speak of the role of the noncognitive in Dewey's account of aesthetic experience (Alexander 2014). The label 'noncognitive' is, however, unhelpful. If there is a real point to some such element of experience, then it is something that is handled by human cognitive resources. For sure, it is something that falls outwith the scope of conceptual content and to deny that would be to run the risk of over-intellectualising experience – something Dewey repeatedly warned against.⁵ That makes the aesthetic difficult to capture in our description of the

4. See Zeltner (1975: 18-21).

5. "There is nothing intellectual or cognitive in the existence of [problematic] situations, although

phenomenology of experience and it can seem to render it invisible to the tools of analytic philosophy.⁶ But that last point is mistaken. The idea of a notion of aesthetic experience that falls outwith the conceptual content familiar to our ordinary notion of meaning is challenging to describe, but we should not thereby take it as challenging to theorise. If we do not theorise about it with care and attention, then we forfeit the right to deploy it in an account of the logic of inquiry that informs pedagogy.

I take the idea of a trajectory from 'itch to fit' as a serious attempt to understand Dewey's dynamic concept of inquiry. My project is to provide a theoretical account of this trajectory and make it serviceable for a fundamental re-shaping of pedagogy. Before outlining some of the detail of the theoretical account of the trajectory from 'itch to fit,' I want to set out the methodological options. Understanding Dewey, let alone learning from him, requires care regarding our methodological assumptions just as much as the assumptions that shape our substantive ideas.

1. Methodology

There are two issues on which I want to set-out my stand before embarking on the detailed argument. The first issue concerns the sort of argument that is involved in appealing to the aesthetics of experience. The second issue concerns how my account of the aesthetics sits with the common presumption that Dewey's theory of inquiry involves a form of social constructivism (e.g. Carr 2003: 123 f.; and Fesmire 2015: 90 f.). I start with the first issue.

If we are interested in the aesthetics of experience, here are two key questions: (i) What is the aesthetic? (ii) What's the argument for this element of experience? On the first point, the aesthetic concerns elements of experience that must not be over-intellectualised, for there is an intrinsic indeterminateness to the aesthetic in experience. The aesthetic concerns the itch that demands our attention, an unsettlingness that demands a response. So we need a theory of the 'itch.' For the moment, this is what I mean by the aesthetic in Dewey's account. For sure, lots of what counts as 'aesthetic' gets rendered into the conceptual frame of thought and talk. For now, I use 'aesthetic' as a more neutral term where others use 'noncognitive' (Alexander 2014). Neither term is fully satisfactory, but 'noncognitive' suggests a distance from cognition that renders opaque the idea that the aesthetic of the itch provides a condition for the possibility of cognition's inquiry.

The aesthetic itch is what Dewey had in mind when he says that not all experience involves knowing.⁷ That can suggest that the answer to the second question is a

they are the necessary conditions of cognitive operations or inquiry" (LW 12: 111). Alexander (2014: 71) notes: "Not all experience is experience as known [...] knowing experience arises and terminates within experience that is not knowing."

6. Hence Alexander's (2014) critique of linguistic pragmatism in favour of Dewey's experiential pragmatism and compare Kitcher's (2014) jibes against the preoccupations of logic-chopping philosophers who miss the pragmatist drive to "reconnect philosophy with life" (*Ibid.*: 99). Note also that Kitcher links this with Dewey's "worries about the detachment of art from everyday life" (*Ibid.*: 100). Similar sentiments run through Kitcher 2012.

7. For Dewey, problematic situations are "precognitive" (LW 12: 111). And see Alexander (2014: 71):

phenomenological argument. It will be an argument that broadly works along the line of: 'Look see. This is how it is. Don't over-describe it or you run the risk of intellectualising it.' But that is too quick, for our two questions are quite distinct. In terms of what it is, the aesthetic cannot be captured too accurately in the terminology of modern theories of experiential content without losing its phenomenological indeterminacy. But with regard to the argument for it, we need more than a descriptive claim, for we need, as theorists, to be able to give a clear account of the role of the aesthetic. If we can't deliver that, then we're just mumbling in the dark. Giving a clear theoretical account of the aesthetic does not mean we over-intellectualise it, but it does mean we have to give an intellectually cogent account of its role and how it integrates with knowing experience and why it is important. Let's start with that last point.

On a phenomenological account, the aesthetic is important because it is required for an account of experience to be full and complete. That is how experience is: it has an aesthetic element. On the argument I want to explore, the aesthetic is important because it provides the condition for the possibility of inquiry; it provides the account of that which renders inquiry possible and which motivates the search for meaning and understanding – that which invites us to adapt. And yet, faithfulness to the phenomenology of the aesthetic means that we owe an account of something that in itself does not provide meaning and understanding. So we need sufficient theoretical granularity to our account of the aesthetic that will support the argument that its existence is a condition for the possibility of inquiry while also accommodating a phenomenology that does not leave it over-intellectualised. We need to talk precisely and with theoretical detail in a way that gives traction to that which is not precise. The theoretical mode of discourse cannot compete with the phenomenological appeal but it needs to legitimise the importance of the phenomenological appeal. Put simply, providing the phenomenology of the Deweyan aesthetic might be an exercise that risks slipping through the net of mainstream analytic philosophy, but providing the theorist's account of what it is and why it matters is part of the core business of any credible detailed theory of experience. The former project looks to estrange Dewey from the concerns of contemporary philosophy; the latter brings him home.

