

Re-imagining learning through art as experience: An aesthetic approach to education for life

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates what it may mean to re-imagine learning through aesthetic experience with reference to John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934). The discussion asks what learning might look like when aesthetic experience takes centre stage in the learning process. It investigates what Dewey meant by art as experience and aesthetic experience. Working with Dewey as a philosopher of reconstruction of experience, the discussion examines responses to poetic writings and communication in learning situations. In seeking to discover what poetic writing (as art) does within the experience of a reader and writer it considers three specific learning situations. Firstly there is an examination of a five-year old child's experience of shared communication through the story of Horton the Elephant. Secondly there is an account of the responses of an 11-year-old child to poetry in a 1950s classroom setting, and later reconstructions of those experiences by the child as adult. Thirdly, the paper extends to intensive writing with 12 to 13-year-old children. The focus is on the process of learning via acts of expression as aesthetic experiences. Through art as experience the child develops perceptions that recover a coherence and continuity of aesthetic experience in art as in everyday life.

KEYWORDS

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Introduction

When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience. (Dewey, 1934, p.1)

John Dewey makes this statement near the start of 'The Live Creature' in *Art as Experience* (1934). He sets out to bring art from its separated realm of canonised practice and into the everyday world of living, and 'to restore continuity' between these worlds (Dewey, 1934, p. 2). To do this, Dewey turns to the 'ordinary forces and conditions of experience' (p. 2) that are not normally regarded as aesthetic, to find the source for acts of expression in what he calls 'art as experience' (Dewey, 1934).

Seeking application of the idea of learning through art as experience, the paper considers engagements with stories and poetry, and takes those engagements into experiences of everyday life. For John Dewey art is a matter of experience for both maker and viewer. The maker's feelings and concepts that constitute the experience of constructing or composing an artwork, be it plastic arts, or literary or performance arts, are as much a part of the life of an artwork as of the readers or viewers. This is where aesthetic experience lies. The experience of the artwork gives the work its meaning and coherence, and also gives the one experiencing it a sense of organised structure and

coherence. There is continuity between experiencing art and experiencing everyday events in this way.

For Dewey the starting point for a philosophy of learning through art as experience is the child in his or her environment. What impulse does poetry (as art) imbue within the experiences of a reader and writer? In the examples that follow, experiences of stories and poetry are considered directly through the words and reflections of readers themselves. The learners are firstly a five-year old boy listening to the story of *Horton hatches the egg* (Geisel/Seuss, 1940); then an 11-year old girl experiencing poetry in the classroom and her later reflections as an adult; and finally, 12 to 13 year-old children in an intensive writing situation.¹ Aesthetic experiences in the learning processes are enlivening the formation of coherent concepts. These become available for later reflection and further learning.

For Dewey there is an expressive dimension to human learning and living when the parts are organised into a coherent structure. The artist can 'provide us with experiences by producing structured objects or events that bring together various aspects of disjoint perceptions and organise them into coherent wholes' (Eaton, 1988, p. 29). Today, in the dominating market state whereby the foot of pedagogy is squeezed into the shoe of economic demands, education is cast globally as a business model of knowledge construction: it is education as the function, pursuit, *métier* of knowledge in the service of market economies of production. Dewey assists in re-imagining education another way.

While the interest rests here on aesthetic experiences in the learning process, the focus is not about setting up an artifice of aesthetics for the sake of promoting such an experience, nor adding aesthetics as some sort of property or extra dimension to learning. The attention is on something else to do with reinvigorating an attunement to life with further learning arising in and from the experience of life events.

What did Dewey see?

