

Education in the Open: The Somaesthetic Value of Being Outside

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Abstract *Over the last few decades, the formal school curriculum in many countries has become increasingly prescribed and attainment orientated with an insistent pressure to measure progress in the name of “raising standards.” This form of constraint on educational practice has provoked counter trends in a desire to enrich the curriculum. Situating learning activities in the open air have become increasingly popular as a counter to formalised schooling. The UK, for example, has seen legislated outside spaces for early years and a growing interest in Forest Schools. The long tradition of activity centres, outside school visits and field trips—offering a valuable way to augment formal learning—has survived in many school settings. The claims for the benefit of taking learning outside are extensive. They range across claiming value for both individual and societal well-being, improving mental and physical health, as well as a way of sustaining inclusion, social cohesion and democratic practice. This article explores how aesthetics and the body may be seen to feature in outside educational experience. By drawing on the work of Richard Shusterman and his extensive work on somaesthetics, the purpose of the article is to augment or ground claims for the worth of “outside” learning in embodied aesthetic experience and therefore help illuminate what is distinctively educational about moving learning beyond the walls of the school.*

Keywords body, aesthetics, experience, outside, somaesthetics, experiential learning

one’s body (like one’s mind) incorporates its surroundings, going beyond the (skin)we live.....as much in processes across and “through” skins as in processes “within’ skins.” (Dewey, 1949/1988-91, LW. 16, p. 119)

Introduction

The title “Education in the Open” is designed to be an inclusive term covering the wide range of activities that take place in the name of education outside of the

school-room. These activities might include fieldwork and adventure activities, as well as leisure and scouting activities, such as building shelters or dens. Moving education outside can also cover activities that normally take place in school buildings—it is obviously possible for classes and groups to read, sketch, write or even dance in the open air. The simplicity of the term is intended to be inclusive of current educational developments such as Forest Schools, as well as avoiding preconceptions that might come with the more traditional term of Outdoor Education. Education in the open is also meant to suggest that we need to be more open, and take a fresh look at how we conceptualise educational activity generally as against the more customary conception of academic, school-based learning. Generally, “in educational institutions strongly influenced by Western rationality the focus of learning is on the universal” and as Bonnett goes on to point out, this conception is at fault because it “valorizes the abstract over the particular and the cerebral over the tactile, and, for example, third person over first person understandings of the body and of bodily experience” (Bonnett, 2009, p. 7).

So, when education has “left the building” in its broadest sense, what changes for the body?; and what is significant with the obvious change of “place”?

The Body

Being outside offers the opportunity to move through space, and to move in qualitatively different ways. Being in the open air has a strong association with a feeling of less confinement and less control. Arguably, less physical constraint may also prompt psychological change. Any observer accompanying a group of children as they move outside for activities, will be struck by the quickening and changes in stance, gesture and talk that anticipation of this move outside provokes. It suggests that the outside context can immediately offer tangibly more freedom of movement and along with it, perhaps less constraint to habitual ways of behaving and thinking in school.

As well as spatial freedom, being outside offers demands or opportunities for increased levels of exertion and the emotional dynamics of physical challenge. Outside we may simply stand more than sit. Demands on the body by being unconstrained in the ways I have described, suggest that we need to reflect on how the quality of bodily experience can change. At its most basic, a change of surroundings can incite an increased awareness of our bodies and how we use them. Shusterman’s claim that the body is the “organising core of experience” (Shusterman, 2004, p. 51) becomes pertinent here. The body’s corporeal, emotional, kinaesthetic and sensual characteristics may have increased significance and feature as more integrated than when we sit in study mode, static and enclosed, with thought dominating our consciousness and separate from awareness of our bodies. Outside then, there is the possibility of increased body consciousness as the body quite naturally becomes more featured, more present and integral to action, to

thought and therefore to learning. The question then arises: What value, if any, might this insight have for maximising the educational worth of being outside?

