Abstract

Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience involved the use of history as “a potent agent in appreciation of the living present” (p. 23). Dewey meant his statement as an educational prescription, but it also has significant research implications. These implications can be understood in terms of studying the history of a topic versus using history in research on outdoor education (Weatherbee, 2012). The article first uses the example of experiential learning to illustrate the importance of using history in research for understanding core concepts. The article then discusses Dewey’s principles of continuity and interaction to show how time functions in a more expansive way in experience than commonly recognized and how it might guide research design. Experience therefore provides a set of historically reflexive guidelines for researchers concerned with the relationships between cultural and psychological processes in outdoor education.

KEYWORDS: outdoor education; experiential learning; John Dewey; intellectual history; research methodology
John Dewey is regarded as a foundational figure in outdoor education (Smith & Knapp, 2011). His concept of experience has frequently been cited as a basis for contemporary models of experiential learning (e.g., Kolb, 1984), which have been widely used to justify particular ways of organizing practice and studying outcomes (e.g., Beard & Wilson, 2006; Patrick & Moseley, 2016). Disputes have arisen over the interpretation of Dewey’s idea of experience, however (Quay, 2017), with some authors maintaining that experiential learning omits crucial dimensions of the concept and relates to it only superficially (Miettinen, 2000; Seaman & Nelsen, 2011). Dewey’s own position on the term experience supports this view, which, when pondering a rewrite of Experience and Nature in 1949, Dewey expressed regret over having used: “I would abandon the term ‘experience,’” he wrote, and in its place “… would substitute the term ‘culture’ because with its meanings as now firmly established it can freely carry my philosophy of experience” (Dewey, 1949/1981, p. 361; cf. Ord & Leather, 2011, p. 15). Dewey (1949/1981) explained his preference for culture by citing the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, who described it as “at the same time psychological and collective” (p. 364). Experience was therefore intended to explain how learning is a cultural, not just psychological, process.

The fact that Dewey ultimately abandoned the term experience is curious for a field that both adulates and cites him liberally as a founder of “experiential” learning and education. For instance, Shellman (2014) joined a chorus of authors who heralded Dewey as “the ‘father’ of experiential education” (p. 19; see also Bisson, 2009; Neill, 2005; Priest & Gass, 2005). James and Williams (2017) opened their article by declaring, “For more than 100 years, the works of John Dewey (1916/1944) have espoused the values of experiential education” (p. 58). Even Ord and Leather (2011), who used Dewey to critique “oversimplified” models of experiential learning, nonetheless attribute the idea to him: “Our aim is to give the reader a fuller and more detailed understanding of the Deweyan foundations of experiential learning” (p. 13). The possibility that Deweyan foundations have little to do with experiential learning is not raised in any of these sources; his abandonment of the term experience seems to have escaped notice.

The main casualty in the transformation of Dewey’s theory of experience into “experiential learning” has been culture—an omission that neglects the profound methodological implications of the theory. The absence of culture as a priority in outdoor education research has left the field vulnerable to criticisms that it has not sufficiently adapted to the dynamic nature of modern society (Brown & Beames, 2017) and that it propagates inaccurate “foundation myths” (Brookes, 2016) and hegemonic “paradigms” (Warren & Coco-Ripp, 2012) that inhibit goals for inclusion and expansion. Restoring a notion of culture to outdoor education research can help address these criticisms, which I discuss as a methodological issue.

The purpose of this article is to argue for the importance of historical reflexivity (Weatherbee, 2012) in outdoor education research to reclaim Dewey’s emphasis on culture in learning. Weatherbee’s distinction between history of and history in frames what I mean by historical reflexivity. He differentiates history in from the past—events as they happened, which are irretrievable—and history of, the act of interpreting and writing about the past. History of involves doing historical research as conventionally understood. History in goes further, requiring all researchers to acknowledge that “as we are actors in the world we study, we ourselves are also products of particular historical and sociopolitical contexts” (p. 202). A commitment to using history in research, Weatherbee argues, requires researchers to acknowledge “what it is we do and the implications of how we do it” (p. 206) as a central part of the research enterprise. Weatherbee’s point is to incorporate history into research as a design feature and as a sensibility toward one’s questions, concepts, methods, and claims. Historical reflexivity is also essential to understanding what Dewey meant by experience/culture as both psychological and collective, a shift in focus that can help address concerns over the relevance of outdoor education to diverse cultural communities, social issues, and individual differences.

