A "Fundamental Theory" of Education Grounded in Ontology? A Phenomenological Rejoinder / James M. Magrini

Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenological possibility of transcending the impoverished ontological state of contemporary "standardized" education (*social efficiency*), which forecloses original ways of Being-and-learning. Focused on the notion of *phenomenological self-hood*, I elucidate a fundamental educational theory, which holds the potential of inspiring a renewed conception of curriculum design and *praxis*. Envisioning a reconceived notion of world and human being, I look to the realm of "absorbed coping," a mode of *Being-in-the-world* that antedates both practical comportment and theoretical comportment. It is a mode of existence wherein we literally "learn" to respond to the "address" of world and others. Building hermeneutically on this analysis, a fundamental theory of education emerges, which is grounded ontologically in the "lived experience" of "pre-theoretical" comportment. Ultimately, I reveal the essential aim of education for thematic analysis, which is the human's primordial search for meaning. This, I claim, is an *original* form of Being-educated, and beyond, it is the essential *ontological-meaning-structure* giving form to all instances of learning and the theoretical manifestation thereof.

Keywords:

Phenomenology, Ontology, Education, Heidegger, Dreyfus, Vandenberg, Philosophy of Education, Fundamental Educational Theory

Introduction

<1> As an educational researcher I am concerned with the following *grounding* question: Can there be a fundamental educational theory grounded in ontology? My rejoinder emerges from a critical engagement with contemporary phenomenological studies in dialogue with the history of curriculum theorizing and the reading of *curriculum as phenomenological text*. Working to develop the notion of a fundamental educational theory inspired by a form of phenomenology emerging from a post-Husserlian perspective, this paper unfolds in three sections: (i) I explicate for the reader the impoverished ontological state of contemporary standardized education (*social efficiency*), outlining the potential devastating effects of the learning sciences on the Being of both educators and students, on *phenomenological self-hood*; (ii) I look to Hubert Dreyfus (1981; 1992; 1999; 2001) in order to envision the reconceived notion of world and human being that his unique and complex phenomenology offers, which is radically opposed to the thematized world of contemporary education; drawing on Martin Heidegger's (1962) *fundamental ontology*, Dreyfus provides us with a rich description of the human immersed within the primordial realm of *absorbed coping*, which antedates both practical comportment and theoretical comportment. It is a mode of existence

wherein we literally learn to respond to the address of world and others; and (iii) in relation to Dreyfus' elucidation of primordial lived experience, I look to Donald Vandenberg's (1971; 1974) phenomenology of education in order to speculate on the possibility of a fundamental theory of education, which would find its grounds in ontology, most particularly in the lived experience as described by Dreyfus that Vandenberg understands in terms of pre-theoretical comportment. Vandenberg wonders whether it is possible to envision a form of fundamental theory grounded in the *dialogic principle*, phenomenology's intuitive scanning of lived experience via reflection, description, and interpretation, in search of the essential aim of education, which for him represents the human's primordial search for meaning - and it is this primordial search for meaning emerging from an essential (ontological) meaning-structure "giving" the conditions of the possibility for the original experience of "learning."

<2> Phenomenology, as a qualitative research method in education, e.g., Max van Manen (1990), George Willis (1991), and William Pinar (1994) generally unfolds as a method in the following stages: (i) stage of gathering life experience as text; (ii) stage of analysis, elucidating (describing/interpreting) common themes and patterns of meaning; and (iii) stage of suggesting ways for inspiring improved educational practice. Caution must be exercised when approaching the third stage of the phenomenological method, lest we inevitably encounter a problem, namely, the susceptibility to fall prey to two highly questionable beliefs: first, that phenomenology might somehow be able to solve problems, and secondly, that theory, in a free-floating manner, lives at a remove from *praxis* and further, can be applied to *praxis* in order to predict, control, and direct it. This notion arises, in one sense, because of the conflation of scientific theory and practical theory, and the latter represents the proper purview of educational theory, because all practical theory can hope to do is offer speculative and tentative insight into the things we *should* be doing in our practical involvements - *praxis*, it must be noted, is a realm of danger and precarious uncertainty (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1989; Nicholas Davey, 2006; David Jardine, 1998). In relation to the first questionable belief, Heidegger (1965) states that philosophy might not be able to accomplish anything, however, as he assures us, if we approach it properly, with respect and reverence, perhaps, philosophy might *do* something with us - and thus we must open ourselves up to the call or *address of philosophy*, or, as in this case, *phenomenology*.

<3> The call of phenomenology, as Ted Aoki (2005) indicates, has unfortunately been silenced in the era of *social efficiency* in contemporary education. This is quite properly an issue of attunement, we are trapped in a way of seeing, understanding, interpreting, and discoursing about our existence that restricts our vision (as visionary-seeing). We experience education as a series of problems to be solved, students as products, and worse, subjects in their manipulability, learning becomes an outcomes-driven activity grounded in pre-determined goals, objectives, aims, and abstracted standards of so-called *achievement*. This, I claim, has devastating effects on the way we view and interact with humans. In a phenomenological manner, we might say that contemporary education has silenced, covered-over, and occluded the more primordial and ontological aspects of our Being. Herein, I offer educators a vista into what phenomenology *might* be able to show us in order to inspire us to rethink and reassess the modes of learning that we tend to privilege (especially in the United States) in various standardized versions of education that we have inherited from the tradition of scientific management

as it moves through behavioral psychology and cognitive psychology and now lives as the learning sciences (Michael Schiro, 2009; John Bransford, 2000; Herbert Kliebard, 2004; Peter Taubman, 2009). Many years ago, Vandenberg (1971) formulated the problem we still confront as educators in the era of standardization and NCLB. He explains that "schooling in the post-Sputnik decade" emerged as a manifestation of "the forgetfulness of being," and still today education is largely a manifestation of "the blind, technological mentality that calculates what it wants and then manipulates objects and people…in order to obtain what it wants" (131).