Place

Characteristics of a change in location also have the potential to be educationally significant. Many, but not all of the educational contexts associated with being outside assume closeness to natural aspects of environment and may extend from the patch of grass outside the classroom to an experience of wilderness and nature in the raw. The range is obviously broader than this though. Outside places can, for example, be urban too. In addition, the exchange from inside to outside is significant in terms of the meanings and expectations embedded in a location's design. Outside moves us away from strictly practical, pedagogical or economically determined educational spaces, into what we might call "real world" contexts. Outside we are subject to the contingency of the elements and are in locations and landscapes that are either predominantly natural or constructed for multi-purpose usage. To the extent that any environment outside is shaped and determined by human purposes, these outside spaces, unlike schoolrooms, are frequently places that have multiple uses, and certainly may be subject to uses other than the educational. Where exactly is the educational value then, in this kind of change of place?

Justifying the Value of Activities Outdoors

There is already an extensive body of work dedicated to arguing for the value of the many different kinds of activities that comprise Outdoor Education. Overall, outdoor education places an emphasis on adventuring and physical activities that develop strength, vigour and skill. Alongside this description there are often claims concerning the value of freedom of movement, how activity promotes health and how being outside enhances appreciation of the natural world. In curriculum terms, these claims are often attached to aspects of PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and Environmental Education. In journals and courses devoted to outdoor education benefits claimed might include: increased self-awareness; self-esteem; memory capacity; heightened motivation and the ability to collaborate. In addition, outside experiences are held up for their therapeutic powers or for the inculcation of desirable dispositions and virtues such as resilience, perseverance, and curiosity (see e.g. Richards, Carpenter and Harper, 2011).

Higgins and Nicol draw attention to this diversity of claims and explain that there are internationally, different accounts of the central elements of outside education because "Outdoor education is a cultural construct which is thought about and applied in different ways within and between countries" (Higgins and Nicol, 2002, p. 1). It is clear that different conceptualisations bring different implications: "...behind the diversity of approaches lie different theoretical understandings and

practical applications of outdoor education” (Higgins & Nicol, 2002, p. 2). In terms of theorising what constitutes outdoor education and its value, a number of writers cite constructivism as the main source of understanding and explanation for why outside activity is educationally valuable. The suggestion is that constructivism rests well with notions of “experiential learning” and therefore draws on “a constructivist pedagogy whereby the learners construct their own view of the world based on personal experience” (Higgins & Nicol, 2002, p. 2).

In terms of its philosophical roots, this theory was presaged in the work of John Dewey. My view is that the relevance of Dewey’s philosophical work to theorising education in the open lies, in particular, in his two key, interconnected emphases on environment and experience and his elaboration of the notion of habit. It is worth revisiting and setting these out in more detail. They can begin to open fresh insights for an understanding of the worth of learning activity in the open air.

Experience

Much of Dewey’s mainstream philosophical work rests on what might be called his philosophy of experience. By way of explanation, he cites mis-educative experience almost as much as describing what counts as educative experience. Despite claims from his many critics, he makes it clear that: “It is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience. Everything depends upon the quality of experience which is had” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 27).

Dewey gives extensive analysis and argument for “experience” needing to be at the heart of education and the open nature of growth that, in turn, determines an experience as educational. For this reason, any form of enterprise, such as outside education claiming to centre around experiential learning in a Deweyan sense, needs to set out the qualities inherent in those learning experiences distinguishing it as educationally valuable. To help reveal the qualities of valuable experience, Dewey firstly separates two aspects to any experience: “the immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness” and the “influence” that experience has on future experiences. He suggests that, independent of desire or intent, whether we want it or not, “every experience lives on in further experiences” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 27). Unlike educationalists who might see enjoyment, happiness or excitement in experiences as an intrinsic warrant for educative experience, Dewey argues that the agreeableness, enjoyment or otherwise of an experience is relatively straightforward and is not the root of educational worth. Instead, he points us decisively to the effect of an experience. What really counts is how experiences connect and achieve what he calls “continuity.” This will happen “if an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 38). Continuity of experience then, connects to our experiences in the past and presses us forward in anticipation and on towards greater receptivity and

further enriching experience. Dewey argues “Its (experience’s) value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 38).

