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# When Praxis Breaks Down: What Heidegger's Phenomenology Contributes to Understanding Miscues and Learning in Reading

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# When Praxis Breaks Down: What Heidegger's Phenomenology Contributes to Understanding Miscues and Learning in Reading

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## Introduction

In this paper I present Heidegger's (1962) ontological notion of learning within the context of meaningful dealings with the use and breakdown of "equipment" and the subsequent revelatory ontological disclosure of "world" and *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world with the intent of intimating how Heidegger's notion of "problem solving" as *breakdown-and-revelation* within our practical (and original) learning situations might contribute to a philosophically reconfigured understanding of the way in which educators understand and enact problem-solving and learning in the reading curriculum, e.g., as related to reading instruction and literacy as it is expressed in Whole Language (Goodman 1996, 1986, 1976; Kohn, 1999; Weaver, 1990). Goodman (1996) describes the reader in terms of what might be described as *Being-in-the-world-of-reading*, which, I suggest, shares certain similarities with Heidegger's philosophy of "absorbed coping," or "circumspective seeing," within our practical dealings (Dreyfus 2001). According to Goodman, reading is never simply "recognizing [cognitively representing] words in succession," rather "something propels you forward as you read, helps you to anticipate so well what's coming that you simply use *cues* [or *miscues*] from the print to move constantly toward meaning" (40). For Heidegger, meaning is also crucial and ultimately it is *towards-which* our practical dealings, in terms of system of relations, or *referential totality*, are directed. Just as there is a world of "absorbed coping" in Heidegger, set within the overarching system of relations that is our *world* that is *lit up* or *revealed* in moments when praxis breaks down, momentary "miscues" in the reading process also hold the positive potential to open up a *world*, which is as well set within the overarching context of a system of relations (*world*) that forms the context from out of things make sense to us, things are interpreted and understood, out of which ultimately we construct and derive meaning for our life and Being.

## What Disruptions and Breakdowns Disclose about Learning and Being-in-the-world: Heidegger on *Dasein's* Referential Totality and World

How do we primarily learn and understand within our practical and involved dealings with entities, others, and the world? In response we must first define, or perhaps redefine, *praxis* in terms of the original Greek sense as involved and concerned dealings with the stuff of the world and others. As Heidegger points out, *praxis* should never be conceived as being directed by or in service of theory (*theoria*), as we find in traditional and contemporary empirical-scientific philosophies of education. *Praxis* is our concern (*Besorgen*) with the entities we encounter, and beyond, it is a concern for the Being of those entities in terms of their "equipmentality," and the unfolding of their Being occurs and is disclosed in use and their Being belongs to a context, or system, of relations, which Heidegger terms the "Totality of Equipment" (97/68). Heidegger indicates that it is not through scientific, or thematic, modes of world disclosure that we primarily know the world, this, as Dreyfus (2001) points out, is because Heidegger recognizes the "inadequacy of the traditional epistemological account of occurrent [*present-at-hand*] subjects with mental contents directed towards occurrent [*present-at-hand*] objects" (85). The Being of equipment along with the Being of *Dasein* is never granted thematically, or "theoretically," in terms of merely occurring things, or present-at-hand entities, rather, through our concerned and intimate practical dealings we learn through a mode of world-disclosure Heidegger calls "circumspection" (*Umsicht*).

Heidegger (1962) insists that speculative seeing is not “a thematic seeing,” however, it is not for this reason “epistemologically blind,” for indeed it “has its own kind of sight by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character” (89/69). Dreyfus (2001) calls circumspection a “*mode of awareness*” and is best understood as “experience” that is “characterized only as openness,” but this is not, Dreyfus assures, an experience that is purely “mental, inner, first-person, private subjective experience (*Erlebnis*, Husserl’s term), separate from and directed toward nonmental objects” (69). When we cope with things in *praxis* our “comportment manifests dispositions that have been shaped by a vast amount of previous dealings, so that in most cases when we experience these dispositions everything works the way it should” (68). It is crucial to note that Heidegger opposes practical comportment, which includes problem solving, in terms that are grounded in the Cartesian subject-object split, which adopts the view that the world can be known, controlled, and mastered when we apply the representational [eidetic] mental schemas formed through “thematic seeing.” And this has crucial implications for the way in which contemporary education views the unfolding of the continuum of and relationship between theory-practice: “Practical behavior,” Heidegger (1962) assures us, “is not ‘atheoretical’ in the sense of ‘sightless.’ It is an oversimplification of things to simply say that in theoretical behavior we observe and in practical affairs we act, and that action must employ theoretical cognition if it not to remain blind” (99/69).