The second methodological issue that I want to note concerns the status of Dewey's constructivism. There is little doubt that Dewey's concept of experience is broader than the model of perception as knowledge gathering that dominates contemporary philosophy. As Alexander (2014: 66) notes, "experience" in Dewey's sense is not "perception" but adaptive existence, which in human existence takes in the form of culture.

There are two points at stake here. The first is the point already noted, experience has a dimension that I am calling the aesthetic. This is a dimension that is only problematically captured if one tries to conceive it in terms of contemporary theories of experiential content, regardless of one's willingness to add 'nonconceptual content' alongside conceptual content, or to add a relationalist model of experience to the contentful. One thing that is signaled by 'culture' is the indeterminacy of experience

"Not all experience is experience-as-known and that knowing experience arises and terminates within experience that is *not* knowing."

that characterises the aesthetic. It's the point that "not all experience is experience-as-known and that having experience arises and terminates within experience that is *not* knowing" (Alexander 2014: 71). But there is another element to the appeal to experience as culture, and that's the social dimension to the construction of culture that many find in Dewey. Alexander again:

We do not begin our inquiries [...] except under certain defining situations. Unless one has lived and interacted with others, learning a language and participating in a culture with its stories and traditions, one cannot even begin asking questions. (Alexander 2012: 89)

There are a number of issues in this passage. Here are two issues that will dominate in my argument.

First, Alexander presents inquiry beginning with questions. That cannot be right, for 'questions' do not belong within the domain of the aesthetic. Alexander is well aware of the point and has done much to present Dewey's concept of inquiry as driven by the non-cognitive. Nevertheless, the use of the idea of 'question' here shows the extent of the difficulties we encounter in trying to give a coherent and detailed account of how inquiry starts with the indeterminate 'itch' within the aesthetics of experience. I provide a theory of the aesthetic 'itch' in the next two sections.

Second, Alexander here gives clear expression to a sense of dependency on situatedness in culture as a precondition for asking questions and beginning inquiry. Inquiry is always situated in a shared culture.⁸ It's not clear to me in what sense Dewey endorses this idea of inquiry's situatedness in shared culture. I shall develop a reading of Dewey that sees the shared culture as a construct of earlier phases of inquiry. It is a construct that scaffolds later stages, but the shared culture is the product of a more basic notion of culture that is found in the individual's aesthetics of experience. That is the order of explanation that I offer in my reading of Dewey. I will note the reasons for this as the argument proceeds, but it is important to mark now that although at any stage of inquiry shared culture scaffolds the following stage, the role of shared culture is not constitutive of inquiry but a result of the basic form of inquiry that is individualistic both in its problems and its aesthetics. The root to culture is individual, not shared and it is due to those roots that we acquire shared culture. Shared culture is an *explanandum*, not the *explanans*. I am assuming that individual transformation is the motor of the social transformation, not the other way around.

The individualism in my reading of Dewey will jar many people's sense of his emphasis on the social, the cultural and the intrinsically democratising drive of his vision of education. With regard to the political and social impact of Dewey's concept of inquiry I have no problem. My emphasis on the individual notion of culture is an explanatory device. The priority I see in the individual is an explanatory one. There is not space in this essay to treat this aspect of methodology in adequate detail, but let me mark one root to a social constructivist account of Dewey with which I take issue.

8. There are many forms of dependency on the social that figure in theories of learning; for a critique of the influential Vygotskian version, see Luntley forthcoming.

It is tempting to think that there are at least two senses of problem. The individual's problems and society's problems. Problems are the root to learning. So what drives an individual's learning? The answer, presumably, is their problems. If we find the individual's problems as those that they inherit from initiation into socially constructed problems, then the source of individual learning is simply the problems inherited by their initiation into the current cultural forms. But that hides the following diagnostic possibility – the idea of a meta-problem with educational thinking:

- The meta-problem with educational thought and policy is that it is not driven by an adequate conception of the problems that drive individual learners – it has no account of individuals' problems.

If individuals' problems are socially constructed (what you pick up from initiation into culture) there is no such meta-problem. But that means that the potential for a Deweyan critique of instrumentalism about education is wholly dependent on how you draft the problems you inherit on initiation into culture. And that is highly contentious. One way of seeing the bearing of Dewey on European educational thought in the 21st century is to focus on the issue: what are Europe's problems? And that takes us into a long, although potentially interesting series of empirical and policy issues about European education. My argument is located in a different set of concerns. My central claim is that there is a fundamental flaw in educational thinking that Dewey can help us expose and that the exposure provides a powerful individualist cognitive account of why the aesthetic matters at the heart of our thinking about and practice of education.