The answer to the direction and ground of truly educative experiences is what Dewey calls “growth”—the promotion of cumulative flourishing or enrichment. Growth cannot be pre-determined. For Dewey, we can evaluate whether an experience is educational by asking: “Does this form of growth create conditions for further growth or does it set up conditions that shut off the person... from the occasions, stimuli and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 36). In terms of practice, it would be easy to distinguish times when individuals have experiences that turn them away from further pursuits outside, make them reluctant to bodily engage with activities, or in contrast, generate an openness, a desire to return or extend those experiences further in some way.

One can see something of the sense of Dewey’s persistent adherence to open-endedness and continuity of experience. Understood properly, this idea avoids some of the traps and clichés often attributed, perhaps erroneously, to progressivism. Enjoyment still has value, but experiences that are merely enjoyable, that merely excite or make us happy may not be educative. In contrast, an experience that gives us an appetite for seeking out experience, that allows us to expand our powers, our understandings, our sensibilities and responsiveness to the world and to others—in other words—to grow, has more lasting value than merely agreeable experience. “Every experience” (worthy of the title educative), he writes, “should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 47).

It could be argued that Dewey’s conception of growth is vague or too general to be of use, however I have tried to indicate that Dewey’s view in its open-endedness is worth revisiting as it is both complex and significant. Prescription of the ends of a conception of on-going human flourishing is highly problematic—how would we go about pre-determining the sensibilities necessary for someone other than ourselves to engage, relish and pursue further experiences that deepen and expand their sense of their existence? If we did try to specify and steer for this in a heavy-handed way, would this not be to fall into a trap of actually narrowing the educational potential inherent in any transaction between an individual and environment? The trap would include making assumptions about what helps us to flourish personally and projecting these requirements onto others. Dewey goes on to argue that the main point of education is to intensify this desire for continuity in growth through experience, rather than weaken it: “If impetus in this direction is weakened instead of being intensified, we don’t just fail in preparing someone for the future—we actually rob them of natural capacities that, if strengthened, would enable someone to become self-sufficient and resilient to cope with the

circumstances that person might meet in the course of their life” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 48).

Environment

In his writings on education, Dewey attaches significance to what he calls, collateral learning, which is the familiar idea that incidental learning frequently occurs for the learner over and above any subject-based, pre-ordained learning. This idea, together with his account of experience, takes us into the wider notions of education that are being explored here. However, we need to go further to do justice to Dewey and experience, by considering his analysis of environment. Dewey sees experience not just in relation to the individual and their perceptions. Experience is necessarily embedded within the environment in which an individual is always inevitably placed. It is the integration, or to use Dewey’s own word, the *trans-action* between individual and environment that constitutes experience.

An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual (their needs, desires, purposes and capacities) and what at that time constitutes his [*sic*] environment (persons, subject matter, physical location, equipment) that surrounds the individual. The environment... is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. (Dewey, 1938/1997, pp. 43- 44)

This then constitutes the physical and intellectually situated sense of environment “that is replete with social meaning and significance” (Dewey, 1938/1997, pp. 43-44). Dewey elaborates this by offering three senses in which environment can be significant. Environment affects experience by giving us

- the concrete, physical environment in which we are placed;
- the intellectual stance and heritage of ideas that form the conditions of where we are at this time and in this place;
- the social, emotional and ethical environment, or, in other words—environment is always coloured by the way we relate to others and the world. Humans are never in isolation from their constituted social nature, even when they experience solitude.

On this view, it is clear that some of the features of environment lie within, as well as outside, the individual. In Dewey’s account, humans are always situated in ways that include orientation, placement and communication. So while the move to the outside draws our attention to the first sense where the distinctive physical features will undoubtedly impinge on us, it is important to recognise the significance of Dewey’s second and third dimensions of environment. The justification of Outdoor Education can be argued for in terms of the social, emotional and ethical value of

group outdoor activity. Comradeship, teamwork, trust and cooperation can feature in collective activity involving, for example, white water rafting, outside play or building dens. The second sense of environment highlights our assumptions and ways of looking at the world as we step into the open air. It calls us to attend to our implicit stance towards nature, and for instance, the ecological environment.