Dewey sought to recover 'the continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living' (Dewey, 1934, p. 9). This recovery occurs in terms of both cultural and natural aspects of living with continuity between them. Dewey does not follow the historical tradition of separating aesthetics into a philosophical realm of inquiry. His interest lies in an aesthetic experience as a bridging force whereby meanings emerge in interdisciplinary processes – as one field of inquiry and another, or one form of action and another, or moving a past experience into a present experience, or bridging 'ordinary and aesthetic experience' (Dewey, 1934, p. 8). The challenge is to see how an aesthetic experience may open the mind to an attunement in life: *in tota fine erga omnes et omnia*.²

Dewey saw value in providing a shaping environment for intelligent growth in a child. For Dewey a child shapes his or her environment as well as being shaped by it. While this discussion is not advocating an instrumentalist approach to the relationship between a learner and his or her environment, it is difficult to make argument against the value of aesthetic environments for activating one's perceptions of experience and organising coherent meanings. In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey writes of the act of expression in terms of assimilating into present existence 'something of the values and meanings contained in past experiences' (Dewey, 1934, p. 74). What impulse of the past affects one's experience of the Māori *haka* with its structural rigour and expression at a Rugby Union match, or the pageant of music and performance at the opening and closing of an Olympic Games? Where lie the Deweyan values and meanings in the expressive experiences that bring together disparate individuals in a coherent group response of collective meaning making?

Alexander (2002, pp. 1–21) affirms the importance of Dewey's chapter on art and aesthetic experience in *Experience and Nature* (1925/2003) and what might be called today an ecological approach to living in a world in which humans and the environment each affect the other. Dewey

argued for science as an art, and art as a practice, and that ‘the only distinction worth drawing is not between practice and theory, but between those modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable and those which are full of enjoyed meanings’ (Dewey, cited in Alexander, 2002, p. 3). Dewey claimed there would be an end to ‘the separations that trouble present thinking: division of everything into nature *and* experience, of experience into practice *and* theory, art *and* science, of art into useful *and* fine, menial *and* free’ (Dewey, cited in Alexander, 2002, p. 3; emphasis in original). Thus Dewey is dismantling binarized categories of knowledge in the disciplinary fields of education as in everyday life situations.

To approach learning through art as experience is a way of bringing art out of the rarified context of the museum or, in the case of literature, out of the separated and lofty realm of bound and rarely opened volumes. The canonised status of the art object or work of literature or music has an isolating effect upon it, thus obfuscating the conditions of expression with which it came into existence. For Dewey art exists through the conditions of expression as in the maker and viewer’s experiences of it. Encountering the artwork provides the condition for art as experience – ‘the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience’ (Dewey, 1934, pp. 18–19) – then a coherence of shared meanings becomes possible.

Dewey and experience

Dewey did not see art in terms of symbols and meanings, but in terms of an experience out of which concepts grow as coherent understandings are made. The experience takes the learner beyond the artwork or poem as a discrete form or object (although the object is an important outcome of the artist or writer’s purposeful action), and beyond the ‘events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear ...’ (Dewey, 1934, p. 3). The experience takes the learner beyond the mere contemplation of a work of art as a static object for aesthetic appreciation or a source of beauty, beyond any philosophical investigations of aesthetic properties in and of an object, and into the living worlds of the artist, viewer and object. Thus, Dewey dismantles the separation of art from life. For Dewey art is a living expression that gives coherence and order to the disparate perceptions, concepts and emotions by which it is structured and through which it is experienced. Dewey displaces art from its canonised pedestal and brings it into the everyday domain of situational experience.

Dewey’s theories have been classified generally as instrumentalist and based in psychologism. Kieran Egan, in his analysis of Dewey’s inheritance, *Getting it Wrong from the Beginning* (2002) said, ‘Because the mind is prominent in education, psychology became the consistent handmaiden of progressivism’ (Egan, 2002, p. 6). Dewey’s ‘art as experience’ may be progressivist, but how deeply entrenched is its basis in psychologism?

In *Art as Experience* (1934) Dewey developed a theory of aesthetic experience, which he had first considered in his work, *Experience and Nature* (Dewey, 1925/2003) and *Philosophy and Civilization* (Dewey, 1931). For Dewey, experience came to mean not an empirical act of representing the external world as in British empiricism, nor was it anchored in the layering of developmental growth in a child with a defined lineage of psychological motivation and growth. Rather, it came to mean a

shared social activity of symbolically mediated behaviour which seeks to discover possibilities of our objective situations in the natural world for meaningful, intelligent and fulfilling ends. And the skill at doing this Dewey calls ‘art’. (Alexander, 1996, p. 119; emphasis in original)

‘Experience’ for Dewey, ‘signifies both an action and its result’ (Dewey, 1934, p. 85) and through experiencing shared social activities a learner is exposed to new concepts. Then by activating past experiences into present action through experimentation, application and reflection, the learner develops further language and coherent understanding. The following story shows how Dewey’s theory of art as experience may be evident in the life and learning of a five-year-old child.