This is a different route to the familiar broadly social constructivist reading of Dewey. It is the route that takes the meta-problem seriously and finds leverage on the critique of instrumentalism by rooting the critique in an analysis of the concept of 'problem' as it figures at the level of the individual learner. My central claim is that Dewey has the resources for a conception of the individual's problem that drives inquiry. That notion of problem is framed by his account of the aesthetics of experience. Learning begins by confronting a problem framed within aesthetics, an account of experience that is intrinsically open-ended although patterned. This is an account that explains the deep source of Dewey's pragmatism – the fact that learning is always situated in real historical time. Learning is timely, not timeless. It is the process by which we smooth the itches in current experience and prepare ourselves for what comes next, where what comes next is invariably open-ended and unpredictable. This is a process that we must face not with rules and prior commitments other than a preparedness to interrogate openly and freely in the search for the smoothing that reduces the friction of the next itch wherever it may lie.⁹

9. Although this is individualistic and although I have noted points of contrast with Alexander's reading of Dewey, I agree fully with the main thrust of his reading that in Dewey we find something usefully called 'experiential pragmatism' in contrast to the linguistic pragmatism found in Brandom. And the reason for this lies in the notion of the "irreducibility of the noncognitive" (Alexander 2014: 65). I disagree with Alexander only on the detail of how to make sense of the noncognitive (I prefer 'aesthetic'), with the need to have a coherent and detailed theoretical account of the aesthetic and the explanatory advantage in seeing the social aesthetic arising out of the individual aesthetic.

2. *Inquiry*

Inquiry starts with a problem. Depending on how we think of problems, this can seem banal and trivial or challenging but elusive. If a problem is identified with a question, the resulting concept of inquiry is trivial and misses Dewey's main concern. Here's a first rough way of marking out how the concept of problem can play an important explanatory role in inquiry.

Contrast two different models of problem solving:

- (a) problem-solving in terms of working out the consequences of what is already known;
- (b) problem-solving as learning, as a source for extending cognition.

The first sense is trivial. It takes problem solving as little more than moving the conceptual furniture into fresh positions. Many of the things we do in education involve conceptual tidying, but this involves a conception of problem-solving in terms of re-arranging of what is already known into a new configuration, a superficial kind of cognitive make-over. Problem-solving in this sense is exemplified in doing basic arithmetic, for example, let the problem be: what's $68 + 57$?¹⁰

The contrast between problems in type (a) and (b) might look too binary, for what about 'real problems' as, e.g. in 'real maths'? That's a good point in the context of pedagogic policy, but the notion of 'real' here means roughly 'matters in some way to the pupil.' It is true that there is a sense of that which is, in policy terms, important for gaining pupils' attention, focus in behaviour, commitment to work, etc. There is also, underlying that, the sense of 'mattering to the pupil' that I want to get into focus and that's the sense of mattering in which the pupil is met with a disruption that demands their attention, a disruption that engages them as inquirer, not simply as a task that is interesting. So 'real maths' is important if it offers interesting tasks rather than abstract tasks – agreed. But it is theoretically important if those 'interesting tasks' are not just interesting because anchored in some concepts that are key to the pupil (counting change due in a purchase rather than just adding numbers in the abstract), but are enthralling because they present to the pupil an experience or set of experiences that disrupt and reveal new domains to experience that in turn produces cognitive growth – learning.

The second sense of problem-solving is the challenging and elusive one. It requires a concept of a problem that arises out of a disruption to experience but where that disruption is not presented within the conceptual resources already available to the learner. It requires a notion of a disruption that can unsettle the learner and drive them into the work of inquiry, but the challenge it presents must be one that opens up new experiences and new concepts, otherwise no real learning will take place. I am assuming

10. It is interesting to note that such problems are not, of course, problems at all, for unless someone else asks you the question, 'What is $68 + 57$?' it has no obvious appeal; it does not, in the abstract demand attention. This sense of problem-solving is invariably dependent on others raising the question and is, perhaps, one reason for taking the social turn in the account of problems. Dewey contrasts arithmetical examples with real problems, arithmetical problems are, he says, merely "tasks," things set by others, cf. LW 12: Ch. 6, § II, esp. p. 111.

here that 'learning' requires a transition that delivers cognitive enhancement; at its simplest, the acquisition of new concepts. It is the idea of a disruption in experience that demands attention and demands the work of learning that is key to understanding Dewey's concept of problem. Whatever else we may say about Dewey, it is clear that the notion of problem-solving he requires is type (b) above.

Dewey is clear that problem-solving involves more than mere tasks, it is the means for extending cognition. Problem-solving arises from the things that unsettle us:

The unsettled or indeterminate situation might have been called a problematic situation. This name would have been, however, proleptic and anticipatory. The indeterminate situation becomes problematic in the very process of being subjected to inquiry. The indeterminate situation comes into existence from existential causes, just as does, say, the organic imbalance of hunger. There is nothing intellectual or cognitive in the existence of such situations, although they are the necessary conditions of cognitive operations or inquiry. (LW 12: 111)

In this passage we have all the key ingredients for understanding Dewey's concept of inquiry as problem-solving. Problems arise outwith the scope of intellectual or cognitive experience, they arise from a natural imbalance in our engagement with the environment (akin to hunger). This is a problematic situation. Problematic situations demand our attention, our inquisitiveness. Problematic situations are the necessary condition for inquiry. A problem is a 'partial transformation' of a problematic situation. As Dewey goes on to say,

A problem represents the partial transformation by inquiry of a problematic situation into a determinate situation. It is a familiar and significant saying that a problem well put is half-solved. (LW 12: 111-2)

The key concept in all this is that of the problematic-situation. Without that, problems become mere intellectual games with the "semblance but not the substance of scientific activity" (LW 12: 112). It is the concept of a problematic situation that provides the drive to inquiry and identifies the end-point to any given inquiry which is found in conversion of the problematic indeterminacy into a sense of unity. Hence Dewey's official definition of inquiry:

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole. (LW 12: 108)