However, the impact of this composite sense of environment becomes clearer when Dewey explains its significance for his view of experience: “Interaction of environment and organism is the source, direct or indirect, of all experience” (Dewey, 1934, p.153), and later, “Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction in participation and communication” (Dewey, 1934, p.22). If educationalists are charged with the shaping of learning activity to encourage its full educational worth of “transformation” and “reconstruction” of experience, then all three senses of environment need consideration. Simply stepping outside has more to it than the initial phrase or action might imply.

Habit

Dewey suggests that whilst as individuals we “transact” with environment to make meaning in our experiences, in this transaction, habit plays an essential role—our habitual approach is what allows us to perceive, to select and discriminate, to make sense of the experienced world. We might assume that one useful contrast here would be between mindless, habitual behaviour and conscious, thoughtful action. However, Dewey challenges this assumed separation of habit and consciousness by saying that reason and consciousness, our sense-making, depends upon, and actually emerges from, our human “habits.” Habits provide the frame by which we are able to perceive, recognise, imagine, and recall, as well as make judgments and reason. He argues that his conception of habit goes

deeper than the ordinary conception of a habit as a more or less fixed way of doing things... It covers the formation of attitudes... that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions that we meet in living. (Dewey, 1934, p. 35)

In other words, habit indispensably forms the lens through which we make sense of the world.

This implies that habit is not opposed to reason and control, with mindless habitual acts on the one hand and rational decisive action on the other. Instead, the real contrast for educationalists is between an inferior way of viewing the world that is routinised and thus “unintelligent” or unaware, and a more perceptive, “intelligent or artistic” engagement that is “fused with thought and feeling,” which Dewey

argues should become the educated way of responding and making sense of the world. Thus the choice is between experience relying on unperceptive habit and an orientation that adopts a more “flexible, sensitive habit.” The claim would be that there is potential in outside experience to challenge and stimulate more flexible and sense-aware orientations to the experience undergone.

To pursue this quality of orientation further, it is helpful to look again at Dewey’s conceptualisation of the body and in particular, how this has been developed in the work of Richard Shusterman.

Body Consciousness

Throughout his extensive philosophical writing, Dewey famously and consistently attacked what he suggested were false dualisms, in particular the mind/body distinction which he felt profoundly misleads us, causing us to overlook the part that the soma or body plays in emotion, thought and action. There are of course a number of philosophers, particularly in continental philosophy that have argued for greater understanding of the significance of the body—Foucault and Merleau-Ponty perhaps spring to mind before thought of the Pragmatists. Bonnett writes for example:

Amongst others, Merleau-Ponty (1962), has developed the idea of the body as a site of perception, learning and knowledge, and it seems clear that its movements express myriad sensitivities and accommodations to a proximate environment in terms of which that body, its movement and its environment, are initially rendered intelligible and from which the sense of its own being—self—continuously springs, and in which it is continuously anchored. (Bonnett, 2009, p. 3)

But the argument for how the Cartesian mind/body dualism has prevented adequate acknowledgement of the significance of the body, was an early part of pragmatist thinking, particularly in terms of our emotional lives. William James argued, “A purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity” (James, 1983, pp. 173-4). If we try to abstract from any strong emotion “all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind” (James, 1983, pp. 173-4). Shusterman adds: “We cannot get away from the experienced body with its feelings and stimulations, its pleasures, pains and emotions...all affect is somatically grounded” (Shusterman, 2000, p. 153).

However, there is an important distinction between Dewey and what James wrote about in terms of bodily action. James, and indeed Merleau-Ponty, both stress the body’s place in emotion and they argue that developed bodily action requires an unthinking spontaneity. So for them, reflection can inhibit effective action. In

contrast, Dewey wants to retain a role for reflection and argues that it is conscious bodily self-awareness that is the key to both better thought and action. The idea is that rather than some general self-awareness, body consciousness enriches and allows a person to be more “present.” And for Dewey, body consciousness is significant for enhancing continuity of experience, helping to give an appetite for further experience that actually expands or grows the consciousness we have of our body and our consciousness generally.