Sharing with Horton

In a domestic setting three generations of a family are relaxing in the late afternoon and a grandparent is reading a story to his five-year old grandson. The story of *Horton hatches the egg* (Geisel/Seuss, 1940) captivates the child's attention with its expressive language and decisively drawn illustrations. In the story, Horton the Elephant takes on the nest-sitting duties of Mayzie the lazy bird, who flies away to Palm Beach to bask in the sun. Horton props up the tree to support his weight and dutifully sits and sits on her egg in the tree over many months surviving all weathers – 'An elephant's faithful one hundred percent!' Eventually he is captured by three hunters and sold to a circus for money. The circus arrives at Palm Beach where Mayzie sees Horton and takes time out of sunning herself to demand her egg back. The egg hatches and out flies an elephant bird. Horton is rewarded for his faithfulness and they send him home happy 'one hundred percent'.

The particular family experience of storytelling with its repetition of 'one hundred percent' is creating shared concepts in the communications between adult and child; and out of this the child is making coherent meanings for himself. For Dewey, a relevant aspect of art as experience is the *outcome* of that experience: a greater understanding of meanings made by it. Those meanings or concepts may be tested in everyday actions, with an outcome of further concepts and language that brings continuity and coherence to the child's learning and understanding of his or her world.

To put this into an example, Horton's experience of nest sitting and faithfulness is affecting a coherence of happy emotion in the child. Later when out walking the child decides his legs are 'one hundred per cent tired.' The child recites the words in step with his footprints on the pavement. In unison the adults join in, reinforcing the reconstructions of experience by integrating physical and intellectual dimensions of expression. From one coherent experience another soon arises. The child in negotiation around bedtime, says, 'But I'm not tired'. 'Perhaps you are a *little* bit tired after a big day of walking?' asks the adult and after some thought and discussion the child decides he is 'twenty percent tired.' New possibilities of language and meaning are being carried over from Horton's *one hundred per cent faith-fulness* into the child's reality, with a new (present) coherence arising from the earlier (past) experience.

For Dewey the continuity of communication between people with shared experiences of coherent meaning making is central to learning. Dr Seuss's language and images, and communications between the parties activate the child's zest for learning and extend the child's language as he accesses everyday experiences in safety. For Dewey there is something logical in these relationships. The child undergoes *an* experience, communicates it, and further language emerges as meanings are shared. This Dewey writes about in his *Experience and Nature* (Dewey, 1925/2003). In the ordinary communicative events of a day, the child undergoes the 'act of expression', to use Dewey's phrase (Dewey, 1934, pp. 60–84) and finds a coherent structure to bring disparate parts of his five-year life experience into a unified whole in the present.

In these shared acts of expression through communication it was the act of sharing the rhythmic and easily repeatable words from the Horton story that prompted the 'meaningful, intelligent and fulfilling *ends*' (Alexander, 1996, p. 119; emphasis in original), rather than any dominating psychological or pre-existing mental factors. Although Dewey did consider the child as a psychosocial being, and that the teacher needs to be aware of this in the educative process, he did not advocate a regulatory view of psychological determinism. Seeing the historical contingency of social phenomena he argued (in his middle years) against the prevailing view that the social order is a product of natural laws, explainable only by science.

For Dewey's philosophy of education 'the artistic dimension of human growth' is crucial (Garrison, 1998, p. 72). Thus, Dewey holds to the artwork as experience in process, with the reader or viewer or artist contributing their own expression to the raw materials of paint or clay, words or concepts.

Aesthetic component

'Dewey's definition of inquiry has a richly aesthetic component. ... Intelligent inquiry serves to artistically trans-form an unstable, distressful, or confusing situation into a beautiful and harmonious form that is relatively stable' (Garrison, 1998, p. 72). For Dewey the roots of an aesthetic experience lie in commonplace acts of social communication, and in commonplace experiences such as poking a fire and seeing the sparks fly – or reading a story. However, Dewey's theory of experience entails a structural component, which serves to organise the various parts of an event into a unified or coherent outcome. This may occur in art as in events of daily life.