1. The Impoverished Ontology of Contemporary "Standardized" Curriculum

<4> Taubman (2009) identifies two problems emerging from contemporary standardized education, which he traces to the effects of contemporary learning theory, or the science of learning: (i) the erroneous conception of school-as-environment, where education is thought to unfold according to the predictable logic of the continuum of *organism-environment-stimuli-response*, wherein learning occurs when there is an observable and demonstrable change in the student's behavior, and (ii) the issue of curriculum content in education: it is the case that in contemporary schools the actual content, or subject-matter, of learning in the curriculum is reducible to strategies-of-learning, e.g., the rise in *metacognition*, which is expressed in terms of strategies through which students learn about the operations of the mind along with ways to control those operations in order that they might be "applied" to the various tasks of the curriculum. Examining these issues I show how a phenomenological perspective might contribute to re-thinking and *reconceptualizing* the way we interpret, understand, and discourse, not only about education, curriculum, and the students in our classrooms, but also the way in which we conceive ourselves and other human beings. As I examine *social efficiency* in education I ask the reader to keep the following query in mind: How are we conceiving the human being in contemporary standardized education, and does this view do violence to *who* we are as *phenomenological subjects*? It is my view that since education and curriculum continue to be swayed by the findings of the "science of learning," there exists the false belief that when the correct method is employed, through either a naturalist model or computational-computerized model (environmental or neuronal), education has predictable outcomes.

<5> To begin with the first concern, the understanding of the learning environment in education is taken from biology: in straightforward terms, environment is the context within which stimuli and organisms interact. Inside the learning environment the learning transpires, and learning here, as indicated above, means that educators are choosing and introducing the most appropriate stimuli to elicit or induce the so-called correct behavior or desired outcome. In contemporary education in the United States the environment assumes a reality that lives at a remove from human meaning, because it is external to the subject. The so-called *classroom environment* is representative of an "object that exists as a knowable space outside the subjectivities of those who occupy it" (Taubman, 2009, 173). Immediately, a phenomenological concern arises: There is a marked difference, not only in quality, but more importantly, in *type*, between the behaviorist view of the human subject and the human subject as it is conceived in existential-phenomenology. Thus, it is possible to envision a limited and stultifying view of the human being, which *social efficiency* in education is producing, set within the

metaphysics of dualism, conceived in terms of a biological entity. The contemporary student is reduced to an organism within an environment, or "locus of external stimuli - rewards and punishments - that [can] be studied, categorized, and controlled" (172). As indicated, the organism exists within the environment, but is separate from it, and thus the environment can be studied apart from the organism "as well as in terms of the effects it [has] on the organism," and ultimately, "those effects [are] read in the behaviors of the organism" (171). Since this understanding of environment and organism already presupposes a dualist metaphysics with a very specific view of the mind, the learning sciences attempt to "address the dualism of such a concept of environment by positing a 'third space' that joins the two, the space of the mental representation and the inscription of those representations at the neuronal level" (172-173).

<6> This brings us to our second concern: The learning sciences define learning in terms of "retention, retrieval, and the transmission and transfer of pre-determined skills, disposition or knowledge" (183). One of the assumptions of the learning sciences about learning, which is of concern for the phenomenology of education, is that the "content of learning is learning itself," that is, as opposed to authentic curriculum subject-matter, "learning strategies, thinking skills, critical thinking, decision making skills, and adaptive expertise, all of which are often grouped under metacognitive strategies, become the content" (185). *Metacognitive* skills are important to learning sciences because they provide *thought-templates* that are transposable, for the skills and strategies are portable from context to context. *Metacognitive* knowledge is really a problem-solving model for thinking, and includes "knowledge of general strategies that may be used for different tasks, the conditions under which those strategies may be used, the extent to which the strategies are effective" (Lorin Anderson & David Krathwohl, 2001, 43). *Metacognitive* strategies are useful, according to Anderson, in that they allow students to "structure their cognition (e.g., set subgoals), monitor their cognition (e.g., ask themselves questions as they read a piece of text, check their answer to a math problem), and regulate their cognition (e.g., re-read something they don't understand, go back and 'repair' their calculating mistake in a math problem)" (56). As stated, for the most part, *metacognitive* strategies are now emphasized above content knowledge when preparing students for standardized tests, and this holds true from the elementary grades to college entrance/admissions examinations. Here the human is reduced to an information processing unit within which knowledge is stored, retrieved, transmitted, and applied when needed to the problems it encounters, marshaled through the application of *metacognitive* strategies for thinking (Bransford 2000). This view presupposes that the human is primarily directed toward its world in terms of a knowing and calculating mind, a tightly ordered neural-web of information/data. So-called *knowledge* of the world, in the form of mental representations, occurs when the *external* world is assimilated *internally* by the mind, and this knowledge is then expressed in the form of propositional (apodictic) discourse.

<7> All educators are familiar with the scientific method as a problem-solving strategy, which is grounded in a theoretical (*representationalist*) view of comportment. By means of working through the various stages of this method our interaction with the world, or the curriculum, achieves a sense of continuity. We might envision this method unfolding in five stages: (i) we confront a problem that interrupts the flow of practice

and we are forced to think in a reflective manner about it; (ii) we identify the structures unique to the problem, which leads to the *Statement of the Problem*; (iii) we form hypothetical ideas as virtual rehearsals for action and form a hypothesis, a predictive theoretical construction, which is grounded in the problematic; (iv) the hypothesis is analyzed so that its possible, probable, and desired outcomes result from its implementation; and (v) the hypothesis is "enacted and the character of the problem is changed. If the plans for action have been wisely and realistically formulated, then the consequences produced are the ones anticipated; the hypothesis is warranted - it has paid off" (Richard Brosio, 130, 2000). When implementing this method, a person's behavior is intelligent when the action is aligned with the possible anticipated consequences. A good education lives in the "reflection that helps make inevitable occurrences and/or changed conditions beneficial to s/he who must undergo them," for it is "experience, intelligence, and education that are to be understood as comparative mastery over problematic situations" (132).

<8> In relation to the initial problems Taubman (2009) brought to our attention, it is possible to state that the scientific method, although touted as a an active, experientially involved form of problem-based learning (PBL) is yet another *theory* of and *strategy* for learning that works primarily by means of abstracting concepts that are applied to various practical situations with the goal of affording the practitioner mastery over his/her *environment*. When employing this method for solving problems, working through the steps outlined above, it is noted that steps one (i) through four (iv) has the practitioner abstracting from the "lived experience" of the situation in order to conceptualize (hypothesize/theorize) proposed solutions, in terms of "thought experiments," which are then, in step five (v) applied, or enacted, in practice in order to change the circumstances of the environment and (potentially) overcome problems impeding the learning process. This method for problem solving might be classified in the new taxonomy for learning as *procedural knowledge*, because it is concerned with knowledge of how to do something in practical terms, but what's crucial here is that procedural knowledge "often takes the form of a series or sequence of steps to follow. It includes knowledge of skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods collectively known as procedures," and this includes subsets of subject-specific skills and knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, 52). Although beginning from the student's experience of the world, within the lived context of the particular problems they encounter, each with their own unique and particular aspects, the mind-world split is still built into the scientific method's account of action as a form of *procedural* problem-solving whereby through thought experiments and the subsequent application of ideas the conditions of the environment are altered.