Dewey's concept of a problematic situation is, in outline, clear enough, but it has an inbuilt imbalance in its conception, reflected in Dewey's observation that to call the situation 'problematic' is anticipatory. He says this, for in calling it 'problematic' we have already started to respond cognitively to the disruption and to begin to formulate it as a problem. But the unsettling disruption must be separate from such beginnings of cognitive response, or else the cognitive response, the first formulations of a problem, would not be one undertaken in response to the disruption that the

indeterminate situation presents in experience. I think it is clearer, therefore, if we see the initial experience as involving a simple sense of disruption. That is the key to what Dewey calls a 'problematic situation'; there is something that unsettles us. The unsettling character is independent of how we respond to it and begin to treat it as a problem. Our challenge as theorists is to make sense of this initial unsettling character to experience.¹¹

In summary, we have the following key ingredients to Dewey's concept of inquiry:

Outline of Inquiry:

(i) A situation can be salient to us independent of our knowing/conceptual encounters with it.

(ii) Salience arises from a disruption to our expectations, where these are understood as part of a more primitive and natural mode of engagement with things than a knowing/conceptual engagement.

(iii) Resolution of such disruptions arises when the situation is rendered into a unified whole.

If we can make sense of the ideas of salience and expectations independent of knowing conceptual encounters with things, we will then have a model of inquiry as problem-solving as the source for extending cognition. Problem-solving thus conceived will provide the basis for learning as a transformative enhancement to the expressive repertoire of cognition.

What I want to argue is that Dewey's concept of salience in terms of disruptions to expectations involves operations within the aesthetics of experience. This provides an account of experience more primitive than the knowing conceptual encounters. In addition, although it is not obvious from the summary above, the sense of 'unified whole' that is achieved at the resolution of a problematic situation is also a contribution to the aesthetics of experience. Inquiry begins and ends in aesthetics. Once we can see how to make sense of these claims, we will also have the resources to see how the aesthetic figures throughout in what I shall call the craft of inquiry. It is tempting to think that the only role for the notion of a nonconceptual salience is as the kick-start to inquiry. Then, once a disruptive situation takes on a conceptual form as it becomes a problem-situation, concepts take over and the resulting unification is also a conceptual ordering of the initial disruptive experience. That is not, however, Dewey's position. For Dewey, the aesthetic is not only the necessary condition for inquiry, it is also the underlying background to conceptual encounters. It is what Dewey called, "our constant sense of things, as belonging or not belonging, of relevancy, a sense which is immediate [not] the product of reflection" (LW 10: 198).

11. The challenge is, of course, the one that most contemporary philosophers think is incoherent – the challenge of making sense of the 'given' as a pre-conceptual input to cognition, for classic treatments see Sellars 1956; McDowell 1994; and Brandom 1994. And that is why Brandom's version of pragmatism is a linguistic one, he thinks the option of an experiential pragmatism would require returning to the myth of the given. My reading of Dewey is, therefore, a reading that amounts to claiming that the default setting in much contemporary philosophy re the foundational nature of the linguistic needs to be adjusted. There is much at stake here.

This background is in all experience and when it is foregrounded, it provides what Dewey calls 'an experience' – that's the consummatory experience that provides the sense of unity at the resolution of disruption. It is akin to the sense of 'an experience' when the background expectations and saliences are foregrounded in works of art.¹² The task then is to provide sufficient detail to the nature of the aesthetic to begin to make sense of how it can play this foundational role without lapsing into yet another flashback to the myth of the given.

3. *Aesthetic Salience*

Dewey needs a coherent concept of salience. That much is clear. It needs to provide a means of engaging with situations independent of conceptual engagements that provide the content to cognition. The obvious move at this point is to treat the concept of salience that Dewey needs as either a return to the myth of the given or to see it as an instance of an appeal to a notion of nonconceptual content to experience.¹³ Both options are fraught with difficulties not least of which is the familiar conundrum: how can a level of experience that is devoid of conceptual content give rise to concepts? But the familiar problems here arise in part because we have not heeded Dewey's insights. If you set up the problem in terms of how nonconceptual content gives rise to conceptual content, you have ignored Dewey's claim about the indeterminacy involved in salience. The unsettlingness of a problematic situation is not just a matter of a content (albeit a nonconceptual one) not being satisfied. The notion of unsettlingness is not so determinate. I prefer then not to try to capture the concept of salience in content terms at all, but simply to say that salience at the level of aesthetic of experience arises when a pattern is disrupted. There are two things that need to hold with respect to the notion of pattern for it to capture the concept of salience that Dewey needs. First, the notion of pattern must make sense of the indeterminacy of disruption that Dewey wants; second the notion of pattern need not itself contribute to the content of experience. It is not necessary to treat the pattern involved here as itself an element within experience; what is necessary is that the disruption is an element of experience. I treat the second point first.