Shusterman similarly emphasises the importance of reflection, resolutely embedding a role for mindfulness in body consciousness and explaining how he wishes to “emphasise the reflective and cognitive dimensions of somaesthetics” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 14). At the same time, Shusterman stresses the body’s sentient subjectivity wherein we can “improve our perceptual faculties through better use of the soma” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 141). One of Shusterman’s main interests is in using somaesthetics as a critique of the current obsessions that are attached to the appearance and care of the body and he therefore challenges the triviality of how these obsessions manifest themselves in modern life. Shusterman attempts to channel the idea of our understanding and care of the body/mind into a form of philosophy, seeing somaesthetics as “a discipline devoted to the critical, ameliorative study of the experience and use of the body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman, 2004, p. 51). For those unfamiliar with his work it may be helpful to very briefly explain where Shusterman’s notion of pragmatic somaesthetics sits within his broader theory of somaesthetics.

Somaesthetics

Shusterman distinguishes different dimensions to the discipline of somaesthetics. Analytical somaesthetics is the study of the basic nature of our bodily perceptions and practices, their particular function in our knowledge and construction of reality. So, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, for example, both raise socio-political issues; they explain how notions of health, beauty, and gender are all socially constructed and how the body is shaped and employed as an instrument to maintain power. For Shusterman, all these aspects fall within analytical somaesthetics. He goes on to argue that pragmatic somaesthetics is an approach that presupposes, but transcends, analytical somaesthetics. Pragmatic somaesthetics focuses on the various activities and disciplines advocated to “improve” us bodily and mindfully. Apart from representational or appearance issues of the body and performative aspects of the body (he cites martial arts and dance as examples), Shusterman suggests improvement can occur with practices that focus on the aesthetic quality of the body’s experience, a strand which he calls the “experiential.”

There is little opportunity to do full justice to Shusterman’s work here but with an emphasis on the body and aesthetic experience, I wish to focus on three features

that I have identified as growing out of Shusterman's "experiential" strand of pragmatic somaesthetics which can be further illuminated by revisiting aspects of Dewey's notion of the aesthetic. My belief is that the following are directly pertinent to education in the open. The three aspects I raise are: the aesthetic nature of immediacy within experience; the aesthetic challenge inherent in bodily-conceived engagement in the environment and the significance of flexible, sensitised habit to generate growth and desire for experience.

Experiential Somaesthetic Practice—Immediacy

In *Art as Experience* (1934/2005) Dewey integrates his notion of aesthetic into the heart of his conceptualisation of experience, whilst Shusterman's overall stress on body consciousness, necessary to our flourishing, suggests a strong aesthetic quality of immediacy—the here and now; the felt, aliveness of being.

The felt immediacy in our experience is palpable, but it is also momentary. Yet, despite being elusive and difficult to describe, this felt immediacy is indispensable as a motivating factor in striving for the continuity of experience so prized in Dewey's account. We should not approach life in ways that turn the flow of experience leaden—Dewey works towards identifying an intuitive, fluidity of action when he writes "if each act has to be consciously searched for at the moment and intentionally performed, execution is painful and the product is clumsy" (Dewey 1938/1997, p. 43). Shusterman points out that for Dewey, the immediacy of qualitative feeling is essential glue holding and shaping experience and thus is highly desirable. But if we acknowledge it is elusive, remains indescribable and reflectively ungraspable, how can we make use of it?

It may help here to remind ourselves of early childhood experience, which can arguably be seen as naturally, aesthetically charged. Peter Abbs for example, argues that life is first experienced sensually and kinesthetically—the tactile, rhythmic, the vocal, the imagined, are all experienced bodily as a child, much more so than later in life. He argues these aesthetic qualities retain their significance for experience later in the arts.