<9> It is possible to understand the scientific method in terms of an account of intentional action as we find in John Searle (1983, 1999) that Dreyfus (1999, 2001) brings our attention to, which philosophizes intentionality in terms of our self-referential ideas in a causal relationship with the world. Dreyfus focuses on the manner in which conscious intentionality unfolds in and through the mental (and linguistic) representations of our goal-driven action. Dreyfus informs us that such accounts of intentionality require both *logical* and *phenomenological* conditions of satisfaction: The logical condition is fulfilled when my expectations for what will occur are fulfilled. That the logical conditions for satisfaction "must be represented in the mind, i.e., that they

must be structures of a conscious subject separate from, and standing over-against an object"(3), represents the phenomenological requirement. There are also two conditions in order for a bodily movement to qualify as an action: first, the mental representation of a goal must extend throughout the action playing a "continual causal role in shaping the action" (4); this is the "intention in action," and is different than the prior intention, which is the goal as it is represented prior to the initiation of movement, and secondly, the causal connection between the intention in action and the bodily movements must be experienced by the subject. If we connect this analysis and conception of intentional action with the unfolding of the scientific method, it is possible to understand the claim from above, namely, that the *scientific method is driven by a view of the human and the world that retains the Cartesian split between mind (subject) and world (object)*, and, as with all dualist thought, there is a tendency to privilege one of the terms in the polar hierarchy between mind and matter, and the judgment here, is in favor of the mind. The scientific method is a theoretical strategy for solving problems, which is mediated by mental representations, rules, steps and stages, and intentional (eidetic) content that is abstracted from the context of lived worldly involvement, and it is, for this reason, a *derivative* mode of disclosure and comportment.

<10> Dreyfus' philosophy demonstrates that we inhabit the world in a multiplicity of ways and that we cannot be reduced primarily to an entity that draws ideas from and brings them to bear upon an external reality. This phenomenological understanding might be related to the *reconceptualization* of our contemporary educational practices. For example, in the new science of learning, Darling-Hammond & Brandford, (2005) and Bransford (2000) equate learning with understanding, which is defined in terms of "usable knowledge," i.e., "expertise which is connected and organized around independent concepts" (9). We are experts when our "knowledge is connected and organized around important concepts (e.g., Newton's second law of motion); it is 'conditionalized' to specify the contexts in which it is applicable; it supports understanding and transfer (to other contexts) rather than only the ability to remember" (9). Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) argue that *conceptual* knowledge, which includes concepts, principles, models, and theories, is required for expertise in the academic disciplines. *Conceptual* knowledge and the generalizations that accrue "have the greatest value in describing, predicting, explaining or determining the most appropriate and relevant action or direction to be taken" (57). This form of knowledge is privileged in both the standardized curriculum and educational research grounded in *social efficiency*, which manifests as *concept empiricism.* Concept empiricism justifies the split between *research and practice* and is "concerned with developing hypothesis to be tested, and testing them in methodological ways characteristic of mainstream social science" (Pinar, 1998, 171). Its research findings seek to generalize and establish principles and overarching categories, e.g., the ideal student, the effective teacher, academic achievement, along with attempting to establish general theories of curriculum and learning. As related to phenomenology, it is possible to state that education in the United States represents one of many objectifying practices in the contemporary world, and this notion emerges from Dreyfus' extensive work on Heidegger's phenomenology and his views on ontology and world-founding epochal forces, or modes of worldly-attunement (1962; 1971). I return to the question posed earlier, keeping in mind the view of the human being that *social efficiency* engenders: Does this view do violence to *who* we are as *phenomenological subjects*? I move in the next section to consider the impact

that philosophy has, not only on education, but as well on the contemporary milieu, which in great part influences the way in which the world and others *come-to-presence* for us, in ways that shape our *Being-in-the-world*.

2. A Phenomenological Reconceptualization of World and Human

<11> The view of contemporary curriculum I have introduced might be traced to the "new science orthodoxy" in education (Kenneth Howe, 2009) and the privileging of analytic-empirical-technical ways of knowing the world, and, as stated, this links education with what Dreyfus (1981) identifies as an *objectifying practice*. Dreyfus (1981) links this view with technology and the positivistic empirical/social sciences, which explain things in terms of *thematizing* the world within an objective and removed form of knowledge that alone provides us with the "systematic order of all reality," and this is the nihilistic view already implicit to the ancient Greek belief that "the theoretical, detached attitude was our fundamental access to reality" (510). Dreyfus, following Heidegger's interpretation of Plato, writes the following about objectification: "Objectification starts when Plato posits ideas as ideal objects over and against a knower who, while not yet understood as subject, is already understood as something other than the ideas that he contemplates" (510). Along with Dreyfus, educators should be highly critical of practices wherein "theory" and *calculative* thought (*modes of objectification*) are privileged above other forms of world-disclosure and modes of thinking. He highlights five features of theory that work as an ensemble to contribute to the devaluation of the role of the body, senses, emotions, and affective ways of knowing our *factical* lived world of experience: (i) The drive to objectify the world in thought, wherein the subject is separated from the ideas he contemplates; (ii) The drive to make all things explicit through propositional explanation; (iii) The resulting de-contextualization of all things contemplated; (iv) The re-contextualizing of the things contemplated into an abstracted system of objective ideas; and (v) The formation of a "world picture" that is linked with a specific historical "mind-set," and in the end, "the subject stands outside of and over against whatever it is he knows, and sees it as objective, explicit, context-free, a total picture" (511).

<12> Here there is a move to ignore and cover over the manner in which the human is immersed in the world as *Being-in-the-world*. According to Dreyfus, this leads to the false and pernicious view that the mind is not only superior to the physical world, it also suggests that people primarily live and comport themselves through the use of their minds, and once a context-free world picture is formed at a remove from *factical* experience, our worldly, embodied, experiential practices lose "meaning and authority" (512). In this view, and this is precisely what we witness occurring in standardized education, the human being is reduced to an epistemological subject, and the most primordial ontological aspects of its Being are lost or occluded. Indeed, the new taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) restricts the knowledge forms in the curriculum and their ancillary modes to the following four main types: *conceptual* knowledge, *procedural* knowledge, *factual* knowledge, *and metacognitive* knowledge. If education is to be an experience of enlightenment and the harbinger of human transcendence, we must seriously question the limited concern for, and in the extreme, the exclusion of, various affective forms of knowledge such as *intuitive*, *normative*, and *aesthetic*, which, as Nussbaum (1990) shows is a legitimate form of *emotional intellection*.