For Dewey, art exists as a physical entity insofar as the artwork *does* something within a person's experience. This view displaces the dualistic division of art as static object and viewer as separated subject. For Dewey, art is an active part of life, an expression of life found in experience itself and there is logic in this coupling. 'By separating the *idea* of art from life, we not only mystify art, but we thereby fail to recognise the pervasive aesthetic possibilities of human experience in general' (Alexander, 1996, p. 119). This is an important statement in understanding Dewey's dismantling of binary separations. Dewey's aesthetic possibilities herald continuity between the self who experiences and the environment in which the expressive processes occur. The five-year old child, as the one who is hearing the Horton story and responding to it by engaging his natural energies and perceptions, becomes part of this moment of art as experience. For the child the communicative acts of perceiving and sharing language are creating a coherent – and aesthetic – experience for learning in the events of his day.

The bedrock of aesthetics lies in the activities and experiences of the human organism as a 'Live Creature' (Dewey, 1934), whose aliveness is shared with other live creatures. The idea that an aesthetic experience could be found in events of daily living is far removed from philosophical approaches to aesthetics, which separate art from life. Dewey showed little interest in aesthetic theories. Significant here is what Dewey wrote on this matter in 1948:

I have learned little from what has been written in the name of Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics, since it has seemed to me to subordinate art to philosophy, instead of using philosophy as an incidental aid in appreciation of art in its own language. (Dewey, 1948, p. 208)

For Dewey, aesthetics has a function in everyday world situations: it is restorative. The aesthetic engagement works as a catalyst to bridge binary gaps and to activate knowledge of the objective world through subjective experiences of it. The child in listening to the story of Horton's faithfulness is undergoing an experience in his own world of emotions and perceptions. Interaction gives continuity and this is crucial for learning. As Shusterman explains, 'For Dewey all art is the product of interaction between the living organism and its environment, an undergoing and a doing which involves the reorganisation of energies, actions, and materials' (Shusterman, 1992, p. 6).

Dewey does not view aesthetics to be the 'property' only of those who make a career from music, fine art, dance, literature and so on; nor does he see aesthetic properties as residing *in* an object or other artistic work, separated from everyday life and worthy only of a museum or concert hall setting. Dewey argues that an aesthetic experience entails the responsiveness of the artist/recipient/reader/ viewer. It is a communicative act.

Dewey's book, *Art as Experience* (1934) was his major work on aesthetics, although he had already addressed aesthetics in *Democracy and Education* (1916/1966) and *Experience and Nature* (1925/2003). It was in the process not the product of art that Dewey found the relevance of an aesthetic experience – and for Dewey the experience was one that had an affect on a person in their everyday lives. But the art object did not lose its place in the learning equation. The person who experiences the object, artwork, poem, jazz music, et al. – 'the expressive object' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 85–109) – experiences an interrelationship with the artwork, and the artwork's environment, and with themselves and the culture at large. The historical contingency of cultural situations is relevant. It is for Dewey a sensory exchange in action between the learner and the environment – in this, the

art *of* experience (which has a product value) becomes art *as* experience (which is process). Both the psychology and the sensory perceptions of the one who experiences are at play here.

Aesthetic experiences of poetry: A New Zealand example

'Some people react physically to the magic of poetry, to the moments, that is, of authentic revelation, of the communication, the *sharing*, at its highest level', said the poet Dylan Thomas (1954; emphasis in original). In the experience of reading poetry it is the physical together with the mental that brings the poetry into the reader's experience, and the reader's experience into the poem. Perhaps that is where 'authentic revelation' lies.

For Dewey the nature of the learner him or herself takes centre stage in these practices; the learner's experience must be valued as a starting point for learning, and environments must be conducive for this to prosper. The learner's situation is considered through the following story of a New Zealand child, 11-years old, experiencing poetry in a classroom environment and reflecting upon these experiences later as an adult. Her recollections of how the poetry had affected her as an 11-year old inform her story of art as experience.