If experience can make things salient due to a disruption, an 'unsettlingness,' then that must be because a pattern that the subject expects has been disrupted. It is difficult to see how we could make sense of disruption without crediting the experiencing subject with some sort of expectation of a pattern. But that does not commit us to treating the pattern, let alone the subject's expectation of the pattern, as themselves elements of experience. For example, a loose floorboard is salient when you step on it. It thwarts your expectations about the rigidity of the floor you are crossing, but it is an unnecessary extravagance to make such expectations a component of phenomenology as you walk across the floor. There need be no 'way that you experience the floor' as a component of your experience as you walk over a stable floor. It is only when you step on the loose board that experience changes and you become aware of the board. And

12. Cf. Shusterman (2010: 37) for this way of reading Dewey's notion of our experience of art.

13. A good starting point for contemporary debate about nonconceptual content is Gunther 2003.

even then, although the loose board becomes salient because a pattern of expectations regarding solidity has been disrupted, there is no need to treat that pattern (the 'way the board is picked out') as itself an element of experience. It is enough if we treat the board itself as the item of awareness and experience; that is, we have a direct relational awareness of the loose board brought about by the disruption to a pattern of solidity. The pattern need only register at the sub-personal level of experience as something that the subject's cognitive machinery monitors. From the point of view of the phenomenology of experience, the solidity of the floor is silent. We say that the subject expects the floor to be solid, but that does not commit us to thinking the subject's experience is awash with representations of the floor's solidity. It is enough if their sub-personal cognitive systems represent solidity and, when the expectations of those systems are thwarted, an alarm is registered in personal experience that makes the loose board an item of awareness. If we reserve 'content' for that which is available to awareness, then the representation of the patterns of solidity need not themselves ever become available to experience (cf. Luntley 2010 for this idea).

The above suggestion does not take us very far in understanding Dewey. What it does is remove the impulse to treat the patterns implicated in an account of expectations as items of conscious experience. That is an important move, but it does not take us to the heart of Dewey's conception of disruption. Having patterns monitored by sub-personal cognitive in silence and below the radar of conscious awareness does nothing to account for a sense of disruption that captures the indeterminacy of which Dewey speaks. To make sense of Dewey's conception of what starts inquiry, we need not just a notion of pattern that is, for the most part, monitored below the level of personal awareness, we need a notion of pattern that, even if it becomes accessible to consciousness, delivers the indeterminacy that Dewey posits. This is the bit that seems difficult, but it is the component of Dewey's thinking that shows why Kant was right to use the label 'aesthetic' for that which is a condition for judgement and also why what is so labeled figures in those experiences characteristic of our engagement with art. The patterns implicated in the notion of disruptive salience are patterns that enjoy an indeterminate open-endedness. We need to turn to sources different to standard theories of non-conceptual content in order to make sense of Dewey's concept of a problem.

4. *The Sense of Fit*

I want to appeal to recent work in both psychology and philosophy to begin to fill out a theory of the kind of disruption that Dewey appears to have in mind. Carey (2009; see also Carey *et al.* 2011) has set out a comprehensive developmental account of the acquisition of number concepts. It is a bootstrapping theory. Like any bootstrapping theorist, Carey has been criticised for failing to account for the transformative transition from possession of the pre-cursors of number concepts to grasp of number concepts. Any bootstrapping theory that posits a form of experience that is weaker than a conceptually saturated experience but which, nevertheless, is held to give rise to the latter will be met with the outraged response: 'How did you get all that out of so

little?’ Hence the enduring appeal of those who argue that the bootstrapping problem cannot be solved.¹⁴ But what can make that response look inevitable is, in part, the poverty of our conception of what goes into the form of experience that is precursor to the conceptually saturated one. And it is here that Dewey has suggestions that dovetail with two otherwise separate initiatives in contemporary research.

Carey does not dwell on the point, but she makes a key observation regarding her account of the experiences that are precursors to grasp of cardinality. She says that before children use numerals to express number concepts, they use them akin to nonsense words in strings like nursery rhymes and similar word games. So the sequence

1, 2, 3, 4...

is learnt as a string akin to

eeny, meeny, miny, mo.

The rhythm, rhyme and repetition of sounds provides the young child with a use of numerals where they serve as ‘placeholders’ for what will become numerical concepts. I shall ignore the issue of what resources are required to pull off the transition from placeholders to concepts. My interest lies in understanding the starting point.¹⁵

A child who knows the sequence for the numerals as placeholders has a sense of pattern to their use, a sense that draws upon formal features of strings found in their rhythm and the repetition of this rhythm, often also involving rhyming games. The young child who hears

1, 2, 3...

expects ‘4’ to come next. There is a pattern to their experience. If you said, ‘1, 2, 3, 5’ they would experience it as wrong. But that notion of ‘wrong’ is not a content notion. It is not a semantic sense of wrong; it is not that the sequence is false. The child may yet have no sense of cardinality. Their sense that the sequence is wrong is just like their sense that

eeny, meeny, mo, miny

is wrong. This is wrong, but no semantic error is involved. Both ‘disruptive’ sequences are sequences that are experienced as disruptive. This does not seem like the loose floorboard. The child might be actively playing with rhyming sequences, enjoying the counting rhymes, aware of the rhythms and rhymes displayed in the repetition and when another child presents the disruptive sequence, it sounds wrong. The challenge is to identify theoretically this notion of ‘wrong.’ Carey does not address the issue, but let’s make some obvious moves.

14. Cf. Fodor 1975, 2008, and many other places.

15. Ignoring the transition problem might seem an act of outrageous bravado, but the point is simple. If there is an answer to the transition problem, it will arise in the detail of the account we provide in pulling together a staged bootstrapping account of learning. It will not be settled in a single sentence.

The first thing one might want to say is that anyone brought up with these rhymes acquires a sense that, e.g., 'mo' comes after 'miny.'¹⁶ It fits. The word belongs in that position. We might say this: it is what you 'ought' to say after 'miny' in that sequence. And the same applies to the use of '4' after '3' in the counting rhymes. The concept of 'fit' here picks out what Ginsborg calls primitive normativity (Ginsborg 2011). The concept of primitive normativity involves a sense of 'ought' that characterises our experience of various patterns. It is a phenomenologically real feature. It is primitive in two senses.