This is often dismissed as an inauthentic mode of knowing or excluded outright from the curriculum.

<13> What type of alternative, ontological view of the human within its world might phenomenology provide, which avoids reducing the subject to an epistemic subject? To begin, for phenomenology, the subject is not merely reactive to external stimuli, which would reduce the human to a " *tabula rasa* upon which the world makes its mark, a template for social conditioning" (Madeline Grumet, 1992, 23). Rather than environment, phenomenology wants us to rethink the context for and the Situation of learning in terms of a discourse between individual and world, one in which the subject, rather than being set at an objective remove from the world, is immersed in the world and equipped to freely construct meaning, i.e., "interpret, repudiate, or reaffirm experience" (23). The problem with viewing the curriculum in terms of a biological "environment" is that it reduces education to a "series of reactive, conditioned behaviors best described as training" (23). Although behaviorists accept this view, it is rejected by phenomenology with its avowed commitment to human freedom. Aoki's (2005) phenomenology of education insists that we open ourselves up to the possibilities of thinking and discoursing in terms of embracing a multiplicity of ways in which to experience, know, and understand the world, which he calls, embracing the *either/or*, *neither/nor*, and *both/and* frameworks for world-disclosure - it is a *perspectival* way of *Being-in-the-world*, which outstrips the limitations imposed by Cartesian metaphysics. This, for Jardine (1992), amounts to education concerning itself with the "risks of self-transcendence involved in the exploration of many possibilities of understanding, self-understanding, and mutual understanding" (121).

<14> We must note that with this talk, phenomenology is not advocating for the exclusion of theoretical modes of disclosing the world, but rather, as Dreyfus (1999) states, phenomenology seeks to "make a place for a sort of activity that has been overlooked by both commonsense and *a fortiori* by the philosophical tradition" (9). The activity we are concerned with relates to ontology and is irreducible to epistemology, in that *we live the world prior to knowing the world in a systematic manner*. Epistemology is primarily concerned with ways in which we know the world, in terms of *what* it is and *that* it is; ontology is primarily concerned with *how* we are in the world, i.e., how it is that our Being is stretched out between birth and death in terms of *phenomenological self-hood* (Michael Bonnett, 2009). Grumet (1992) reminds us, that if definition of education requires an understanding of epistemology, "any consideration of epistemology requires an ontological foundation" (30). Curriculum theorists Grumet, Jardine, and Aoki have provided a vista into certain aspects of the human being conceived in terms other than the Cartesian one, intimating a richer ontological sense of human life than is afforded by Descartes' metaphysics. I now turn to Dreyfus' (1999, 2001) unique phenomenological-philosophical account of the ontological foundations of human existence, which represents the most aboriginal form of learning that we experience. Dreyfus (1999; 2000) does not provide an analysis of formal education, although he certainly deals with learning in his work on skill acquisition in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's non-representationalist cognitive science. It is possible to elucidate a concept of *original learning* by examining Dreyfus' phenomenology. It is rare to see Dreyfus' phenomenology in any account of education and I believe that his unique interpretation of Heidegger's (1962) *fundamental ontology* provides us with a rich interpretation of the

most primordial level of Dasein's lived experience of learning in the world. This "enactive" view of intentionality embraces the notion that our engagement with the world "through actions and projects" is not reducible to "simple mental states," but involves an "intentionality that is motoric and bodily" (Gallagher, 2012, 76).

<15> In addition to *practical comportment* and *theoretical comportment* there is a third layer of lived experience, which, as indicated by Joseph Rouse (2001), not only underlies the mode of theorizing (*conceptual* knowledge) it is also anterior to the mode of practical comportment (*procedural* knowledge), and this is what Dreyfus (1993, 1999, 2001) refers to as *absorbed coping*. Dreyfus (1999) calls this mode of comportment "a third kind of being - a kind of being that is neither natural nor constituted, but is produced by embodied intentionality that is always already present in the world of involved, active, social beings" (23). The formalized understanding, or the thematized view, of learning that contemporary standardized education embraces stands in sharp contrast to this mode of moving through the world wherein we are already learning in a primordial manner in that we are transformed as we at once transform our world. This mode of existence, a way of being absorbed in the world of our activities, which embodies our response to the address of the world (Sean Kelly, 2005), is ignored by the learning sciences, and yet, as indicated, all learning, whether it is practical or contemplative/theoretical is derived from and dependent on this aboriginal way of *Being-in-the-world*. Let us elaborate Dreyfus' (1999) account of "coping" by looking at its structure, which is grounded in activity that is intentional but devoid of ideational content. First, it neither has initial *intentionality* in terms of a definitive goal (*telos*) nor is there intentionality in action, i.e., the holding of a mental image that is stretched out through the duration of the action. It is a unique form of comportment typical of *everyday activity*, a basic way of *Being-in-the-world* that does not involve *intentionality* as linked with mental representations. Secondly, this *non-ideational intentionality* "is the condition of the possibility of both kinds of intentionality" (2). To return to a point introduced earlier, phenomenology does not want to "make practical activity primary," rather it seeks to "show that *neither* practical activity *nor* contemplative knowing can be understood as a relation between a self-sufficient subject with its intentional content and an independent object" (2).

<16> In absorbed coping there is a responsiveness to circumstances within situations wherein we are attempting to maneuver our way through the world with others. One's activity is "experienced as a steady flow of skillful activity" in response to one's sense of the situation, which solicits that person to "get into the right relationship to it" (Dreyfus, 1999, 6). Our purposes can only be made explicit when we step back in reflection from the activity, or, as in Heidegger's (1962) account of *tool-Being*, the equipment with which we are working breaks down or fails to function. Dreyfus (1999) provides many examples of absorbed coping, such as "working, getting around, talking, eating, driving, and etc," even though these are undeniably meaningful and purposeful activities, "skillful coping does not require mental representation of its goal at all. It can be *purposive* without the agent entertaining a *purpose*" (7). For example, I often ride my bicycle around the neighborhood, and when doing so, I am oblivious to the engaged activity of biking because I am taking in my surroundings, the gestalt of the terrain, and responding, not, however, through the application of the knowledge of "how" to ride a bike, not "through the intentional content of the experience of action," which is a

"representation of my brining about the state of affairs I am trying to achieve" (7). Rather, in this particular example of absorbed coping, I am simply, as if on auto-pilot, peddling faster to accelerate, breaking when I want to slow myself down and taking curves with no thought to what I am doing. Although I have no mental representation of the activity of biking as a "bodily action," I am able to perform the activity in a highly proficient manner, all this so as "to complete the gestalt made up" of the situation of biking (6). However, if my brakes fail or the bike chain loosens, I would certainly become aware of my activity and how that activity is related to other activities (a *referential totality* comprising my *world*) that might be linked with the importance of exercise and fitness for my life. I will have more to say about the phenomenon of *breakdown-and-revelation* below.