The setting is an Intermediate School in Auckland, New Zealand, in the mid-1950s. The teacher has introduced the children to the New Zealand poet, R.A.K. Mason. His *On The Swag*, 'the cold wet dead- beat/plods up the track ...' (Mason, 1930) has a certain plodding sound to it and the 11 year-old child tests the rhythm of Mason's words. The child perceives the beat of plodding footsteps as a concept, which sets her thinking about her daily experiences of walking her own, dark, tree-lined driveway and watching for that welcome glimpse of a kitchen light ahead. She sees that 'cold wet dead-beat' and later reflects, 'I feared him walking up our long drive and knocking on the door in the dark,' (Botting, 1995, p. 38). What could happen, might happen if this 'old lag ... with his clumsy swag /made from a dirty old/turnip bag' (Mason in O'Sullivan, 1987, p. 46) should walk up *her* driveway in the dark? The child is making personal meanings from her experience of the poem.

She continues reading the story: 'Bring him in cook/from the cold level sleet:/put silk on his body/slippers on his feet;/give him fire/and bread and meat ...'. She thinks about this and reads on: 'Let the fruit be plucked/ and the cake be iced ...'. Kindness is overtaking fear as the poem works its way to the end with the revelation, 'this is Christ'. The outcome of a 'dead-beat' manifesting as a human Christ affects the child's perceptions of ordinary human interchanges. The outcome is a coherent understanding of what 'being human' might mean, and this understanding has continuity from the words of the poem and into everyday life.

From reading the poem the child experiences something more than cognition; perhaps her experience in its fullness was inexpressible. The sociolinguistics of a learning situation are crucial as the mind is not an entity separated from the body, nor does it exist as an essence antecedent to action. 'In Dewey's theory of emergence, to have a mind means to be capable of possessing and responding to meanings. ... To acquire a mind means to become able to participate productively in the discourse practices of a culture' (Garrison, 1998, p. 73).

From her participation as a 'live creature' she was responding to meanings, alive to her surroundings and self; and from this emergence she was reflecting on everyday life's events through the Deweyan 'promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 18–19). Her encounter with this poem was truly the 'zestful integration of all the elements of ordinary experience ... giving the experiencer a still larger feeling of *wholeness and order* in the world', as Shusterman puts it with direct reference to Dewey's *Art as Experience* (Shusterman, 1992, p. 15; emphasis added). Each experience was becoming part of a whole. Through Mason's words, similar in response to Thomas Hardy's approach to life (O'Sullivan, 1987, p. xix), there was revelation in the sense used by Dylan Thomas; and both the action and outcome of the experience was a reconstruction of perception and emotion in the Deweyan sense.



The story continues

The teacher gave out Banda sheets with poems fading in and out, the words running off the newsprint page. Spirit duplicators used in those days gave uneven results, but this was worse than most. Later, the child, as adult, recollected, '*The Wild Flower's Song* by William Blake seemed to make no sense; ... and the Banda sheet was pasted crooked on the page, so I didn't illustrate it' (Botting, 1995, p. 38). Blake's expression was unfamiliar to her: images of wandering the forest among green leaves and meeting with scorn lacked any sustaining source for her. Later she recalled what happened next:

The next sheet had Tennyson's *The Owl* which I liked because we all recited it together like a song, though I had no idea what it was about, and my favourite *Matilda* by H. Belloc: I loved the way it started, *Matilda told such dreadful lies/It made one gasp and stretch one's eyes* (Botting, 1995, p. 38)

In the communal reciting of poetry, words were alive with rhythm, repetition, music and sound and coherent meanings came together from the disparate parts of her life. Also of relevance is the communicative act of overcoming intransigence in communal situations. To be part of a group has the potential to be a positive learning experience in the acquisition of language and meaning, which Dewey addresses in *Experience and Nature* (1925/2003).

Discovering the New Zealand poet, Gloria Rawlinson was a defining moment for this child's learning experiences.³ Rawlinson's poetic language and images of New Zealand flowers and trees held particular relevance. At that time, in the mid-1950s, dominant references in school journals were of England – the official narrative cast New Zealand as English to the core. Rawlinson's poems peppered with New Zealand images were different and they set the child's perceptual energies alight. Later, the child as adult reflected on Rawlinson's poem, *The Garden* (Rawlinson, 1935): it 'talked about *Maoriland* and English buttercups and lilacs growing among kauri and koromiko: something I could hold as mine. ... I learnt to draw kowhai flowers bursting with yellow beside willows with swathes of weeping green' (Botting, 1995, p. 38).⁴ The poems brought to life coherence and continuity to later actions and thinking for this New Zealand child.