First, it contributes to a very basic form of experience involving our engagement with various formal features of things, patterns of rhythm, rhyme, repetition in the case of words; balance of hue and intensity with regard to colours, and patterns of line and shade in graphic forms. These are properties that figure large in our experience of art objects, but they figure in patterns that are importantly subjective. This is the second sense in which the normativity of fit is primitive. The sense of fit that applies to the position of 'mo' after 'miny' is a sense of ought that lacks generality. It is a sense of how things are experienced as belonging in my experience. That I find 'mo' belonging after 'miny' does not mean that I thereby have resources for criticising you if you produce the sequence

Eeny, meeny, mo, miny.

I will find the sequence disruptive, but not with a sense of error that provides resource for critiquing your performance. Your performance will jar. It will sound wrong, but there is no semantic error involved. The error is an aesthetic error, your performance does not fit in the patterns that I have come to expect in the use of these tokens. It is the lack of generality to the position occupied by 'mo' that betrays the fact that whatever pattern is involved here, it is not a conceptual pattern.

A defining feature of conceptual content is that the bearers of such content exhibit a generality with respect to the place they occupy within structures that carry conceptual content.¹⁷ The word 'four' only carries the concept of the number between three and five in the series of natural numbers when it figures in patterns of use that make its applicability correct of sets of things that share the same cardinality, namely they all have four members. As a concept bearing device, the word 'four' carries a conceptual content when it has a role applicable to groups of apples, of people, the suits in whist, the riders of the apocalypse, and so on. The word 'mo' exhibits no such generality of application. The sense of 'ought' governing the fit of 'mo' in the nonsense rhyme is therefore quite unlike any sense of 'ought' that might be thought applicable to the use of content bearing words when used in adherence to standards of semantic correctness. The objectivity of such standards is manifest in the generality of application that provides the resources to critique others' usage if, e.g., they use 'four' when only three riders go by.

16. 'Brought up,' for these things are only properly understood in the context of their natural history, something Wittgenstein (2009: § 25) emphasized too: "Giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing."

17. For the generality constraint, cf. Evans 1982.

The idea of primitive normativity opens up scope for a rich structure to experience that populates a good part of the things we ordinarily treat within the aesthetic. The idea of the sense of fit as a subjective 'ought' captures that part of our experience of things that finds a heftedness, a sense of belonging and order to experience in the absence of rules and objective demands upon patterns. It introduces patterns that, although oftentimes accompanied with a strong sense of 'fit' are, by any sense, quite open-ended and amenable to playful imaginative extension. These are patterns with their accompanying sense of fit that are, nevertheless, open to agential modification. Like the paths we tread when walking across open country, these are patterns to which we feel some sense of allegiance – we respect the path as worn by previous walkers – but we are not beholden to them or to anything else to always walk in just the same way.¹⁸

In short, the sense of salience that I think Dewey needs is found in the disruption experienced in the sequence

Eeny, meeny, mo, miny.

The sequence thwarts our expectation. But there is no determinate sense of error here, for the notion of fit that has been transgressed has no generality to it. For sure a sequence that retained the rhyme but replaced the last word,

Eeny, meeny miny, oh

might not jar as much, but it still does not fit; it lacks the repetition of the *em* sound expected as the lead consonant to the last three words of the sequence. The indeterminacy is manifest also in the adaptability of fit. The disruptive sequence can be rendered fit by adopting the varied rhyming scheme and placing it within an extended instance of the rhythmic pattern with,

eeeny, meeny, mo, miny
mine is big and yours is tiny.

Such examples are commonplace in the playful engagement with rhythm and rhyme found in young children's early encounters with language.¹⁹

5. *Fit, Work, and Closure*

The appeal to the idea of fit gives theoretical purchase on the 'itch,' the disruptive irritant that starts inquiry and which, when attended to, provides us with a problematic situation. With the idea of an experience that jars our sense of fit, we have the starting point to inquiry. There is much more to be said about how to develop the detail of the cognitive dynamics of this reading of Dewey's account of inquiry. But we have the beginnings of a reading of Dewey that permits theoretical development in laying

18. Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of a path, indeed a garden path, for the idea of a rule: see Wittgenstein (2005: § 90; and 1978: § 163).

19. See Cook 2000 for a good starting point on the literature on children's language and play.

out the trajectory of an individual's engagement with inquiry that offers explanatory leverage on what is going on, rather than merely descriptive comfort.

Dewey has inquiry starting with an indeterminate situation and resolving when this is transformed into a 'unified whole.' Part of what is implicated in the end point of any inquiry will doubtless involve a conceptual unification, but I think Dewey intended the sense of closure and wholeness at the terminus of inquiry to mean much more than that. On the reading that I have indicated, the closure is also part of the aesthetics of experience. The slogan I offered was to consider inquiry as the dynamic from 'itch to fit.' The disruptive 'itch' is theorised as the loss of fit. It is proper then to see the conclusion of inquiry as the return to a sense of fit. That is the idea that is clear in Dewey's conception of inquiry as a dynamic that restores a balance to our engagement with the environment that was unsettled by the problematic situation.