In what follows, I explain why historical reflexivity matters and describe one way to accomplish it: by revisiting Dewey’s theory of experience to examine his handling of time—an element...
of Dewey’s theory that has been overlooked because of misreadings of *Experience and Education* (Dewey, 1938) and an overreliance on psychologistic reasoning in contemporary models of experiential learning (for discussions, see Bell, 1993; Fenwick, 2001; Hopkins, 1993; Miettinen, 2000; Quay, 2003). I present the argument in three parts. The first uses the example of experiential learning to illustrate why a clearer view of history is important for understanding core ideas guiding research. The second section provides a close reading of key sections of Dewey’s (1938) *Experience and Education*, showing how the principles of continuity and interaction entail three dimensions of time: historical time, developmental time, and event/real time—which should be interpreted methodologically as a whole. The final section uses examples from the wider literature to discuss research implications in three areas: defining central concepts, studying interventions and community processes, and linking multiple timescales.

**How Experience Became Experiential Learning**

Dewey’s turn to culture over experience as the preferred metatheoretical frame for his educational philosophy suggests that outdoor educators looking to his ideas as a conceptual anchor for so-called experiential learning and education may be misreading his corpus of work. Indeed, Dewey (1949/1981) renounced the term *experience* in 1949 because people were already misinterpreting the idea:

> ... by an ironical twist of events which I failed to comprehend, the theoretical grounds that can be cited for using “experience” as the needed name are historically identical with the obstacles that effectively stand in the way of the name being understood in the senses I intended. (p. 362)

He saw *experience* being interpreted “in the sense of the psychological, and the psychological has become established as that which is intrinsically psychical, mental, private” (Dewey, 1949/1981, p. 362); this is not the sense he intended. Experiential learning has been criticized for being reductive in exactly this way, defining learning as fundamentally distinct from context and knowledge as a property of the individual (Fenwick, 2001). Take, for instance, Itin’s (1999) influential description: “... experiential learning is best considered as the change in an individual that results from reflection on a direct experience and results in new abstractions and applications” (p. 92). While some sources admit context as a feature in experiential learning, it is typically discussed as a kind of surround that “influences” psychological processes (e.g., Boud & Walker, 1998; Ord & Leather, 2011; for discussions, see Cole, 1996, and Seaman & Rheingold, 2013). In contrast, Dewey viewed psychological processes as constituted by history and culture, not surrounded by them.

In the story that Dewey tells of his late terminological change, history plays two parts: (1) as giving rise to the obstacles preventing understanding of experience as he intended it and (2) as one of the main dimensions of experience that was consequently neglected. The irony to which Dewey referred is that he developed experience precisely to capture the unity of psychical, historical, and cultural processes, but his efforts were undermined by the same ahistorical and individualistic epistemology he was trying to overthrow (see Dewey, 1915, 1915/1990, 1929/1999, 1934/2008; Westbrook, 1991; for related work, see Morgan & Harris, 2015). Dewey did not live to see the irony occur again with the rise of experiential learning.

**The Forgotten History of Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning has come to be regarded as a “general model of learning” (Miettinen, 2000, p. 54) whose origins extend to Plato (Wurdinger, 1995). Although this timeline is undoubtedly true for the broader phenomenon of learning from experience (which is to say, all of human learning), the scholarly record indicates experiential learning *as such* was not mentioned much before the mid-1960s.
Judging by the scholarly record, experiential learning either was called something else before 1960 or it emerged in the 1960s and has accelerated ever since. The project of understanding experiential learning therefore partly requires doing a history of the topic, as it involves questions about what currents in the 1950s launched use of the phrase in subsequent decades, how the phrase relates to the phenomenon it seeks to describe, and what accounts for its growth. The usefulness of future research on the topic will depend partly on answering such questions.