Nearly all the early shaping responses of human life are aesthetic in character, bringing through pleasure, pain or a diffuse sense of well-being, intimations of the nature of our common world. Long before we are rational beings, we are aesthetic beings; and we remain so, though often undeveloped and unsubtle, till ultimate insensibility defines the end of individual life. For death, in the precise words of Philip Larkin, administers "the anaesthetic from which none come round." (Abbs 1989, p. 4)

The question that follows is whether this sensibility can be developed further and become sufficient for an experience to be educational in its ability to drive us toward greater receptivity and thus encourage “growth.” While immediacy may be present in an early childhood awareness of the world, can it also feature in maturity? Michael Bonnett seems to echo the significance of immediacy with his notion of anticipation. He suggests that dislocation from a familiar situation can be threatening. A change of place or moving outside for example, may be daunting. On the other hand, change can also be liberating. Bonnett draws our attention to this “anticipation,” when unfamiliar territory can provoke a readiness and an openness to what is forthcoming. He writes, might “such anticipation be emancipatory through provoking new kinds of receptiveness, sensitivity?” (Bonnett, 2009, p. 7). He gives some graphic examples of how anticipation might sit well with and even capture something of the immediacy that I believe Shusterman wishes to stress. Bonnett writes:

The anticipation experienced on a fine spring morning by the walker as she sets off, or of the fisherman as he approaches the riverbank at dawn, or that of the trysting lover, is of a very different calibre... Here anticipation is experienced as an openness to and embracing of the unknown that is to come—the challenges and the sights, the smells, the textures, the ambiances and surprises of, say, different spots and times of day. It speaks of a keen attentiveness. Such anticipation quickens life, gives a heightened sense of being. It is a form of futurity, and of ecstasis. (Bonnett, 2009, p. 7)

Thomas Alexander’s insight into Dewey’s aesthetics is also helpful here—he too suggests that we begin with “raw” aesthetic experience—“those experiences that call forth attention and compel us, making experience ‘come alive’ as it were” (Alexander, 1998, p. 14). But he adds that for something to qualify as an experience, it has to run its course to fulfilment; it will thus have a beginning and an end. Alexander explains:

The beginning is initiated by a tensive excitement that compels us to focus on the unfolding experience... Dewey calls this “impulsion”... while the field of experience is rendered focused and kept within limits by what Dewey terms “closure” or “fusion”... the sense of bringing the experience to an end. (Alexander, 1998, p. 14)

Dewey speaks of the pervasive, qualitative “feel” of a situation which is consciously manifest throughout the course of the experience and gives it a sense of unity, and in Alexander’s words, is completed by: “a bounding horizon... within which all our

conscious awareness of meaning... occurs... As experience becomes aesthetic... this pervasive quality that marks out an experience as whole, continuous and meaningful is vividly present.” (Alexander, 1998, p. 15). This creates what Alexander has called “an aesthetically consummated experience” (Alexander, 1998, p.13). To qualify as an experience in the sense Dewey claimed, there needs to be a transforming consummation or completion, “in which the world opens itself to us and reveals a felt or sensed meaning and embodied value (in a non-verbal way)” (Alexander, 1998, p. 14).

Perhaps stepping outside to engage bodily with the world has a natural shape and ending as we step back indoors. But for this engagement to qualify more surely as education, the experience needs in part to change us and, significantly, to provoke a desire to return to the open, to re-engage, relish openness to feelings and what is around us; to savour and extend that form of engagement. Alexander speaks of an aesthetically consummated experience largely in terms of art, but I think the transfer to open air activity and experience is clear, for it is the consummation of the aesthetic nature of that experience that becomes crucial if there is to be a change in the way the world is seen and felt.

While stepping onto an urban street or walking through grass can be experienced as mundane activity, approaching such steps in ways that increase sensibility to both body and world strengthens the educational potential (see Shusterman, 2008). To shape this sensibility through expressions that bring the experience to consciousness, strengthens it even more. To then round the experience in some sense, to reflect back and share what was noticed, experienced and thought, offers the possibility of completing and consummating the aesthetic worth and transforming effect of experience itself. It is these dimensions that pick up Shusterman’s own emphasis on “the reflective and cognitive dimensions of somaesthetics, its concern with acutely discriminating bodily perceptions and with meditative experiences of beautiful inner feelings” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 14).