In his account of our experience of art, Dewey makes explicit appeal to the notion of 'an experience' and I think that is best understood on the model that I am promoting as an appreciation of fit. There are many ways of responding to art objects and many of them involve ascription of content to the objects, whether words, patches of paint or movements of a dancer. But some of the ways of responding to art objects that seem central to many aesthetic experiences involve the response that comes from an appreciation of the formal properties of fit. Apt vocabulary choices can provide the novelist with a sentence whose individual words are hefted in each other's company in a way that alerts us to the cadence available when words are handled by writers with a craftiness for finding fit. Or consider the resonance of colours in a Malevich abstract, or the thrum of the etched lines and scratchings in the paint in a Ravilious landscape. There are lots of moments when our experience of art draws upon our sense of fit, when the artist provides an arrangement of words, colour or line that brings to our attention the way some patterns can be enjoyed for their sense of fit, whatever other purpose they may also serve. One of the things art can do when it provides what Dewey calls 'an experience' is bring to the surface the patterns that provide some of our most basic expectations in experience, the patterns whose disruption prompts inquiry. How natural, then, that inquiry should end in the resolution of those disruptions, in an experience in which the aesthetic order is, for the time being at least, restored.²⁰

And all this is natural in a sense that is central to Dewey's philosophy. It is natural, for it draws upon features of our experience that fall within a naturalistic account of inquiry as a dynamic between the rhythm of disruption and fit in our sense of aesthetic patterns. The account is, in this respect, properly on a par with the dynamic from hunger to satiation of need in our pursuit of food. What is natural for our species is the 'hunger' for patterns that fit. The idea of primitive normativity is the idea of a sense of 'ought' that is subjective. It is, however, not idle. It is not subjective in the way that colour or value are sometimes taken to be subjective in error-theories of those properties. The 'ought' of fit is subjective, for it is part of how we respond

20. Having the aesthetic order restored is also, perhaps, part of what Wittgenstein meant by bringing peace to philosophical perplexities. If so, his quietism is momentary, not enduring; it applies to the settlement of a moment in a Deweyan dynamic, rather than an endpoint to philosophy.

to regularities, but it is a natural response for creatures like us. And that we have this response does explanatory work in our self-understanding, for it is because we respond to patterns with a sense of fit that we seek out patterns, that we adjust them when they are disrupted, that we create new extensions of them when their course dries up. It is our aesthetic sense of fit that is a key driver in the pursuit of pattern making and pattern sustenance. And that, at heart, is the idea running through Dewey's theory of inquiry.

The dynamic from itch to fit is not, in itself, a knowing dynamic. It is not a trajectory of conceptual organisation. It is a naturalistically conceived dynamic. It is, however, I suggest, the necessary condition for the emergence of conceptual organisation. Making good on that suggestion is work for another occasion, but it is important to note that even if that claim can be substantiated, it does not remove the aesthetic dynamic from inquiry; it does not get supplanted by the conceptual dynamic, rather it contributes to it.

6. The Craft of Inquiry

I have suggested a reading of Dewey that provides a naturalistic theory of inquiry. I have used resources from contemporary research to provide a reading of Dewey's concept of inquiry that provides explanatory purchase on the dynamic from itch to fit. The appeal to the aesthetics of experience in characterising the initial 'itch' does not exhaust the explanatory project I am grafting onto Dewey's theory of inquiry. The aesthetic plays an important role in concluding inquiry, but it also figures in the ongoing culture of inquiry. The work of inquiry also has room for the aesthetics of experience. I want to close with some brief remarks on the phenomenology of inquiry. The details of the theoretical model that I am recommending require more space and the explanatory project of working through the detail of the theoretical model sketched must wait on other occasions. But if the approach is plausible, what does it capture in the phenomenology of inquiry? The answer, I think, is that it provides some important observations about what we might call the 'craft of inquiry.' It also gives credence to Dewey's recommendation that it is the imagination that is the hallmark of human action, and the mark of teaching that is more than merely mechanical.²¹

When confronted with an initial itch, the unsettlingness that once attended to provides the sense of a problematic situation, it is not obvious how one should respond. As Dewey observes, 'a problem well put is half-solved.' But what, then, is it to put a problem well? Clearly, at a minimum, it is something like this: it is to frame the question(s) that drive inquiry in a way that permits solution. But that just invites a further question, 'What is it to frame a question?' What is the initial move by which an itch is taken up by cognition? There are lots of things to be said about this, but I want to sketch some ideas that seem to me to illuminate aspects of the phenomenology of inquiry that we rarely talk about, aspects that are themselves part of the aesthetics of experience.

21. "An adequate recognition of the play of imagination as the medium of realization of every kind of thing which lies beyond the scope of direct physical response is the sole way of escape from mechanical methods in teaching" (MW 9: 245).

An itch is a disruption in a pattern of expectations that lacks the generality due to conceptual patterns. We are unsettled by the disruption. So where there's an itch, there's a breach in an aesthetic pattern. By its nature, the pattern breached provides no resources for handling the sense of itch, for there is no generality to the position in the pattern where the breach occurs. So if it feels like a breach, we need other resources to heal the sense of disruption. One option is the simple playful one in which we capture the breach and make it a moment within a different sense of fit. This is the move that is rampant in children's play with words. It is the move that seals the breach in

eeny, meeny, mo, miny

by offering the new pattern,

eeny, meeny, mo, miny
mine is big, yours is tiny.