Cultural practices

By reading Gloria Rawlinson's poetry the child was learning something about being a New Zealander with an English father, about Christmas in summer and cards of snow-covered fields from aunts in England. This cultural situation needs to be seen in context of a strongly Anglo-centred curriculum in New Zealand schools at the time. England was deemed to be the source of all knowledge, history and culture and as New Zealand was a part of the British Empire, and owed its cultural debt to Britain, the story of New Zealand was rarely discussed. As New Zealand writer, Robin Hyde put it in her 1938/1980 book, *The Godwits Fly*:

History began slap-bang in England. Normans in England said 'Bœuf' and 'Mouton' at first and the old Saxon tongue struggled and died out, till nobody understood it, any more than people here understood Maori. ... You had to know that much, or you failed in your examination. (Hyde, 1980, pp. 33–34)

Like Robin Hyde, the child was aware of her growing cultural sense of living in New Zealand where native trees and flowers did exist although were not talked about much, and her childhood friends were not of England and there was no snow at Christmas time. Through the poetry of Gloria Rawlinson the child was experiencing something of this personal culture and was making a relevant coherence for herself. She felt connected to Rawlinson's experiences as part of a larger experience, just as she felt connected later to Robin Hyde's perceptions of New Zealand. Robin Hyde expressed the intensely felt realisation that she was both 'English and not English', when she wrote:

It took time to realize that England was far away. And you were brought up on bluebells and primroses and daffodils and robins in the snow – even the Christmas cards were always robins in the snow. One day, with a little shock of anger, you realized that there were no robins and no snow, and you felt cheated; nothing else was quite as pretty. (Hyde, 1980, p. 34)

The child found in Rawlinson, and later in Hyde, concepts and reflections and actions that were local as well as being of England – a new continuity was setting this child's affective learning alight. Later, the child as adult recollected this restorative integration:

At last someone was writing about my world, about New Zealand and England in the same poem. ... I felt a sort of exhilaration and was forgetting the teacher and his Banda sheets. I was on my little path and was not about to get off it. (Botting, 1995, p. 39)

The Rawlinson words continued to enliven the child's perceptions as she wrote and illustrated poem after poem into her exercise book. There was *At The Concert*: 'Nobody clapped when you finished singing/We all sat silent for a second or two./Suddenly somebody laughed and all looked at me, rebuking/I knew it was a foolish thing to do' (Rawlinson, 1935). 'At the time I thought perhaps it was about Gloria Rawlinson ... and then I thought perhaps it was me'(Botting, 1995, p. 39); and *The Little Greenstone Tiki*, to which the child related as the *tiki* was kept in a treasure box and this child kept treasures in boxes.⁵ The tiki 'Swept down the Wanganui to some long forgotten place' (Rawlinson, 1935). The child felt herself to be there, in those words, with the *tiki* on the Wanganui River. Her mother was born in Wanganui, so she could experience the concepts and words in an intimate and alive way. Later, as an adult, she wrote, 'I could hear the paddles splash, and sense the dark riverbanks ... those same wide waters that were in my mother's photo album. All so long ago, the tiki, the paddles, the photos and my mother. They all merged' (Botting, 1995, p. 39). Perhaps in this merging is the coherent whole of which Dewey speaks.

Impulsion and impetus

Through 'the act of expression' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 60–84) the child was responding as other memories of childhood experiences came into play. Then language grows. Language as a shared social activity takes its place in the process of learning through the expressive act and in the experience each part comes together in a continuing and coherent whole. Dewey speaks of experience beginning 'with an impulsion ... [which] designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism ... the initial stage of any complete experience' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 60–61).