<17> This mode of original world-disclosure, as Dreyfus claims, drawing interpretation from Heidegger's notion of *ontological transcendence*, "is attributed not to consciousness, but to *Dasein*," in that it is neither reducible to a mind nor a discrete physical body that is involved in the process of disclosive activity at this primordial level (11). Rather it is the characterization of the Being of the human, which, "involves absorbed responsiveness" to situations within which it finds itself (11). Following from this line of thought, this form of comportment that is *non-ideational*, is not merely a maneuvering amid and around objects within Cartesian space, rather, as Rouse (2001) points out, *non-ideational* comportment "discloses things themselves freed from intentional intermediaries," and those things that are revealed are not "discrete objects but an interconnected setting organized around one's…concerns" (2). In the midst of absorbed coping we are not demonstrating "a self contained sequence of movements, but a flexible responsiveness to a situation as it unfolds" (2). This system is not a "determinate arrangement of objects but the setting of some possible comportments" (2). As Dreyfus (1999) states, "The basic idea is that for a particular person to be directed toward a particular piece of equipment, whenever using it, perceiving it, or whatever, there must be a correlation between that person's general skillful coping and the interconnected equipment whole in which the thing has a place" (11). And this place within which our activities make sense and have meaning we call *world*, the system of Dasein's meanings and relations, and this context (Dasein's web of meanings) represents a "field of possible activity with something at stake," which holds the potential to elicit an "intelligible response to it by a being to whom the situation and its outcome matter" (Rouse, 2001, 4). Thus, at the most basic level of lived experience, absorbed coping is *about* meaning and meaningful activity, which finds structure in the fore-the-sake-of-which we do things, and "its constituents are 'in-order-to' realize some possible way of being" (4). To reinforce this notion, Heidegger (1985) describes walking across a room as a field experience: "My encounter with the room is not such that I first take in one thing after another and put together a manifold of things in order to then see a room. Rather, I primarily see a referential whole" (187). Dreyfus (2001), contributing to this understanding of being in the world as a *system of relations*, observes that when I am in a room, "I take the room in its wholeness, and my 'set' or 'readiness' to cope with chairs by avoiding them or by sitting on them, for example, is 'activated' when I enter a room. My readiness is, of course, not a set of beliefs or rules for dealing with rooms and chairs; it is a sense of how rooms normally show up, a skill for dealing with them, that I have developed," or, we might say, learned tacitly, "by crawling and walking around many rooms" (103).

<18> As might be inferred from this account, more important than knowledge of our situation or surroundings, is the meaning-significance for our life that emerges from out of the situations within which we find ourselves, and hence world for Heidegger (1962), and the successful navigation thereof, is never primarily an issue for epistemology, rather, it is undoubtedly an ontological issue first and foremost, and as stated, it is related to the way things and others in our world have meaning for our lives. Our understanding, which manifests *as* projection, is always dependent upon the *wherein* that is the context of the world, and this is always an understanding that is antecedent to both *practical* and *theoretical* comportment, for as Heidegger (1962) states, " *The 'wherein' of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself, is that for which one lets entities be encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements; and this 'wherein' is the phenomenon of the world* " (119/86, emphasis in original). The world is a context for the primordial totality of relationships that alone give meaning-significance to Dasein's life, and both emerge by means of the relational, or *referential totality*, of involvement, which is a process of signifying (*bedeuten*) through this relational totality the sense of significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*) this has for Dasein's Being (120/87). We are not made aware of the ontological structure of our involvement with equipment and others within the world by means of theories or calculated methods of discernment, but rather the world as system of relations and meanings manifests within moments when the flow of *praxis* is disrupted in the phenomenon *breakdown-and-revelation*. The disturbance, or problem encountered, makes us aware of the function of equipment and the way it fits into the meaningful context of our practical activities, which, as Heidegger indicates, is inextricably bound up with the revelation of the larger phenomenon, namely, that of *world*: "When an assignment to some particular towards-this has been thus circumspectively aroused. We catch sight of the 'towards-which' ⌈for-the-sake-of-which⌋ itself, and along with it everything connected to the work - the whole 'workshop' - as that wherein concern dwells. The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself" (105/74-75).

<19> As Kelley (2005) points out, "Dreyfus's approach to phenomenology has always focused on the first-person phenomenon of everyday absorbed activity - activity in which we find ourselves engaged even though we are not noticing that we are engaged in it" (15). There is, importantly, as stated above, at this level of absorbed involvement, a process of *learning* always taking place, I am learning in the most *original* manner by responding in a multiplicity of ways to the address of the world, e.g., when I reach out to grasp a doorknob it "affords or solicits grasping…without even noticing it is happening, my hand forms itself naturally to the shape of the doorknob" (17), whatever that shape might be. Although I do not "explicitly *notice* the doorknob (ex hypothesi), it nevertheless *directs* or *leads* my grasp," and what distinguishes this level of lived experience from linguistic representations or ideational representations, or any "detached perceptual experience of the world, is that the content of my engaged activity is not a *description of* the world, even one that uses bare demonstratives; rather it is a *response to* the world's demands" (18). There are no strategies or well-laid plans for approaching doorknobs or crossing rooms. In fact, the absorbed involvement within a chess match in which a master player is involved is, for Dreyfus (1999), an example of "complex problem solving," which only appears to "implement a long-range strategy" (19). However, as opposed to the formulation of a strategy on the master's part, his

moves "may be best understood as direct [unmediated] responses to familiar perceptual gestalts" (9). To learn is to respond in ever-new ways to the address and demands of the perceptual gestalt, the world within which our *referential totality* is embedded, and as it changes, so too does our relationship to the world, and this is finite human *transcendence* as conceived by both Heidegger and Dreyfus. To formalize such activity, to break it down in analysis, to step back from the activity in contemplative thought, to return to the example of the doorknob and my grip, the very act of "noticing my hand," reflecting on the activity, contemplating the movement, "breaks the spell that the world had over it" (Kelly, 2005, 19). Kelly goes on to add, and here we might relate this to educational research, all "right-thinking people" should recognize that "sensitivity to the first-person perspective [of phenomenology] is essential to any full and proper account" of the world and human being (22). This recognition of absorbed coping as a primordial mode of *Being-in-the-world* figures into Vandenberg's (1971, 1974) phenomenology of educational theory, and he describes it as being grounded in our pretheoretical ways of Being, which contribute to our fore-conception and fore-having of the original experience of *the fundamental ontological* grounds of learning, as manifest in the pre-understanding.