The story I will tell about experiential learning begins not with Dewey but with Kurt Lewin in New Britain, Connecticut, in June 1946 at the first human relations training laboratory (Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). The purpose of the laboratory, designed and led by Lewin and his associates, was to enlist workshop participants in creating more effective strategies for area communities to combat racism and anti-Semitism (Lippitt, 1949; Marrow, 1967). Experiential learning did not yet exist as a method or theory and was not a phrase Lewin used, but instead emerged as an accidental by-product of the training. As Kolb (1984) described it, “When the participants went home at night, the research staff gathered together to report and analyze the data collected during the day. . . . Lewin was receptive . . . when a small group of participants asked to join in these discussions” (p. 9). In this particular event, people approached their own conduct in previous workshops as a kind of behavioral data they then discussed collectively, a process formally instituted in subsequent workshops as the “training” or “T-” group (Benne, 1964). The design structure of T-groups and the associated outcomes of self-awareness and interpersonal relations initially became known as experiential learning (Benne, 1964). Its transformation into a more general theory of learning occurred over several periods during the next 30 years and is attributable to the rising popularity of humanistic psychology and personal growth workshops during this period (for further elaboration, see Seaman et al., 2017).

1947–1949: Experimentation Period

After the inaugural 1946 training, leaders ran subsequent workshops in Bethel, Maryland, as the National Training Laboratory, or NTL. Workshops in this period were highly experimental.
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with designers testing different group configurations and balances of academic content with interpersonal skills training (e.g., Babad, Birnbaum, & Benne, 1978; Barron & Krulee, 1948). During this period, the workshops retained their focus on applying insights generated during the training to different community problems.

1949–1955: Separation Period

A main program element during the experimentation period was the Basic Skills Training (BST) group, soon shortened to T, for training. T-groups were orchestrated to generate behavioral data in the immediacy of the here and now, and collectively analyze it for insights into group dynamics and members’ personalities. According to Benne (1964), because of the popularity of T-groups among participants and the psychotherapeutic and humanistic backgrounds of new NTL trainers, T-groups overwhelmed other workshop components and spun off as a distinct training format (e.g., sensitivity training; see Wechsler, Tannenbaum, & Zenger, 1957).

1955–1976 Expansion/Codification Period

By the late 1950s, the T-group structure had spawned a range of programs and techniques such as encounter groups and marathon workshops (Eddy & Lubin, 1971). These came to be described as experiential learning groups, all of which focused on self-awareness and interpersonal relations (Barrett-Leonard, 1974). During this time, the phrase experiential learning not only referred to T-groups but also started being applied to learning processes corresponding to the format when people sought to explain and adapt workshop outcomes. These two uses of the phrase experiential learning—a training format and a psychological process—were soon used interchangeably (e.g., Middleman & Goldberg, 1972). David Kolb, an advocate for the human relations approach (including in outdoor education; see Katz & Kolb, 1968), consummated the union of format and theory in schematic models he published at the time (e.g., Kolb & Fry, 1975). By 1976, experiential learning had expanded considerably as a specific type of humanistic social practice and a tightly associated theory of individual learning that was partly attributed to Dewey, even though he was not involved with or responsible for its creation.

After 1976, experiential learning entered what I’ll call its sedimentation period, when the phrase and related models became available for referencing without any further elaboration or historical justification; they stood for learning in general and could be applied and investigated in a range of settings. This move to a general theory of learning coincided with the rising influence of cognitive psychology and the popularity of psychometric testing for assessing individual characteristics such as learning styles (Kolb, 1976; see Hopkins, 1993, for a discussion). Citations of the most recognizable model, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, have escalated in the decades since its initial appearance (see Figure 2). The availability of experiential learning as a theoretical vocabulary, decoupled from its origins in a particular form of quasi-therapeutic group practice in adult education, contributed to exponential growth that surely helped popularize the idea. The advent of Internet search engines in the mid-1990s also gave researchers easy access to this vocabulary and imposed no requirements to look beyond Kolb's 1984 book as the definitive and final source for the theory of experiential learning. Nevertheless, treating experiential learning as a theory about a psychological process of individual change represents a departure from what it was initially: a phrase describing the format and methods of the T-group and its related aims of self-awareness and interpersonal relations. The result of this transformation was that “the rich variety and modes of human experience characteristic of various human activities [were] replaced by a narrow and particularistic conception of experience” (Miettinen, 2000, p. 61).
This brief sketch indicates that experiential learning underwent the same kind of psychological reduction that drove Dewey to abandon the concept of experience. In Weatherbee’s (2012) terms, articles using the phrase experiential learning as a theory without respect to its origins are also doing a kind of historical work, only unconsciously: They contribute to a kind of collective amnesia by treating the past as irrelevant to the immediate research at hand. Meanwhile, individualistic assumptions inherited from the origins of the idea in humanistic psychology may be generating shortcomings in research and restricting educational practice (Towers & Loynes, 2018).