In line with these thoughts, Heidegger’s view of human intentionality, or “absorbed coping,” is not that of a “mind content directed toward objects [or situations], and a new sort of entity encountered (transparent equipment) which is not a determinate, isolable substance” (Dreyfus, 2001, 69). We do not need to leave the confines of our subjective modes of Being in order to meet the world that resides outside of our minds, nor do we need to assimilate it, through the re-presentation of the world by means of our internal thoughts. This is because, as Heidegger (1962) philosophizes, we are always already in the world as *Being-in-the-world*. Thus, we neither actively situate ourselves within an “environment,” nor it is possible to ontologically remove ourselves from the “environment” in a “theoretical” manner by means of the virtual or thematic “dress rehearsals” of our problems, for the kind of “Being which belongs to such concerned dealings is not one into which we need to put ourselves first. This is the way in which everyday Dasein always is” (Heidegger, 1962, 96/67). When we encounter problems, or disruption to the flow of *praxis*, which Heidegger refers to as breakdowns to the “*non-thematic circumspective absorption* in references or assignments constitutive for the *ready-to-handness* of an equipment whole,” a new form of coping, a more precise, a form of circumspection, emerges (107/76). Heidegger, avoiding the specific concern with the mental representation of the so-called “problem,” wants to “concentrate more on the specific experience of breakdown, that is, on the experience we have when ongoing coping runs into trouble,” and when this occurs, “new modes of encountering emerge and new ways of being encountered are revealed” (Dreyfus, 2001, 70).

I now examine the unique way in which Heidegger (1962) claims that we encounter and attempt to overcome problems, for his view is far more complex than “scientific methods” that focus on solving isolated aspects unique to the specific problem encountered. For Heidegger, it is never simply about overcoming the problem alone, beyond this, it is about the ontological relation between the problems we encounter and the unfolding of our *Being-in-the-world* in its entirety. The process itself is in fact a “learning” experience that is happening in a way that is anterior to any and all formalized and systematized forms of education. According to Heidegger (1962), and this relates to his notion of ontological truth as *aletheia*, or disclosedness, scientific methods for problem-solving are derived from and dependent on basic and original modes of concerned, circumspective coping. All forms of “thematic intentionality,” according to Dreyfus (2001), if Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein is correct, “must take place on a background of transparent coping” (85). The approach to the reduction of practical comportment to “theories,” as we find in the notion of the “expert/educator” problem-solver in Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005), who possesses the skill to transform “knowing-how”

into a “knowing that,” runs into trouble when “facts and rules ‘discovered’ in the detached attitude do not capture the skills manifest in circumspective coping” (Dreyfus, 2001, 86).

Heidegger writes of three specific forms of disruption, or moments of *breakdown-and-revelation*, which Dasein encounters within circumspective coping, i.e., there are three kinds of disturbances for Heidegger, wherein what is “ready-to-hand,” a piece of equipment, becomes, or better, shows itself, as “un-ready-to-hand” in that we are no longer able to use it, and these modes of *breakdown-and-revelation* are: conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy. Conspicuousness (of the unavailability of equipment) occurs when a piece of equipment we are using breaks or fails to function at its appointed task, but we are able to move beyond it to complete the task, and this “presents the ready-to-hand equipment as in a certain un-readiness-to-hand” (103/74). Obtrusiveness occurs when a piece of equipment is missing and we can’t use it, and the “more urgently we need what is missing, and the more authentically it is encountered in its un-ready-to-handness, all the more obtrusive does that which is ready-to-hand become” (103/73). Obstinacy is a serious disruption that calls for deliberation on our parts because the phenomenon of the un-ready-to-hand “stands in the way of our concern” (103/74). These latter two modes of *breakdown-and-revelation* will be explored in some depth as related to our themes, but it must be noted that all three modes of disturbance to *praxis* for Heidegger reveal a variety of aspects of Dasein’s existence, including the *worldliness of the world*, as will be outlined. Speaking on the three modes of disruption Heidegger states that they