3. The Fundamental Educational Theory Grounded in Ontology

<20> How might this phenomenological talk of the most primordial way in which we are in the world relate to our notion of formal education or the formalization of the curriculum? Is it possible that its analysis might have something to contribute to our reconceptualization of curriculum? The rejoinder to these difficult queries will comprise the final section of the paper. The reader will note that much of my scholarly work focuses on philosophers of education and curriculum theorists from the first wave of the phenomenological movement in educational research (Magrini, 2014), but here I restrict my focus to Vandenberg (1971; 1974), who I consider a major force in educational phenomenological research during the late 1960s and 1970s in the United States. His work continues to provide valuable, if as yet untapped, insights into the power of phenomenology to enhance our educational practices. I begin by elucidating what Vandenberg refers to as *fundamental educational theory*. In Vandenberg, the idea of *foundational* functions duplicitously: first, it refers to a foundation or grounding, and secondly, it refers to the *fundamental ontology* involved in grounding the phenomenological view of education in the first instance - Vandenberg was one of the first scholars working in Post-Husserlian phenomenology who performed exegetical work on Heidegger's (1962) *Being in Time* in its potential relation to education and educational philosophy. Although it is the case that Vandenberg does not offer us anything resembling the depth of interpretation that Dreyfus has provided of Heidegger's philosophy, Vandenberg, in a critical and unique manner, is contemplating the potential of phenomenology's exploration of the non-thematic mode of worldly comportment for the potential betterment of our educational practices. As stated, his *fundamental educational theory* is grounded in non-thematic (non-ideational) comportment, which informs our pre-understanding of things, and allows us to step into the circle of hermeneutic interpretation, with the focus on discerning for analysis the original ways in which we are in the world and at once always and already learning, or *Being-educated*, anterior to any notion of a formalized, and hence thematized education (*schooling*).

<21> Vandenberg states that educational theory cannot be justified by parent or sister disciplines such as sociology, empirical science, and cognitive psychology. This indicates that educational theory is "autonomous from other disciplines, though dependent on them" (185). Although educational theory is composed of a body of principles that are justified by reasons "related to the findings of the factual, theoretical, and normative disciplines, they are logically independent of these sciences" (185). Educational theory does not possess intrinsic worth or meaning, as if existing "in a Platonic realm of ideas independently of someone's having them in mind" (185). We seek to find "educational phenomena (or facts) about which one will subsequently formulate a theory with concepts that in fact do have the requisite logic - and ontological - characteristics" (187). Typically, educational theory consists of three levels: (i) there is the level of practice; (ii) there is the level at which educational principles are "formulated within the horizons of the practical situations in general" (187) that are justified by the special sciences; and (iii) there is the level that consists of the search for sociological, psychological, and philosophical elements underlying practice; "this occurs within the horizons of the general features of the educational situation from the vantage point of the parent discipline" (187). This indicates that practice is viewed and assessed through the conceptual lens of sociology, psychology, or philosophy. According to Vandenberg, this provides a disingenuous model for authentic educational practice. When theorists "lose sight of the educational system altogether and explore issues in the parent discipline in their own right" (188), they give rise to an educational theory that is not autonomous, for it is too closely allied with the concepts, logic, and epistemological paradigm of the parent discipline. In this instance we have a theory of education, which seeks to influence and direct practice, but has lost sight of the actual lived experience of education as it is abstracted and generalized at level (ii). Educational theory, according to Vandenberg, should in fact be authentically drawing its inspiration from level (i), and through the ever-renewed process of hermeneutic interpretation authentic educational theory returns to the level of the lived experience of educating with an ever-deepening understanding of the human being and the processes of *Being-educated*. What Vandenberg brings to light represents the tendency in education to embrace a theory of learning and curriculum that is "out of touch" with the lived experience of "learning" (254).

<22> As a corrective, and this comes by way of an understanding of ontology and phenomenological-hermeneutics, it is possible to envision the *reconceptualization* of the levels of tradition education as suggested by Vandenberg, which "requires the juxtaposition of humanistically formulated educational theory and educational practice to retain this pedagogic perspective and to maintain visibility of educational phenomenon as such" (189). When Vandenberg talks of educational phenomena *qua* educational phenomena - the *essence*, *is-ness*, or *Being* of education - he is opening the door to a phenomenological and ontological view of education, which is expressed in and through a *fundamental educational theory*: (i) the practitioner begins at the level of lived educational practice, which is still at this level understood in terms of a formalized education; (ii) through the phenomenological method Sense (*Sinn*)-giving-meaning structures are rested from concealment for thematic analysis, i.e., phenomenology performs a *fundamental ontology* of the lived experience of practitioners and students, and thus teases out those aspects of education that are hidden, or remain pre-theoretical, but are always at work influencing our pre-understanding of education in the mode of

everyday existence (as in the tacit understanding of Being in Heidegger, here, in Vandenberg, we encounter the tacit understanding of the *Being of education* or *learning*); (iii) educational principles are formulated in relation to level (ii) and the justification contributed by the "special sciences" is attuned to the ontological analysis of the structures of *Being-educated*. At level (iii) there is already a fourth level presupposed, and this is where the phenomenological method "turns back" to levels (i) and (ii) in order to deepen the interpretation of the ontological understanding of *Being-educated*. This is precisely the manner in which Heidegger (1962) views the spiral unfolding of the phenomenological method and hermeneutic interpretation, which never arrives at a definitive conclusion to its inquiries. For, as Heidegger reminds us, when performing a *fundamental ontology*, "in this field, where 'the thing itself is deeply veiled' one must take pains not to overstate the results. For in such an inquiry one is constantly compelled to face the possibility of discovering an even more primordial and more universal horizon from which we may draw the answer to the question, 'What is '*Being*'" (49/29)? What is crucial in Vandenberg's philosophy is the attention to pre-theoretical ways of learning. "Teachers, for example," claims Vandenberg, "occasionally possess great pedagogic wisdom before pedagogy became an object of university research. This is a non-thematic understanding that is acquired through the buffetings of experience in the classroom. When a practitioner's pretheoretical understanding is rigorously explicated by an immanent reflection, i.e., by an interpretive hermeneutic, it becomes *fundamental educational theory*" (190, my emphasis).