Dewey’s Idea of Culture as a Guide for Using History in Research

Dewey’s turn to culture over experience suggests he wished to prevent further reduction of his ideas to psychological and methodological individualism. For him, historical reflexivity was an integral dimension of his theory. In Experience and Education, Dewey (1938) expressed this priority as a rhetorical question: “How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present?” (p. 23). He answered this question by introducing the principles of continuity and interaction, stating that their “active union with each other provide [sic] the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience” (pp. 44–45). This is an important framing for the book, as it binds continuity and interaction to a certain use of history.

To understand how these principles work methodologically, one must recall Dewey’s turn to culture and his view of history as a tool for interpreting the present. To date, these metatheoretical commitments have not been applied to continuity and interaction by outdoor and experiential educators. I illustrate this point by highlighting three representative discussions of continuity and interaction found in popular and academic sources pertinent to outdoor and experiential educators. It is useful to track how they each handle culture and time, which are central to grasping Dewey’s idea of experience.

Continuity is that each experience a person has will influence his or her future, for better or for worse. Interaction refers to the situational influence on one’s experience. In other words, one’s present experience is a function of the interaction between one’s past experiences and the present situation. (Neill, 2005, para. 8)

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Figure 2. References to “experiential learning” and “Kolb & Fry” (1975) and “Kolb” (1984) in Google Scholar by decade.
This first passage encourages readers to imagine experience episodically and from the first-person perspective, as Dewey sometimes did (e.g., “an experience,” “one’s experience”). The relevant scale of time is the biography, with past and present as the most significant coordinates for determining educative value. Readers must infer an idea of culture from this passage, but it is unclear in this passage how history, apart from an individual’s past, matters to experience.

For an experience to be considered “educative,” it also had to lead the learner on to new experiences, that is, to adhere to what Dewey called the “principle of continuity” (e.g., 1938, p. 28). These two intertwined characteristics, interaction and continuity, were what distinguished educative experiences from others. (Beard, 2018, p. 28)

In this passage, experience is again presented episodically; however, the passage connects the present with the future as the determinant of value, but it does not mention the past. It does not specify who is the agent of the momentum connecting present and future: “the learner,” someone designing “experiences,” or some other force. Again, culture must be inferred.

Dewey’s naturalistic conception of intelligence . . . [informs] our understanding of continuity as characterizing the driven, incremental, and ultimately integrated growth of cultural sensitivity and expertise, and interaction as characterizing the dynamic processes through which cultural sensitivity and expertise are achieved . . . (Mayer, 2015, pp. 41–42)

This final passage references culture explicitly, but in the sense of an individual characteristic. It represents time continuously instead of episodically, and it implies but does not discuss explicitly a relationship between two timescales, the biographical and the historical.

These three passages bear some resemblances: They all focus on pedagogy and they all foreground the individual as the focal object in experience. These emphases are understandable given their source material—a book Dewey wrote about education. Yet they depart in important ways. Each handles time differently and demonstrates more or less concern for culture. What explains these differences in interpretation, and how faithful are they to Dewey’s (1938) explanation in Experience and Education, especially in light of his emphasis on history and his turn to culture? Part of the problem in answering this question is that Dewey used experience in multiple ways in his own text; it is both the name of the larger theory he was developing and a term he used casually in developing it. When used in the latter sense, it often carries conventional meaning—experience as a biographic episode viewed from the individual’s perspective, understood psychologically. One can therefore see how the aforementioned descriptions are justified. But what about culture? If by experience Dewey meant culture, as he later indicated, clearly continuity and interaction cannot be understood only episodically or at the individual level, as it would preclude the evolutionary and collective aspects of the idea. This is a crucial omission, as it encourages the individualistic assumptions contained within subsequent models of experiential learning, which have been heavily criticized (e.g., Michelson, 1996).