all have the function of bringing to the fore the characteristic of present-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand. But the ready-to-hand is not just observed and stared at as something present-at-hand; the presence-at-hand which makes itself known is still bound up in the readiness-to-hand of equipment (104/74).

This indicates something unique about “mistakes” and “problems” and the manner in which they are viewed, and beyond, experienced, namely, when encountering equipment, or tools, that cease to function momentarily, are recalcitrant to our efforts to get them to work again, or are simply absent, we do not encounter them as mere “things” or “objects” in isolation from the task. In fact, Heidegger suggests that in these moments of breakdown it is not the “thingness,” or ontical aspect, of the equipment that is revealed, but rather it is the Being of equipment, or the “readiness-to-hand” of tools in their use, as “equipmentality,” which is already imminent (although *transparent*) in the unfolding of *praxis* that makes its presence known. The *presencing* of the Being of equipment might be understood in terms of what Macquarrie & Robinson (1962) write about Heidegger’s use of the term for “disclosure,” *aufschliessen*, which does not mean that we infer a “conclusion from premises,” working through a mode of deliberation that is discursive in nature, but rather *aufschliessen* means

to “lay open.” To say that something has been “disclosed” or “laid open” in Heidegger’s sense, does not mean one has any detailed [or thematic] awareness of the contents which are thus “disclosed,” but rather that they have been “laid open” to us as implicit in what is given [within a totality of relations], so that they may be made explicit to our Awareness by further analysis or discrimination of the given, rather than by any inference from it (fn. 106/76).

Dreyfus (2001) describes the need for “*deliberate coping*” when we lose the transparency of engaged action, and our activity becomes “explicit” and we are forced to “act deliberately, paying attention to what we are doing” – this is *obtrusiveness* (72). It is in this moment that the meaning and significance associated with equipment references are *laid open* for us, for as Heidegger (1962) claims, “when assignment has been disturbed – when something is unusable for some purpose – then the assignment [and not the individual piece of equipment] becomes explicit” (105/74). When our activities are interrupted we are forced into a mode of deliberation, however it must be noted that this type of deliberation bound up with problem

solving in circumspective coping is never thought of in terms of a detached form of abstract (thematic) seeing/conceptualizing. To reiterate what was previously introduced, this represents a traditional, and, according to Heidegger, an erroneous account of *praxis*, which “supposes that a subject is related to an object by means of some self-sufficient mental content” (Dreyfus, 2001, 73). This is not to say that deliberation as conceived by Heidegger does not involve “mental content,” for we do “have beliefs and desires and experience effort – but these need not involve the sort of self-sufficient mental entities philosophers since Descartes have supposed,” i.e., that they are purely mental and analyzable without reference to the world (74). Dreyfus makes clear that deliberation is never a “pure detached theoretical reflection described by the tradition. Rather it must take place on the background of absorption in the world” (74). But what is the phenomenon of “world” to which Heidegger refers in relation to Dasein’s Being?