If this argument stands, there is a subtle distinction emerging with Shusterman’s own advocacy of experiential somaesthetics for improvement of body consciousness. He is both convinced and convincing about the need to directly train adults’ proprioception (the self-sense of strength, effort and relation of different parts of the body), to cultivate somatic discipline and enhance bodily introspection by minute adjustment of bodily positioning. But the young, particularly children, already have some instinctive awareness and are disposed to move through space. This suggests there are already advantages that can be maximised in their education, particularly when it takes place in the open air. That said, it is important that we do not lose sight of the overall, ambitious aim of somaesthetics. It is to improve the body physically and the body as the site of “subjectively lived experience” by “rendering external physical form and inner perceptual experience more

aesthetically satisfying while adding grace and efficacy to our somatic performance” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 17).

The Challenge in Bodily-led Engagement with the World

The clear focus on quality of experience and the importance of “felt immediacy,” challenges the assumption that outdoor activity should focus on control of the body. Instead, the need is to become bodily attentive in environmental trans-actions. Shusterman mentions a notable shift from ideas of commanding the body, to the development of an ability to listen to the body in its everyday situatedness in the methods he cites, such as the Alexander Technique or Feldenkrais method. However, it could be said that to listen to our bodies, for example, in the throes of demanding active pursuits, may be difficult or counter-productive, if not impossible or dangerous. Furthermore, there must be limits to explicit consciousness during such experiences.

Nevertheless, developing immediate body consciousness through being bodily attentive may well be an important feature of gaining skill in these situations. To bodily sense the need to adjust one’s position on a wind board may eventually become more crucial than the beginner’s laborious control of body placement in response to instruction. This is not an argument against developing careful somatic adjustment or “cultivating somatic discipline” (Shusterman, 2012 p. 141). The point is that there is clearly an argument for both aspects. In terms of educating the young, there may be the need to keep momentary awareness of their natural somatic and aesthetic sensibility alive, alongside or even prior to increased control of the body.

The idea of developing body consciousness in the moment, suggests the cultivation of a specific form of aesthetic awareness. Literature and the arts have long tried to convey the sensual quality of experiencing certain activities—sailing in stormy waters or trudging along riverbanks in the rain, for example. If there is a need to maximise the educational potential of being outside, appreciating the need for an aesthetic response in this situation may help. There are many forms of expression that can make explicit, cherish, and lead to sharing the felt immediacy of experience in ways that heighten sensibility both in attending to the environment and the felt body. In particular, images, movement, words and sounds, clearly have the power to help form what might be otherwise ungraspable. Here then is the link to why Shusterman draws in a Deweyan understanding of aesthetics. Pragmatic somaesthetics places a particular stress on mindfulness as a significant feature. In education, the expression of feelings and experience can occur through a variety of imagery and media, as well as simply talk.

To licence an experience outside as educational, there needs to be opportunities for communication, for sharing meaning and felt experience. The forming of felt experience into consciousness and shape, requires the individual to re-present their

experience for themselves and in relation to others. My suggestion is that the pragmatist emphasis on puzzlement as a spur to learning is experienced here as more of an aesthetic challenge—an ongoing provocation to be attentively situated, to relate, to feel, then to re-present; all as part of becoming bodily conscious and mindful when outside.

Flexibility in Habit and Environment

David Granger is another writer who attempts to revision aesthetic education with reference to Dewey. In his work, Granger speaks of “situations that have an array of components” and says that situations “are in the main organised and purposive and ‘stable’ thanks to the continual work of habits—so they have a tendency to evoke certain pre-set or ‘scripted’ behaviours” (Granger, 2006, p. 36). This suggests a tendency then, towards the routinised form of habit mentioned earlier which, it can be argued, is a particularly dominant characteristic of learned behaviour within the schoolroom.

