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Abstract submission

John Quay – working paper.

Organizing education: Boundaries of knowledge, of activity, of life.

Dewey (1909, p. 29) saw schooling as framed by a threefold, a “trinity” comprised of “(1) the life of the school as a social institution in itself; (2) methods of learning and of doing work; and (3) the school studies or curriculum.” In another place he described this trinity as that of “subject matter, methods, and administration or government” (1916, p. 193). It is plain that issues concerning method and subject matter are continually being discussed and rehearsed amongst educators in efforts at improvement. But we sometimes neglect to consider how this discourse assumes a form of organization that is driven by subject-matter classification, or in the case of the co-curricular, by a focus on method.

In this paper I problematize the way that academic subjects (derived from disciplinary subject matter) and co-curricular offerings (built around activities) structure the very basics of school organization. In doing so I call on Dewey’s notion of occupation to provide an alternative organizational frame that is closer to life. Occupation is understood by Dewey in an aesthetic sense (holistic forms of social life), as continuous purposeful activity (method), and as an organizing principle for knowledge (subject matter). Thus Dewey’s (1916, p. XX) understanding of an “education *through* occupations” (not to be confused with versions of vocational education) illuminates how forms of social life may act as boundaries that encompass both method and subject matter, and that these perhaps offer a better way of organizing education.

Dewey, J. (1909). *The moral principles in education*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin & Co.

Dewey, J. (1916a). *Democracy and education*. New York: The Free Press.