In explaining 'impetus', Dewey adds, 'things retained from past experience that would grow stale from routine or inert from lack of use, become coefficients in new adventures and put on a raiment of fresh meaning' (Dewey, 1934, p. 63). These words are relevant for the child reading Rawlinson's poetry, and also for the child as adult in writing her account of reading Rawlinson's poetry. So there is a doubling going on here in art as experience: a double activation in the life world of this person, and she was fully present to her perceptions of it as both child and adult.

Action and perception are coming together in these learning situations. Dewey takes the example of a 'live creature' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 1–19). 'What the live creature retains from the past and what it expects from the future operate as directions in the present' (Dewey, 1934, p. 18). He shows how the live being (the fox, the dog, the thrush) reestablishes its moment in time by a 'heightened vitality' of being acutely alive, 'fully present, all there, in all of its actions' (Dewey, 1934, p. 18), fully aware of the ever-changing environment. 'Because experience is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ ... it contains the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 18–19).

That delightful perception

How may 'the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience' be found through teaching intensive writing for children? The setting is an Intermediate School in Auckland in the mid-1960s. The children, boys and girls, are 12 or 13-years of age. The teacher, Miss B is experimenting with a Deweyan approach to activating imagination in a 'fully present' moment of perception to activate a flow of language. She hoped the children would write spontaneously of the experience of a spider, through perceptual qualities of imagination, rather than reflecting objectively upon a given idea.

Margaret Langdon's book, *Let the Children Write* (1963) makes a practical study of the effects of intensive writing for children. Instead of reflecting upon a situation from an inevitable distancing, Langdon advocates taking a child into a situation via activating an immediacy of imagination, emotion and perception. Langdon wrote her book as a response to children's written and oral work, where she met the 'stultifying, deadening medium, which made all their expression come out as from a sausage machine, ... which they thought they *ought* to write, and say and think'(Langdon, 1963, p. 4). Langdon knew the joy of poetry and also its limitations – 'a dead end as far as modern children are concerned' (Langdon, 1963, p. 5).

As Langdon decided 'to attempt a new, drastic experiment' (Langdon, 1963, p. 7) in teaching poetry writing to children, so Miss B decided to undertake this same experiment of intensive writing through Langdon. Miss B prepared the children for the poetry lesson; they did not know what was coming. 'All you need on your desk today is a pencil and paper,' Miss B said, and waited while they organised themselves. Then she pointed to the back wall of the classroom with a startled look on her face, 'Look. There's a spider on the wall, a huge one. Quick – write down the first thing which comes into your head about it. Now – as quickly as you can', said Miss B, following Langdon's words (Langdon, 1963, p. 9). After an incredulous moment of disbelief in the children, Miss B continued again with Langdon's words, 'Make it brief and snappy – don't stop to think just write what *you* feel' (Langdon, 1963, p. 9). It worked. The children wrote. Miss B urged the children on. 'Start on the next line, and say something about its body. Describe it as *you* see it. ... its legs. ... its web' (Langdon, 1963, pp. 9–10). With words like *bloated, squashy, ugly, hairy, black*, the writing was immediate, engaged, beyond explanatory prose; the lines were short, punchy, the words alive to Dewey's 'delightful perception which is aesthetic experience' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 18–19).

The expression of art as experience intensifies in the one who is experiencing a fully awake accretion of everyday life experience. Dewey calls this a felt harmony. It seemed that these children and their writings were an example of felt harmony. Their imagination, emotion and immediacy of expression were one. Their words and lines spilled across the page and every so often they turned to check the progress of an invisible spider crawling up the classroom wall. They were not thinking of the formalities or task of 'writing poetry'; they were attuned to experience imagination in action. In the process of undergoing this experience, the 'self and the object are mutually adapted, ending with felt harmony' (Leddy, 2016). The spider, the poetry and the emotion were becoming alive through this adaption and becoming more understandable and intelligible through the intensification of perception.

Integration in continuity

Just as Dewey rejects previous theories of aesthetics in the analytical tradition of philosophy, so he rejects theories of 'essence' in traditional metaphysics. To him the artist's perception informs expression, and expression brings together meanings both in the artwork and in the maker. If there is an essence that is where it lies.