**Continuity, Interaction, and Timescales**

One difficulty regarding experience in the larger theoretical sense—is that it involves holding different ideas about time in mind simultaneously (see Quay, 2017, on Dewey’s use of time). Grasping Dewey’s ideas on time as a dimension of culture requires a close examination of the details of his argument throughout Experience and Education.

Dewey introduced continuity and interaction in Chapter 3, “Criteria of Experience.” The excerpts from Neill (2005), Beard (2018), and Mayer (2015) mostly capture the gist of this chapter; past experiences influence present ones, which influence future ones. In this manner, the individual can be positively transformed or “arrested on a low plane of development, in a way,
which limits later capacity for growth” (Dewey, 1938, pp. 37–38). Dewey’s description justifies psychological interpretations like those offered by Neill (2005) and Beard (2018) in their descriptions. Dewey continued,

But . . . experience does not go on simply inside a person. . . . Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had. . . . we live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities. (p. 39)

Here Dewey introduced evolutionary, technological change as a feature of continuity. Continuity involves accounting for changes on two levels, then: individual, and historical or evolutionary.

Moving to interaction, which Dewey (1938) called the “lateral” dimension of experience, he described a mother feeding a baby: “Instead of [external] conditions being subordinated to the immediate internal condition [i.e., the expressed biological needs] of the baby, they are definitely ordered so that a particular kind of interaction with these immediate internal states may be brought about . . .” (p. 42). He continued,

The word “interaction,” which has just been used, expresses the second chief principle for interpreting an experience in its educational function and force. It assigns equal rights to both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a situation. (p. 42)

Situation, Dewey (1938) explained, is “inseparable” from interaction:

The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations. And when it is said that they live in these situations, the meaning of the word “in” is different from its meaning when it is said that pennies are “in” a pocket or paint is “in” a can. . . . An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time [emphasis added], constitutes his environment . . . (p. 43)

I want to pause and note that Dewey was defining continuity, interaction, situation, and “in” as interrelated, technical concepts that are part of a systematic argument he is developing. One has to resist the urge to impose commonsense meanings on these terms. To break into this argument, it helps to focus on “at the time” in the passage. He meant time in at least two senses. First, he obviously meant (a) the immediate material and social environment. Second and less obviously, he meant (b) the individual’s developmental stage. The interaction of these two elements constitutes the situation, since B determines the meaning of A from the learner’s perspective (see also Vygotsky, 1930/1994). Dewey (1938) made this point directly:

It is not enough that certain materials and methods have proved effective with other individuals at other times. There must be a reason for thinking that they will function in generating an experience that has educative quality with particular individuals at a particular time.

It is no reflection upon the nutritive quality of beefsteak that it is not fed to infants. It is not an invidious reflection upon trigonometry that we do not teach it in the first or fifth grade of school. It is not the subject per se that is educative or that is conducive to growth. There is no subject that is in and of itself, or without regard to the stage of growth attained by the learner, such that inherent educational value can be attributed to it. (p. 46)

“Significance and value” of an experience is, therefore, always relative to the learner’s developmental stage, because this determines what constitutes the environment at the time. This is a
main criterion of experience in an educational sense and a central premise of Deweyan psychology. Moreover, it introduces developmental time as one dimension of time in experience. Understanding experience therefore requires a theory of human development, without which situation is theoretically trivial, as are continuity and interaction and any application they might have to education. I will discuss the implications of this point shortly.

In Chapters 4 to 6, Dewey (1938) dropped the topic of continuity after explaining in Chapter 3 (a) that experience consists equally of subjective and objective conditions, (b) these are understood relative to a person’s given developmental period, and (c) the interaction between developmental periods and objective conditions occurs in situations—bearing in mind that “in” implies a more dynamic perspective on context than is often recognized. Chapter 3 can be read as an outline of Dewey’s theory of human development, viewed psychologically.