To begin, I analyze exactly what Heidegger claims is *laid open* or *lit up* in the moment of *breakdown-and-revelation* occurring within instances of practical comportment when we experience problems with equipment. When tools function properly in our everyday ways of using them, their “readiness-to-hand,” or Being as “equipmentality,” remains inconspicuous to us, this phenomenon was referred above as “transparency.” On the contrary, when a tool ceases to function, when there is a disruption or breakdown in the flow of our practical activities, it quickly draws the attention of the user, but not to the tool in particular, rather beyond the tool, to the entire system of relations of which the tool belongs as an integral part of a web of relations (*referential totality of equipment*) as it is directed toward a specific task. At the instant of breakdown, Dasein catches sight of everything connected to the work: The totality of the workshop, so to speak, is *lit up*, or revealed. The nature of “equipmentality” and the *referential totality* of the “ready-to-hand” are simultaneously made explicit, disclosing the overall purpose through the *in-order-to*, *towards-this*, and the *for-the-sake-of-which* – components in Dasein’s referential “equipment” totality, and this is a concern with the “Being of those entities within-the-world which we proximally encounter,” as *ready-to-hand*, as well as the “Being of those entities which we can come across and whose nature we can determine if we discover them in their own right by going through the entities proximally encountered” as *present-to-hand* (Heidegger, 1962, 121/88). There is yet another ontological structure and dimension of circumspective coping, which is intimately linked with the Being-with (*Mit-sein*) of other Dasein and that is the revelation of the overarching context within which Dasein’s referential equipment totality is located, and this

third kind of Being gives us an *existential* way of determining the nature of Being-in-the-world, that is, of Dasein. The other two concepts of Being are *categories*, and pertain to entities whose Being is not of the kind which Dasein possesses. The context of assignments or references. Which as significance, is constitutive of worldhood, can be taken formally in the sense of a system of Relations (121/88).<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to explore briefly how the referential totality of equipment is organized in such a way as to have intimate meaning for Dasein’s Being and its potential-for-Being, and this will lead into a discussion of the *worldhood of the world*. The ontological manifestation of the “world” as world occurs in moments of *obtrusive* disruptions, e.g., when tools or equipment go

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<sup>1</sup> As introduced here, with the philosophizing of the referential totality and the phenomenon of the *worldiness* of the world, Heidegger is also indicating the crucial notion of the communal nature that belongs to Dasein’s Being-in-the-world as *Mit-sein*, or Being-with others. I always encounter others as belonging to my world; I am always dealing in one way or another with the Being of others, those whose Being is similar to my own. Polt (1999) makes this point with an excellent example: “I always experience things in relation to other people...The glove is not only my glove; it is the glove I bought from the clerk at the shop owned by so-and-so, and fashion authorities this year recommend the design. If I rub two sticks together to make fire, I am imitating what I once watched another do. In short, there is a social context for all the equipment we use. So even when no other people happen to be around, I acknowledge their importance simply by using something. My ways of using the thing, and the thing itself, as a tool, refer to my human community” (60).

missing completely from the “towards-which” totality of equipmentality, and in this instance, “what was transparent in everyday coping becomes explicit – when the referential totality is disclosed – *world* announces itself” (105/74-75, emphasis added). Importantly, when moving from equipment to Dasein, as it were, this totality, which is originally set within the context of the workshop, is now set within the larger context that Heidegger refers to as the “where-in” of the world and this indicates that all of our dealings with equipment is ultimately for the sake of our Being and our Being is *Being-in-the-world*. Heidegger indicates this in the following way: The “primary ‘towards-which’ is a ‘for-the-sake-of-which,’ and the [ultimate] for-the-sake-of-which always pertains to the Being of Dasein, for which, in its Being, that way of Being is essentially an issue” (116-117/84).

The “wherein” of an understanding which assigns or refers itself, is that on the basis of which one lets entities be encountered in the kind of being that belongs to involvements; this “wherein” is the phenomenon of the world. And the structure of that on the basis of which Dasein assigns itself is what makes up the worldliness of the world (119/86).

This, however, is not to indicate that the *for-the-sake-of-which* functions in terms of an explicit, *intentionalistic*, futurally projected goal, and here we must keep in mind what was stated earlier about eidetic abstraction (thematic seeing) not playing a crucial role in the process of Dasein’s involved, everyday coping, for when encountering the *for-the-sake-of-which* “we do not need to introduce a mental representation of a goal at all. Activity can be *purposive* without the actor having in mind a *purpose*” (Dreyfus, 2001, 93). Heidegger incorporates this term to represent the *non-intentionalistic* “endpoints we use in making sense of a flow of directed activity”; the *for-the-sake-of-which* is a “self-interpretation that informs and orders all of my activities” (94-95).