<23> As stated, in traditional forms of educational theory, which allow parent and sister disciplines to shape the view of education, the theorists are predominantly restricted to the investigation of education from within the conceptual lens of the discipline, which is ordered by an epistemological paradigm or structure unique to that discipline, and when several conceptual lenses converge to offer a view of education, the phenomenon of education, which of course includes of view of the student, is splintered and fragmented. According to Vandenberg, this does violence not only to the phenomenon of education, but also to the student, for it is wrong for educators to "chop up the living child into modes of abstraction created by the various disciplines," rather, authentic educational theory should, in the first instance, confront "the 'whole child'" in authentic situations of learning, or *Being-educated*, for this reveals "the educational facts that an educational theory is designed to explicate and explain" (189). When educational theory is reduced to its dependence on one or another of the sciences, for example, from either the perspective of political science or economics, "the direct application of concepts from these disciplines to educational practice has the effect" of transforming the human being into a *political animal* or an *economic animal* (214). This practice needs to be evaluated in terms of the form of human existence it produces and promotes, and, according to Vandenberg, a view of the human being in which, for example, the political "dominates every other dimension," would obviously represent a severely limited view of human life, and in the extreme, it would produce "an obviously unhuman life" (214). The use of the concepts of the separate sciences to understand the phenomenon of education "in no way depends upon the validity of the concepts in their own domain, but must be evaluated in terms of the program conveyed, that is, in terms of the effect upon the child's life in determining who he will become" (214), i.e., grounded in the ontological way that the child is already in the world "of learning" as a human being prior to an institutionalized school setting. No matter how rigorous or solid the science

- education is ultimately about the normative effect it exacts on the child's life. There is indeed the hope that phenomenology as it is related to *fundamental educational theory* might contribute to the restoration "of the wholeness of educational phenomena as they appear within the educating perspective" (189).

<24> In *fundamental educational theory*, principles, understood as emerging at the third level do so through the practice of the *dialogic principle*, which furnishes "the context of relevance" for *foundational theory* that is essential - unlike *product-process* models for curriculum making, the principles for education associated with *fundamental educational theory* are already immanent in the lived experience of learning at the primordial level of Being's unfolding. The *dialogic principle*, which is phenomenology's intuitive scanning of the first-person lived experience of pre-theoretic practices of original learning, allows what is tacitly presupposed about learning, once wrested from concealment, to inform the educational principles. "Established on the ontological level," these *ontologico-existential* Sense (*Sinn*)-giving-making structures, "necessarily underlie every principle that can be established," because they are instantiated in our "lived" experience "at the ontic level" (Vandenberg, 1974, 214). Vandenberg considers and discusses a primordial level of existence that is reminiscent of absorbed coping, and at this level of existence we are tacitly accumulating, acquiring, and passing along information, which is later made explicit in other modes of practical and cognitive involvement. As Vandenberg points out, there is a "slow assimilation of many things that are not thematically reflected upon that slowly develops one's pre-theoretical understanding" (195) and that "pre-judgments are accumulated non-thematically in experience is a phenomenological finding" (197). This might be linked with Dreyfus' (1999) position stressing the primacy of phenomenology over logical analysis when seeking to understand the third mode of being, "absorbed coping," which is "too specific and contextualized to be analyzed using the usual philosophical understanding of propositional representations" (21). In everyday *modes of coping*, as elucidated by Dreyfus (1999; 2001), we already have a tacit understanding of what it means to learn, but this understanding or insight is not explicitly represented via mental imagery, and this mode of tacitly understanding learning, for Vandenberg, must be brought to light and analyzed through the phenomenological description and hermeneutic interpretation. As Vandenberg (1974) reasons, if *fundamental educational theory* focuses on the phenomenological description of the "tacit knowing of the practitioner, it introduces no philosophical, theological, or ideological doctrine of its own, but it does tap an extremely rich resource of [potential] knowledge that is hardly been explored previously" (190).

<25> Let us briefly examine how the *dialogic principle* functions in Vandenberg's phenomenology. The *dialogic principle* reveals for thematic analysis the *ontologico-existential* structures giving order and "structuring meaning" within our everyday modes of educating. This relates to Heidegger's (1962) view of the task and focus of phenomenology, which means "*legein ta phainomena*, where *legein* means *apophainesthai*," and so phenomenology literally means "*apophainesthai ta phainomena* - to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (58/34). However, this is certainly not to indicate that phenomenology simply sees things as they are, as they come to *presence* before us, for this would never rise to a "science of phenomena." Rather, phenomenology is a form of seeing that *sees behind or beyond* what is directly before us, and this represents for Heidegger, as it does for

Vandenberg, the phenomenological move to *wrest from concealment* the *ontologico-existential* structures that give sense-meaning to our lived experience. According to Heidegger (1962), phenomenology is "distinguished from the ordinary conception" of phenomena because it is concerned with that which "does *not* show itself at all; it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself," and here Heidegger explicitly references the ontological foundations of appearances, which at once belong to what "shows itself," and these "foundations belong to appearances in an essential way as to constitute the *meaning and ground* of the appearances" (59/35, my emphasis).

<26> With this explanation in mind, the *dialogic principle* begins at the level of observing and reflecting on situations where we believe education or learning is transpiring. For example, when in the classroom with students we might notice several of them having difficulty with a question or problem. These students manifest in a mode of self-showing as "help-requiring" (198). The *dialogic principle*, inspired by the phenomenological practice of "imaginative variation," asks the following question: Can we imagine instances of education wherein both children and adult learners (students) do not show up at times as "helpless"? Might not "helplessness," as related to human finitude, represent one of the essential characteristics (*Sinn* Sense-giving-making structures) of all instances of education or learning? Can we conceive instances of education or learning wherein people do not require help or assistance? If we attempt to perceive and imagine education without the essential *ontologico-existential* mode of *Being-helpless*, the phenomenon of education, as it came to presence within our initial observations, disappears; education is no longer present in its original self-showing *from out of itself*. We might also ask: Are there any instances of learning or education that we can imagine taking place in isolation, at a remove from social or historical situations? Since we cannot, the social and historical become essential ontological structures of learning and education. Now, in order to consider phenomenology's task of wresting from concealment the *ontologico-existential* aim of education, which for Vandenberg, represents the ontological essence of education as it informs his *fundamental educational theory*, we ask: Are there any instances which rightly deserve the name "education" wherein the acquisition of meaning (or the deepening of the understanding) is not an essential aim of the process of learning in terms of *human transcendence*? Since we cannot, we conclude that the "aim" of education represents the *ontologico-existential* meaning structure that defines education *qua* education (education as such) in its very Being: "Fundamental educational theory indicates how man [*sic*] can become a human being through educating by articulating the basic phenomena of education in the structural context demarcated by aim of educating" (211).