In Chapter 7, “Progressive Organization of Subject Matter,” Dewey (1938) turned his focus to the “objective conditions” part of experience; this is the sociological side of his argument. He opened the chapter with a developmental description of infancy and childhood once again before focusing on “orderly development toward expansion and organization of subject matter through growth of experience” (p. 74). But to what is this “outward” movement directed, and how does it pertain to continuity and interaction? To answer these questions, one must examine the section where he justified his preference for the scientific method:

For if it is true that existing experience in detail and also on a wide scale is what it is [emphasis added] because of the application of science, first, to processes of production and distribution of goods and services, and then to the relations which human beings sustain socially to one another, it is impossible to obtain an understanding of present social conditions . . . apart from an education which leads learners into knowledge of the very same facts and principles which in their final organization constitute the sciences. . . . [which have] been applied more or less casually and under the influence of ends, such as private advantage and power, which are a heritage of a prescientific age. (Dewey, 1938, pp. 80–81)

Here Dewey (1938) integrated social and political critique into his theory of experience as well as into his use of time. Technological evolution is not only a product of science but also a source of inequality, which only an updated, more democratic application of science can ameliorate, in part by helping uncover and remedy society’s undemocratic “heritage.” Moreover, the material and social products of prior human activities constitute the objective qualities of experience in all senses of the term and by necessary implication are subject to change in the future. Therefore, immediate psychological and social processes are always dynamically changing in relation to longer timescale processes of historical evolution, which are also subject to manipulation by people seeking private gain through the institutions they erect and the ideas that sustain their power and privilege. Dewey wanted to intervene in these dynamics (which he also posited as features of modern consciousness; see Seaman & Quay, 2015) because they are hostile to democracy. Education, and educational research, should be attuned to their psychological and collective ramifications, which also evolve over time in relation to changes in human activity, that is, changes in culture.

Time as a main dimension of continuity and interaction as criteria of experience now comes fully into view. To understand Dewey’s meaning when he said that “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 43), one must hold three ideas about time in mind simultaneously: (1) developmental time, or the scale of ontogenetic life stages (cognitive, etc.); (2) historical time, or the scale of scientific/technological evolution and civilizational change; and (3) event time, or the scale of situations, which operates in time as experienced ordinarily (“real time”), and is where the other two timescales interact (on real time and developmental time; see Kunnen & Metz, 2015). Figure 3 provides an illustration of these dimensions.
When Dewey said an individual is “in” a situation, he had in mind a mutually constituting relationship between person and environment, each changing along different timescales, mediated by present conditions. This was Dewey’s conception of culture. It is in event time that historical and psychological processes reveal their continuity, making it the leverage point for educational intervention and the focal point for research.

*Experience and Education* (Dewey, 1938) is therefore not about making learning or education more “experiential”; it is about designing a system of education that harnesses the ontological fact of continuity between historical, cultural, and psychological processes for individual and social benefit in rapidly evolving industrial democracies—something neither traditional nor progressive viewpoints were capable of, from Dewey’s perspective. One can look to Dewey’s lab school to see how he intended these ideas to work (see Tanner, 1997), or to examples today where young people are involved in civic action informed by an understanding of their community’s past and their anticipated role in its future (e.g., Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005; see also Beames & Brown, 2016). Another way to understand this point is to read *Experience and Education* as Dewey’s effort to apply his pragmatic, historical ontology of experience to education—not as a call to make education more experiential. And, since Dewey’s argument in the book is essentially ontological, it also has methodological implications.

**Experience as Research Methodology**

Experience provides an irreducible unit of analysis for approaching educational situations empirically. Any investigation of psychological or social processes, from specific program outcomes, to a developmental transition, to a period of rapid community transformation, requires researchers to account for three scales of time: developmental time, historical time, and their interaction in event time. In other words, the reciprocal influence of historical time and developmental time occurs in situations, which can be subjected to empirical study in real time. Research
at any of these levels therefore requires, in Weatherbee's (2012) terms, historical reflexivity. This assertion has several implications for research in outdoor education including defining central concepts, examining the relationship between interventions and community processes, and asking broader questions that link multiple timescales.