More important than “knowledge” of one’s situation or surroundings, for Heidegger, is the “meaning-significance” for one’s life emerging from out of the situations within which we find ourselves, and hence “world” for Heidegger, and the successful navigation thereof, is never primarily an issue for epistemology, rather, as we can see, it is undoubtedly an ontological issue first and foremost. Our understanding, and the projection that is bound up with it, is always dependent upon the “wherein” that is the context of the world, and this is always an understanding in *praxis*, 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). 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 radical moments when the flow of *praxis* is disrupted, and for this reason I have termed 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).

## Heidegger's Phenomenology and Education: Learning and the Whole-Parts-Whole Philosophy of Reading

There is a way to understand the manner in which mistakes and disruptions are viewed within the learning process, as described in Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of Dasein's practical and concerned dealings with equipment within the context of the world by relating these ideas to the view of literacy and reading found in "Whole Language" (Goodman 1996, 1986, 1976), which is expressed through the philosophy of *whole-part-whole* learning. Although Whole Language experienced a resurgence of popularity in the 1980s and 1990s it has since fallen by the wayside, a victim of the "Reading Wars," wherein the teaching of isolated skills, code based-systems of recognition, and the championing of phonics instruction ("scientifically-based reading research") for ensuring literacy eventually triumphed over Whole Language. In this final section I read Whole Language through the lens of Heidegger's philosophy in order to show that "scientific-based" approaches to reading that focus on skill-based areas of instruction in isolation, have the propensity to obscure the holistic nature of reading and writing. Reading, I suggest, might be more appropriately, as related to Heidegger's phenomenology, understood in terms of always occurring within a "context," or *referential totality*, which grounds and directs the activity of reading itself. Further, it is possible to show that scientific methods in isolation and didactic forms of instruction for teaching reading obscure the ontological aspects of our Being as philosophized by Heidegger, which, by reading Goodman (1996) might be linked to language and reading and their intimate relationship to meaning, i.e., reading for meaning relates to our lives in intimate ways and our attempts "to make sense of the text is what drives the whole process" (52).

Working through Chomsky's challenge to behaviorism, Piaget's constructivist view of learning, and Vygotsky's notion that "active" learning occurs in "play situations," Goodman (1976), adopting a holistic approach to reading (reading as "psycholinguistic guessing-game"), inspired the philosophy/practice of Whole Language (Shafer 1998).<sup>2</sup> The basic, albeit controversial, tenet of this form of reading instruction is that learning to read and constructing meaning from texts occurs as the reader engages three "cueing systems" - these cueing systems

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<sup>2</sup> Kozloff (2002), in "Rhetoric and Revolution: Kenneth Goodman's 'Psycho-Linguistic Guessing Game'," presents an eloquent and seemingly devastating critique of Goodman's philosophy of Whole Language. Kozloff charges Goodman with committing no less than three logical fallacies within his claims for holistic reading instruction: (1) *the fallacy of the false binary opposition*: Reading is being taught in terms of either "phonic centered" or "word centered," and offers no further alternatives; (2) *the fallacy of reification*: Goodman moves from the analogue, "reading might be like a guessing game" to "reading is a guessing game"; (3) *the fallacy of over-generalization*: Goodman moves from "some reading might be like a guessing game" to "all reading is a guessing game." Kozloff also brings contemporary empirical evidence to bear on the problem - "recent research on reading" and "experimental assessments of whole language" - "Controlled longitudinal research shows that instruction on phonic awareness, decoding, reading fluency, spelling, and comprehension that focuses on specific skills, involves explicit communications of rules and strategies by the teacher, precisely and logically sequenced, and provides systematic distributed practice is reliably superior for a wide range of students than implicit (less focused) instruction that requires students to construct their own knowledge" (1). Goodman conducts no experiments, collects no research showing that whole language instruction is more effective than phonic centered or word-centered approaches that he seeks to replace. Kozloff calls whole language and the "psycho-linguistic guessing game" speculation, not science: "A defining feature of science (in contrast to metaphysics, opinion, fantasy, and madness) is that propositions, arguments, theories, and conceptual schemes are judged viable and scientific not because proponents say so, but on the basis of empirical evidence and sound reasoning" (3). In the end, the supposed scientific ("empirical") data marshaled against Goodman by Kozloff appears to fall into the same trap as much of empirical research in education, especially research coming from the social and behavioral sciences, namely, all it *suggests* is a correlation between data and conclusion, but, much like Goodman's claims for Whole Language reading instruction, fails to *establish* the all-important causal link. As related to Kozloff's claims, I return to Taubman (2009) who states that the conclusions of empirical research in education "aspires to the role played by atoms and molecules in physics and chemistry. But the latter offer explanations, whereas schema and schemata of concepts as defined by the learning sciences offer only descriptions, although they aspire to explanatory force and nomological certainty" (187).