Many breaches are settled in that way, but that is not the way of inquiry, it is the way of aesthetic improvisation. In inquiry, the task is to repair the breach with a response that offers understanding. Inquiry therefore demands, of the inquirer, some grasp of concepts and some thirst for applying them.²² That means that when inquiry moves to seal a breach in the aesthetic pattern, the move at stake is to find some general pattern to repair the breach. There is no recipe for selecting the general pattern, other than improvisation, the experimentation with ways of treating the breach as an instance not just of a new fit pattern, but of a pattern that is general.

If something like this is right, what moral does it suggest with regard to the phenomenology of inquiry? I think it suggests that we should expect to find the phenomenology of inquiry manifest as an imaginative and oftentimes playful experimentation with the aesthetic forms of experience. Of course, we identify hypotheses, we test them by checking their consequences for observation and the inferential shadow they cast over our web of beliefs. But we also judge them with respect to how well they fit with some of our deepest cultural bearings, the intellectual myths and presumptions that reflect some of the shape of the aesthetics of experience. What does this mean? Here's a simple example.

Think of the experience common to many academics on grading student papers: early on in reading the paper, perhaps as early as the first couple of paragraphs, you form a view about the intelligence on offer and the grade due. Some academics are shy of acknowledging this point, for it might reflect an improper rush bordering on prejudice to admit such views arising so early. I think, however, acknowledging it tells us something important about the culture of inquiry. Our early initial judgement might be due to the fact that the student is posing exactly the right questions and making our favoured first inferences in evaluating them. But I think it is rarely that simple. I suspect there is something real and important to the thought that what you

22. The big questions concern how much native ability is required in order to support communication and the pursuit of inquiry. For an exploration of this in a manner that captures something of Dewey's insistence on avoiding too intellectualist a view of experience, see Malloch & Trevarthen 2009.

are responding to, what makes you think that there is an intelligent voice present in the paper with an impressive grip on things, is that the writing exhibits a sense of fit in their formulation of the key problem. It is the thought we might express by saying something like, 'it hangs together.' If so, I suggest that whatever conceptual unity we might be commenting on, there is also and underlying that, an aesthetic unity. This is something that can be salient early on and, of course, one might later revise one's view on this.

Think of the phenomenology of engaging in inquiry, e.g., the phenomenology of writing a paper. How is for you when you start on a research paper? When I started this paper, I did not know that I would write this section on the craft of inquiry. That came later. Did I not know what I was doing when I started? If so, that might betray a lack of foresight on my part, but I suspect a more honest and interesting answer reflects a common and important way of working. We work in inquiry by playing around with the itch – the sense of what bothers us and we gesture towards a sense of what might settle us. Then we experiment and play around with ways of framing the problem. Sometimes, it comes clear very quickly. We crank the handle and churn out the essay, but most of the time, it is not like that. Most of the time, it takes work, graft and craft that is much more exploratory and playful than simply doing the analysis and running through the inferences. Learning involves a trial and error strategy not just in the narrow analytic sense of conjectures and refutations, but in the adjustments to the aesthetics of experience, the imaginative and playful experimenting with the aesthetic form of things until we arrive at a formulation of a problem that delivers the fecundity appropriate for serious cognitive work (MW 9: 245 f.). Even then, there is a considerable to and fro between careful analysis and derivation of the consequence of assumptions and theoretical posits and the crafty manoeuvrings of the domain of fit.

The reading of Dewey that I am offering is not based on the appeal to these phenomenological observations. It is based on the explanatory work that the aesthetics of experience enables in providing an understanding of the dynamic from itch to fit. But that explanatory work gains credence if it offers legitimacy to a phenomenology of the craft of inquiry that, to my mind, rings true.

7. The Problem with Dewey

I have outlined a reading of Dewey that takes seriously the project of providing an explanatory account of how inquiry is driven by problems. Inquiry is learning. Learning is driven by, brought to rest by and, arguably, its many modes of operations are replete with, manoeuvrings in the aesthetics of experience. If that is what learning is, we have no pedagogy fit for learning if we do not place the provision of the aesthetics of experience at the heart of our pedagogy. Engagement with the aesthetics of experience is much more than a motivational 'extra,' a boost to the cognitive enterprise, a means for framing interest, attention and motivation in the learner. Engagement with the aesthetics of experience is the condition for the very possibility of learning. The theory of pedagogy needs to start with aesthetics.

Educators acknowledge this.²³ Policy-makers normally dare not, for the aesthetics is messy, hard to plot, intractable to modern management methods, invariably lost to the schedules of accounting targets, and so on. But if the aesthetics of experience does seem messy to the mindset of 21st century policy makers in education, no matter, for inquiry is, by their lights, messy. That's the point. That's the problem with Dewey. And it is perhaps a gesture towards an explanation of why the transformative inquiries of individuals require a transformation in our social spaces so that they provide conjoint common experiences. There is no telling where the messiness of problems will lead, nor where the resources for fit might be found. Such messiness is a problem with Dewey, but it's a problem we should celebrate and proclaim and by so doing begin to reshape our conception of what pedagogy might become when once we understand how learning happens.²⁴

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23. For an implicit grasp of the elusiveness and yet centrality of things that fall under the aesthetics of experience as I have been promoting it, see the detailed account of a year in the life of a New York kindergarten class in Diamond 2008.

24. Thanks to the editors of this special volume for giving me the opportunity to expand my initial paper and for their helpful suggestions in this regard.

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