History in: Defining Central Concepts

Experiential learning. I have already sketched a history of experiential learning here and elsewhere (Seaman et al., 2017), but the research implications of this history are worth underscoring. At the end of *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) wrote, “The basic question concerns the nature of education with no qualifying adjectives prefixed” (p. 90). The same thing may now apply to learning: *The basic question concerns the nature of learning with no qualifying adjectives prefixed*. With respect to empirical research in outdoor education, it is no longer clear to me that *experiential learning* serves a useful function as either a phrase or a theory. This was Fenwick's (2001) point in her seminal comparison of different perspectives (but see Kolb, 2014, for a response to recent criticism). It might be fruitful for future research to focus merely on learning, which frees scholars (and educators) from the humanistic baggage that comes with the prefix *experiential* owing to the origins of the concept in T-groups. It also opens up the study of learning in outdoor programs to investigation from different vantage points, which should lead to new insights. If, however, researchers still want to use experiential learning as either a theory or the object of study, they should be expected to do a more careful job justifying this choice relative to the history of the idea in T-groups and its humanistic assumptions about psychological and social processes and their relation to instructional design.

Grit. Outcome variables such as grit and resilience are currently enjoying popularity (e.g., Chang, Davidson, Conklin, & Ewert, 2019), perhaps because they intuitively accord with long-standing beliefs about the relationship between adventure, hardship, and character. Although my concern is not with grit per se, it serves as a useful example of how seemingly benign, psychological concepts have social histories that bear on their current interpretation and use.

Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) define *grit* as a combination of “perseverance and a passion for long-term goals” (p. 1087). It is part of a suite of so-called noncognitive factors beyond IQ that are presently being investigated to explain achievement. Researchers view grit psychologically, as an aspect of one's personality. Because measures of grit are now widely available, it lends itself to research in outdoor education as a variable that helps to operationalize an otherwise vague legacy idea.

Like experiential learning, however, the concept of grit has a more complex history than indicated in the current psychometric approach. In his content analysis of popular and academic sources on grit over the 20th century, Ris (2015) traced the term to Nathaniel Hawthorne, who used it in 1863 to characterize a British poet in a way very similar to Duckworth's definition. It then functioned as a literary trope designed to appeal to the anxieties of middle- and upper-middle-class parents who feared affluence was making their children soft. Now, Ris demonstrated, it is being applied to students of color in underperforming schools, with potentially negative consequences: “The grit discourse allows privileged socioeconomic groups to preserve their position under the guise of creative pedagogy. This phenomenon does not require malevolence on the part of its enactors. In fact, it can coexist with perfectly benign intentions” (p. 2). Ris's point is that narrow, ahistorical uses of grit as a psychometric variable hide the normative cultural work the concept has done for over a century, which outdoor educators may be unwittingly extending through their research. This example shows that seemingly innocuous variables can introduce potential biases that tacitly reproduce and justify an unequal social order (for an example related to risk, see Morrissey, 2008).

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Interventions and Community Processes

Historical reflexivity also has implications for studying interventions. As one example, Hammack (2006) studied a summer camp designed to engage Israeli and Palestinian youth in collaborative activities, to promote long-term, regional peace, a program model that should be familiar to many outdoor educators. Hammack situated the camp in two historical contexts: (1) He labeled the design a “human relations” approach, so as to make transparent the underlying belief about the mechanism for political change (positive face-to-face interaction), and (2) he sought specific forms of religious and political antagonism in his empirical data rather than relying on second-order themes such as whether or not participants learned conflict mediation skills. With the first context, Hammack focused on the underlying etiology of a program instead of its superficial pedagogical features, and with the second context, he assessed this etiology in light of specific, entrenched cultural histories. Through these methodological choices, he demonstrated empirically how long-running narratives of religious and political conflict are transmitted intergenerationally through the identity processes of youth—even among participants in a program intended to reduce those very conflicts. Hammack's research therefore provides a potential model for studying particular interventions in the context of both design beliefs and cultural narratives, which experience indicates are present in any educational situation through the interaction and continuity of historical, psychological, and social processes. Hammack's work provides a potential model for outdoor educators studying, for example, racial diversity in outdoor programs, in which community histories are directly relevant (see Rose & Paisley, 2012; Savoy, 2016).