are interconnected and unfold simultaneously during the process of reading: The three systems are (1) Graphophonic; (2) Grammatical (syntactic); and (3) Semantic (meaning): texts are also composed of these systems (graphophonic, lexico-grammatical, and semantic-pragmatic), which allow texts to mean for the reader. As Goodman (1986) writes, "The cue systems are used simultaneously and interdependently," for example, what "constitutes use of the graphic information depends on how much syntactic and semantic information is available" (97). Proficient readers are able to determine meaning by drawing various clues from the cueing systems in a way that allows them to gather and construct meaning from the text. As related to Heidegger's phenomenology, problems or breakdowns ("miscues") in the reading process always refer the reader back to the "system," which might be properly referred to in Heideggerian terms, the *referential totality* of reading. Goodman (1997), unlike "intellectualist" approaches to learning and problem solving, which "assume that mistakes reflect incompetence, inexperience or carelessness, or some combination of these," embraces mistakes, or "miscues," as part and parcel "of the process of making sense of print" (5, emphasis in original). Miscues represent the point at which "the *observed response* (OR) doesn't match the *expected response* (ER)," and miscues "provide windows on the reading process, because they show the reader attempting to make sense of the text. They reveal as much about the reader's strengths as they do about weaknesses" (53). The "miscues" of reading, rather than taking us beyond and outside the holistic activity of reading, situate us within the totality of reading - the unfolding of the three systems wherein "what we expect to see has such a strong influence that, as long as we're making sense of the text, we overlook our own miscues and the writer's or printer's errors," while on the other hand, according to Goodman, the miscues that "really interfere with making sense are not only detected but corrected" (40). Readers are always using information from all three systems to make meaning, and when failing to make meaning from a text they either (1) rethink and reassign new meaning as drawn from the interaction of the three systems or (2) "regress" to the point where the miscue occurred, they "then use visual and perceptual information to assign a new structure and meaning," drawn from the context of the *referential totality* structuring the text and the reading thereof (110).

If we were to approach the instruction of reading in terms of a series of isolated "problems" to be solved or a series of "skill sets" to be mastered, we would approach reading in terms of the behavioral theorist that Kohn (1999) describes, who wrongly believes it is "logical in principle to start with the pieces and then put them together, moving from phonemes to words to sentences to stories," however, as the author adds, in the real world, "it's far more natural and effective for the whole to come before the part" (122). This, according to Goodman (1996) is analogous to the flawed (atomistic) understanding of reading that would have us focus on "each letter and each word instead of on meaning," and in such instances, we've "stopped using the reading process to make sense" (37). As with Heidegger's phenomenology of Dasein's *equipmental totality* and "world," Whole Language is grounded in a holistic philosophy, which, we might say, without a great deal of distortion, embraces the "world-of-reading," and emerges from a critique of and dissatisfaction with behaviorism in education. We refer to it as a *whole-parts-whole* philosophy because it begins with an understanding of the whole (the system of relations and assignments) and moves to address the parts only as they are related to and emerge from, and, eventually lead back to the whole. This philosophy of education believes that it is impossible for students to learn anything in an authentic manner through analyzing isolated aspects of the learning system. This philosophy of reading and literacy also shares another common element with Heidegger's phenomenology and that is the issue of "significance-meaning," which is always anterior to "skills acquisition," and so Whole Language represents a "meaning-first approach" to reading. Questions concerning what meaning the text might have for the student's life, both in and out of the formalized setting of education, are crucial to consider according to those advocating and implementing Whole Language. That is to say, Whole Language asks "original" questions such as, "What is ultimately at issue when reading and writing?" And beyond, as might be related