<27> The aim of education, or original learning, as related to Dreyfus' (1999; 2001) interpretation of finite human *transcendence*, is a process and way of being wherein we are always projected out beyond what/who we are at any given moment and this phenomenon is intimately related to "non-formal" learning, because we are always already in the world in such a way that in and through understanding we are on the approach back to ourselves as *other* from out of the indeterminate future; education is an original process of *becoming-other-in-learning*, and this prior to unpacking any texts, prior to preparing for any tests, prior to passing through the doors of any educational institution. Human *transcendence*, as the embodiment and manifestation of original

learning, is grounded in the "third mode of Being," *non-ideational intentionality*, which is not merely a characteristic or trait added on to human existence, neither is it reducible to a function of consciousness, rather this directedness toward the world from within the world in search of meaning comprises the primordial *world-of-learning*, and it is intimately bound up with and inseparable from our Being. This is precisely what Vandenberg explores within his *fundamental educational theory*, which, as he informs us, "investigates man [*sic*] in his fundamental essential characteristic of requiring education to become man because everything that man is able to do or be directly human is due to his having been educated" (213).

<28> However, as we have seen, this goal of acquiring meaning is a far cry from the determinate goals and terminal aims of traditional curriculum as we find in *social efficiency*, rather the aim of education, according to Vandenberg, is always already occurring at a pre-theoretical level because "the human is always projecting into some possibilities in the world and future, and this project is understood, and the understanding of the project of being is permeated with personal concern" (213), i.e., concern for our Being and the Being of others, concern for our unique possibilities for Being, concern for the way in which things show up for our appropriation as *having-meaning* for our Being. In this *original* view of education informing *fndamental educational theory* we are no longer focused primarily on epistemological concerns, because *conceptual* knowledge, *procedural* knowledge, *metacognitive* knowledge, and *factual* knowledge are in fact all derived from and dependent on pre-theoretical modes of understanding the world as described in absorbed coping. *Fundamental educational theory* opens the way for the essential "accessibility of 'man' in his educability," and this is never restricted to institutionalized settings or formal definitions of education that have been forged and reified within the standardized logic of *social efficiency ideology*. It is only, according to Vandenberg, when we approach education through a "hermeneutic phenomenology," that the possibility exists to yield "educational phenomena that furnish the distinct object of research that is studied by no other discipline, thereby," and perhaps for the first time, "creating the possibility of a discipline of education" (213).

In the End: The Grounding of *Ground*

<29> Adopting a critical view of Vandenberg's position we might say that it falls victim to its own critique of traditional educational theory - for in place of the disciplines such as philosophy and science, we now view the educational experience through the restricted conceptual lens of "phenomenology" with its unique paradigm for knowing. Why should we accept the claim that phenomenology offers us the potential for a more authentic form of educational theory than the tradition? Is this view not also limited in the scope of its vision? These are legitimate concerns, however I believe the following rejoinder might be marshaled in defense of Vandenberg's turn to phenomenology (and *ipso facto* ontology) in the attempt to rescue educational theory: Since we are dealing with ontology, we are dealing with the most fundamental (essential) ways of our existence as human beings. Since ontological issues are always prior to epistemological concerns with knowledge and psychological categories for structuring conscious existence, it is possible to state, invoking later Wittgenstein (1991), that when we reach ground, or bedrock, there can be no more talk of justification or validation, but rather,

at this point, we are simply standing in the presence of the is-ness of existence (Aoki, 2005). Phenomenology indeed brings us into close proximity to the very grounds (*is-ness)* of our existence by returning us to the primordial aspects of life that have been covered over and occluded by the technological-scientific worldview.

<30> Importantly, Vandenberg's (1971) *fundamental educational theory* resists the tendency in analytic-empirical modes of education to reify the student, which is the "analytic reduction of the phenomenon to something else" (140), i.e., the human student becomes something other than human - a number, place-holder, percentile, or statistic. *Fundamental educational theory* embraces "nonreductive and nonobjectifying" ways of viewing and encountering the student that are necessary for authentic education to obtain (140). *Fundamental educational theory* allows for, and further, facilitates the coexistence between teachers and students, which represents the "projecting into possibilities in the world" in relation to the "co-disclosure of possibilities of being" (140). Such a concept and enactment of education, however, according to Vandenberg, is impossible within the "established societal power structures" dictating the "relations between people," which are reduced to "dominance/submission patters, to commanding/obeying relations" (131). Those words were penned over forty years ago, and now we must ask as educators, how far have we progressed in the quest to overcome the disingenuous binary power structures of which Vandenberg speaks? In response to this query I claim that we have not yet outstripped *social efficiency*, which, as argued throughout, is a limiting and stultifying view of education that has lost sight of and is moving farther away from the human subject as conceived by Heidegger, Dreyfus, and Vandenberg, namely, in terms of *Being-in-the-world*. In this paper I have attempted to contribute to the further development of Vandenberg's early thought by demonstrating its continued relevance and immediacy in a time of high stakes testing, standardization, and hyper-accountability, where educators still cling to the false and empty promises of reform proffered by analytic-empirical (quantitative) research, which is grounded in the *instrumentalist-representationalist* view of education. Educational reform on a grand scale is an unrealistic hope, for "envisioning the mass liberation of education in this manner ignores the complexity and depth of what is involved to accomplish this task" (Magrini, 2012, 513). However, perhaps it is possible to open worlds in the current curriculum that stand beyond the technical-empirical attunement of *social efficiency* and its drive for standardization. Perhaps it is possible in such worlds to catch a momentary glimpse of a reconfigured, or better, a transfigured human being in terms other than a cold, sterile epistemological subject of knowledge. This, as I have suggested, calls for educators to turn to phenomenology and philosophers such as Heidegger, Dreyfus, and Vandenberg for the insights afforded into original ways of Being and learning, which might inspire both educators and students to "adopt a richer ontology than the Cartesian one of minds and nature assumed by Husserl and Searle" (Dreyfus, 1999, 24).

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