Linking Multiple Timescales

Hammack's (2006) research also demonstrates the intersection of different timescales: in his case, individual autobiography and cultural “master narratives.” The former changes along the coordinates of developmental time and the latter along historical time. This kind of research involves identifying the dominant processes at each timescale that are likely to be involved in the expected changes and requires greater integration of developmental theory in any study of learning. In Hammack's study, the relevant processes were identity formation and generational change. The leading assumption in this approach is not that the processes “interact” as separate “factors,” but rather that they are mutually constituting (Erikson, 1968/1994; see also Dewey's definition of “in” in the introduction to the article). Kunnen and Metz (2015) made a similar point and argued for studying these processes in event (real) time, to “answer questions about how identity changes and stabilizes on a developmental long-term level as a consequence of daily experience on a microlevel” (p. 115). Kunnen and Metz’s essential claim is that whatever else adolescents are doing in any given moment, they are also participating in identity formation—what Polivanova (2006) called the period’s leading activity, to which all other developmental tasks are subordinated. Identity, then, might assume a much greater role in practice and research on outdoor education with adolescents (e.g., see Schachter & Rich, 2011).

This position carries at least two implications for outdoor education research. First, researchers may elect to foreground processes occurring at any one of these timescales, but satisfactorily explaining the focal process will require referencing the other two timescales. Kellert’s (2002) developmental theory of biophilic values provides an example. He proposed that the outcomes of children’s contact with nature are governed by three basic stages of development: (1) ages 3–6, which “involves a primary emphasis on satisfying the child’s material and physical needs, avoiding threat and danger, and achieving feelings of control, comfort, and security” (p. 132); (2) ages 6–12, when children “become more comfortable, familiar, and appreciative of other creatures and natural settings” (p. 133); and (3) ages 13–17, when “children become cognizant and appreciative of larger spatial and temporal scales...” (p. 135). Activities in nature
during these periods support qualitatively different developmental processes in affective, cognitive, and values-based domains. The dominant developmental processes occurring in each of these periods drive children's engagement with nature and determine any ultimate outcomes associated with that engagement. Furthermore, these event and developmental time processes are influenced by broader cultural patterns such as land development, technological innovation, and child-rearing practices. These longer timescale processes will shape the availability of nature-based activities, children's orientation to those activities, and any outcomes derived from them.

Second, measures should be selected that are likely to reflect expectable changes in focal variables at the relevant timescale. As Kunnen and Metz (2015) explained, “The lowest order time scale is the real-time scale: the scale of current behavior, of what happens in seconds or minutes. Developmental time is a higher order time scale and describes processes that cover months or even years” (pp. 122–123). A substantial portion of outdoor education research over the years has sought to measure changes related to various aspects of self following participation in an outdoor program (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). Self is a concept pertaining to the process of identity formation, which occurs on a different timescale than a program. It is not reasonable to expect changes in self to be detectable in any meaningful way at the scale of real time. It is reasonable to expect changes in some of the elements that constitute this longer term process: enhanced feelings of school belonging, adoption of new long-range goals, expanded friendships, and so on. Directly measuring self variables at the scale of real time is an elusive business and probably a misguided approach. My point is not that outdoor programs are incapable of generating powerful effects that influence longer term developmental processes, but rather that research will benefit from a more detailed conceptualization of the relationship between event and developmental time and the careful selection and coordination of variables related to each. Longitudinal designs can help outdoor educators to understand the relationship between program effects occurring in event time and longer term processes occurring in developmental time, as can some qualitative methodologies that locate specific experiences as part of evolving life stories (e.g., McAdams, 2008).

Conclusion
Given the reasons Dewey turned to culture in 1949, it is once again ironic that his theory of experience has transformed into experiential learning through the very same processes that led him to abandon the term—the reduction of psychology to individualism and time to the scale of personal biography. It is doubly ironic because the transformation was yet again achieved by neglecting history. Clearly in this case, history of (Weatherbee, 2012) will be important in gaining clarity on the origins of foundational ideas and practices. But more important, history in will be essential to asking better questions in the future. I have made several suggestions on what this could involve: exhuming the history of specific concepts, situating interventions in the context of community histories, and better aligning outcomes across different scales of time. These suggestions are not exhaustive, but they may provide a starting point for outdoor education research equipped with a greater historical sensibility, for research, like education, “can expand into the future only as it is also enlarged to take in the past” (Dewey, 1938, p. 77).

References

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