to ontological issues, “How does learning to read and write affect the student’s Being-in-the-world?”

These are important questions about the referential totality of assignments comprising the instruction of reading and writing, related to how these assignments are set within the larger context of the school or even the student’s lives, and answers to these questions are never reducible to concerns of a purely epistemological nature. To incorporate Heideggerian concepts, if we begin with the assignment of the “towards-which” of reading, we might begin by seeking out a definition for literacy, because literacy, it would seem, represents the “goal” of reading and writing programs. Literacy, while variously defined, might be said to represent the development of readers’ understanding of spoken worlds, the ability to decode written words, and overall, to gain a deep comprehensive understanding of the texts she engages. Neuman (2010) is critical of the definition for “early literacy” established in 2008 by the National Literacy Panel (USA) for being too narrow and overlooking the important aspects of background knowledge and embedded meaning-making within contexts that inform the student’s development as a reader. The panel’s findings favor code-based skills for ensuring later literacy in young readers and “do not sufficiently account for...content-rich settings in which skills are learned through meaningful activity,” all of which “help children acquire the broad array of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that build the foundation for literacy learning” (301). Those who support direct instruction and code-based skills for decoding words, sentences, and texts are measuring “literacy” by “tallying up children’s scores on standardized reading tests,” and the problem with this practice is that “most of those tests measure decoding and word identification, not comprehension,” which of course is a crucial aspect for determining literacy (Kohn, 1999, 128).

The *towards-which* of reading, if it is literacy, is poorly and inadequately defined, quantified, and assessed through standardized testing in today’s educational milieu of *social efficiency*. Kohn views the “towards-which” of reading in terms other than rote standardized numbers and locates literacy in the ability to “communicate more effectively to readers when you write, and get more out of what you read” (128). Recall what was stated earlier about the *towards-which* in Heidegger’s understanding of practical comportment, it is not to be thought of in terms of an explicit, *intentionalistic*, and futurally projected goal, Heidegger incorporates this term (“towards-which”) to represent the *non-intentionalistic* “endpoints we use in making sense of a flow of directed activity” (Dreyfus, 2001, 94). The *towards-which* functions in terms of Dasein’s “self-interpretation that informs and orders” the activities within which it is involved (95). In traditional reading instruction we might say that the *towards-which* of reading is literacy as determined by a hard and fast goal (*telos*), which in a disingenuous manner represents the reification or hypostatization of literacy in terms of a quantitative, calculable value attached to a standardized exam for determining when and whether or not students have reached the “intentionalistic” goal of reading fluently and efficiently. Whole Language adopts a far more fluid and malleable view of “goals” in the reading process, based in great part on social interaction, and the uniqueness and particularities of the “lived world” (*Lebenswelt*) of the classroom as a social dwelling, where “its about having teachers and students decide together what is worth knowing and how to come to know it,” in such a communal setting for reading, goals are imminent in the unfolding of the learning (Kohn, 1999, 123).