In contrast, Granger describes situations that stimulate, that “can change in (overt or) subtle ways from moment to moment—situations can go from routine, to problematic in what seems a blink of an eye” and he stresses that, in these cases, there will be an “elaborate array of components” which mean every situation has its own qualitative sense of being unique (Granger, 2006, p. 36). Education in the open, with its ensemble of natural and sociocultural components, has rich potential to provoke somaesthetic reflection and expression and inspire more flexible habit. The immediacy of experience, where thought and feeling is bodily fused, is more likely to occur in transactions with situations and places where there is a likelihood for the environment to be felt as fresh and changing, and unroutinised. So the “open” can offer expanded opportunities for provoking experience that will challenge or jolt us into more flexibility of what we might call integrated body/mindfulness. Sense-ful with conscious sensibility.

Conclusion

This paper is concerned with the theorising that can underpin the practice of education taking place in the open. There are numerous sound and extensive arguments which can be mounted to support this form of educational activity, as well as many different accounts of what that practice might look like. However this paper has sought to find space for “body consciousness” as part of outdoor education. Shusterman argues that foregrounding the body serves to “improve our understanding of the body’s background functioning so we can also improve its effective performance through the reconstruction of poor habits” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 17). Yet this, together with the aesthetic potential I have outlined, may be easily overlooked in more cognitive justifications or straightforward physical accounts of educating outside.

In the search for worthwhile characteristics of educational experience in the open, two themes have emerged. The first is the often unappreciated primacy of the body as a source of sensibility and intelligibility. The traditional neglect of children's bodies in favour of their minds in education has a long history. Outdoor education is frequently seen in terms of physical activity but there is the potential for conceptualising an even richer educational experience. This is one that includes physicality but acknowledges the aesthetic dimension of soma. Taking children outside to learn immediately offers the potential for developing body consciousness. However, without educationalists having a full understanding of the place and value of body consciousness and the aesthetic in outside learning, much of that potential for educational experience and growth may remain unrealised.

Secondly, the aesthetic nature of experience, its features of immediacy, compulsion and potential for consummation, are all aspects that can be richly heightened in outside experience. Being outside can become naturally distinctive for urging the body into conscious awareness—we feel cold, stretched, discomfort, we immerse ourselves in water, get stung, feel the rush of adrenalin, feel exhilarated, or creep and crunch our way through leaves. We exert ourselves, become tired, conscious of our breath, and our muscles as they ache. But we can also meditate—contemplate the night sky—sit close to one another, rest, touch, support one another and talk about our experiences.

Drawing from the richness of Dewey's extensive thought, Shusterman has developed a complex view of somaesthetics which I have argued has relevance for education in the open. He mainly directs his work at ongoing adult cultivation of body consciousness and there is little reference to what this might mean in terms of the young, immature learner. However I believe these ideas offer clear potential across the ages. To the notion of experience in its transactional corporeality I have tried to echo Shusterman and bring into play a distinctive Deweyan conception of aesthetics, which can have resonance for all ages. It captures something of why placing education in the open may be worthwhile. At the same time, I am conscious that there are clear, significant implications in all of this for education inside too—hence my ambiguous title, education in the open. The trend to take learning outside, to extend children's physical experiences through activities, adventure and pursuits is simply one of the best opportunities currently available in education for attending to mindful body consciousness and the pragmatic, aesthetic nature of being.

When learners step outside they may each notice different things. What they see in the location, their feelings, their appreciation of the elements and their perception of themselves and their place in the urban or natural landscape, are all aspects that may be individually different. Yet all these aspects are ripe for education. The question is how teachers can enhance their student's experience, that is, increase their sensibility and aid their capacity to express, re-present and relate to others through these aspects of their experience. If being out of doors does urge aesthetic

sense-awareness and consciousness of both environment, the self and the body, it is the gradual developing of sensibility and discernment, through reflection, through “expression” and “sharing” that helps move that experience into having lasting effect, being influential and ultimately being somatically and educationally worthwhile.

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