'Through imagination, experience becomes expressive. In art, unlike mechanical production, ends and means are thoroughly integrated: through this experience the self grows' (Alexander,

2002, p. 4). The practices of reading, writing and imagining come together in this intensification. Dewey played an important role in rethinking aesthetics away from the analytical tradition of considering art and aesthetics as an objective site of philosophy.

[H]e would [...] insist that art's wide-ranging value is better established not by shunning the notion of the aesthetic but rather by reconstructively reinterpreting it in richer terms which recognize the cognitive and practical import of aesthetic experience and, more generally, the continuity of art and the aesthetic with the everyday world of thought and action. (Shusterman, 1992, p. 29)

To Dewey an aesthetic quality is emotional, but emotions are not static; they are processes of complex change and continuity in the everyday life world. 'Emotion is a cementing force that gives diverse things their qualitative unity' (Leddy, 2016). Expression in art as experience is 'governed by the idea of *communication*' (Alexander, 1996, p. 120; emphasis in original), and this involves a critical process in the artist and writer. Here, Dewey even starts to sound like Heidegger – or perhaps that goes a step too far as Dewey contra Heidegger does retain his sense of instrumentalism (but not the logic of correspondence) in and through his argumentation. Notwithstanding, when Dewey speaks of art as *artwork*, it is the *work* of art as a process not a work of art as product. The form of the artwork is the 'way the work gives organisation to experience: it is the pattern of the "working of the work", to use Heidegger's phrase' (Alexander, 1996, p. 121). The work of art situates its life in the cultural context in which experiencing occurs as in the intensive writing experiments discussed. It was Dewey who said that 'the first approach to any subject in school, if thought is to be aroused and not words acquired, should be as unscholastic as possible' (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 154). The learning lies at the point of realisation about what an empirical situation may give rise to. Imagination through active experience plays its part. As Alexander said, 'Through the aesthetic, we grasp the significance of the imagination as the transformation of the world through action' (Alexander 1992, cited in Garrison, 1995, p. 423). This approach could well be implemented more generally in schools today to disturb the instrumentalisation of knowledge and learning and the relentless quest to meet the intrusive demands of auditable outcomes.

Conclusion

The discussion has investigated the question not of what poetry as the work of art *is*, but of what poetry as the work of art *does* within the experiences of reader and writer; and how the impetus of art as experience may imbue coherence in a child's learning. It is in the realm of direct experience, not of conceptual or propositional logic, that Dewey offers a way of re-imagining learning through experience and being attuned to that moment of experience. This attunement, as considered by the three learning examples in this paper, contains 'the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience' (Dewey, 1934, pp. 18–19).

In the aesthetic experience so defined by Dewey there is for the reader, maker or viewer an active process of clarification, even purification, as meanings and prior experiences come together in the coherence of present perception. This restoration of continuity becomes accessible for future experiences of living in the world, in commonplace times of remembering, perceiving and expressing meanings imaginatively and intelligently.

The learners in each of the examples in this paper have found the potential to perceive an aesthetic experience for life in a 'zestful integration of all the elements of ordinary experience' (Shusterman, 1992, p. 15). They have found ways of learning by being fully present to the moment of art as experience. They have found ways of accessing past experiences and bringing those into the present through shared language in social situations. From this, Dewey is showing that learning by direct experience of artworks may bring together disparate facets of emotions, perceptions and imagination into a coherent whole, an experience that prepares a child learner for living fully in the commonplace world of everyday actions. Thus, learning through art as experience becomes a learning for all purposes, in regards to all and everything: *in tota fine erga omnes et omnia*.

Notes

1. Each of these examples comes from direct personal experience. In the first example, I was present as one of the family members; in the second example I was the 11-year old child reflecting later as the adult writing as Elizabeth Botting (maiden name of Elizabeth Grierson); in the third example I was the teacher, 'Miss B'.
2. Latin: for all purposes, in regards to all and everything.
3. Gloria Jasmine Rawlinson was a well-known New Zealand poet and writer. She was born in 1918, and died aged 76 in Auckland, on 25 July 1995.
4. Kauri, koromiko and kowhai are New Zealand native trees.
5. The *tiki* or *hei-tiki* in New Zealand is a neck pendant of human figure carved from *pounamu* or greenstone. The *tiki* is regarded as a *taonga* or treasure.

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