To move beyond the immediate *towards-which* of reading, it is possible to understand the *world-of-reading* in terms of a system of interrelated references and meanings as set within the overarching *for-the-sake-of-which*, which for Heidegger (1962) serves as an explanation for why we do any and all meaningful activities, namely, “for the sake of a possibility of Dasein’s Being” (116/84). We make sense of reading in terms of the way it has “meaning-significance” for our Being-in-the-world. In line with Dreyfus (2001), we should understand reading as an activity that plays a crucial role within our world, informing the *for-the-sake-of-which*, which orders all of our activities, as related to the reading process, in ways that have intimate meaning for us. This is a far more liberating way to understand what it is to be a reader than *reductionist* views that relegate reading to a quantitative activity that can be gauged, measured

and calculated. As follows from this discussion, when considering approaches to teaching reading, it is crucial to keep in mind the fact that reading, first and foremost, relates to our Being-in-the-world in ways that matter, and this points to the issue of educators actually fostering and sustaining a student's *love* of reading, which transcends the boundaries of the classroom (Kohn, 1999). And, it is possible to nurture the love of reading by providing opportunities for "children to choose what books they want to read," because the stories they tell have intimate, personal meaning for their lives (123). The philosophy of "giving students a lot more control over their learning" is beneficial in facilitating the student's openness to her unique potential-for-Being, and this idea, we might say, is "part of what makes Whole Language so effective and exciting" (123).

According to Kohn, attempting to teach reading through isolated activities that teach components of reading and writing and various decoding skills represent the "stufiest, dreariest, silliest, most-out-of-context and inauthentic set of practices" for educators to adopt (132). For example, "scientific-based" programs for older readers, which means that they are no longer "developmental readers," are typically structured around such practices as "spelling and vocabulary quizzes based on lists of unrelated words, lessons on the separate elements of punctuation and grammar, diagrammed sentences, penmanship practice, formulaic book reports that could make anyone lose interest in even the most delightful story" (132). The stories, or story-fragments, that are often employed by basal readers are selected more for the purpose of teaching a "specific skill than on the basis of their literary quality" (134). This view advocates learning in isolation and is based on the erroneous and fallacious assumption that if one has mastered in advance the various parts that comprise the whole, the whole will be understood, and, this of course, falls victim to the philosophical *Fallacy of Composition*, which "consists of an erroneous inference from part to whole" (Pojman & Vaughn, 2012, 46). In this view educators "trouble-shoot" in advance of engaging in the authentic activities of reading and writing, attempting to anticipate the problems, miscues, and disruptions to the flow of reading and understanding the text that students "might" encounter. Such methods "decontextualize" problems in order to solve them in advance, and by decontextualizing the learning there is a movement in abstraction away from the legitimate context of reading. This relates specifically to Nielsen's (2007) critique of forms of learning and problem solving, wherein the components that comprise the totality are approached separately and analyzed through abstract thematic thought, this fosters the erroneous belief that the reader's understanding of the text occurs when things, or components (constituent parts), are taken *out of context* in order for the reader to acquire a sense of comprehension through the teaching and honing of separate (disparate) skill-sets. The danger in this method, according to Kohn (1999), and this is what Dreyfus (1981), reading Heidegger calls an "objectifying practice," is that it is difficult for students to learn abstractly. This is precisely what "scientific-based" reading strategies do, the "skills are removed from a meaningful context and learned as abstract rules," and as a result students who are taught reading in this manner are "least likely to succeed," and when teaching reading in this manner, education allows "meaning to take a back seat to decoding" (129).<sup>3</sup>

To think about learning within a meaningful context as related to Heidegger's (1962) phenomenology, it is helpful to recall the intimate context within which Dasein's concerned, meaningful activities are always situated, wherein through Dasein's original and ontological mode of *disclosing*, the space and entities within the workshop show-up as meaningful to its Being, which allows Dasein to *discover*, in terms of ontic transcendence, its relation to those

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<sup>3</sup> Watson (1994) writing on "Whole Language" outlines a schemata for developing a whole language philosophy that includes the components of (1) belief; (2) practice; and (3) theory, and she adds, interestingly, despite outlining a tightly organized philosophical flow-chart: "There are no hierarchal ability grouping intended in the ordering of my list, nor is there a formula for mastering and moving from category to category" (603). The philosophy of whole language itself might be thought of as occurring in *praxis*, and not in terms of the disingenuous understanding of theory-practice outlined above in relation to traditional educational models. "I've learned," states Watson, "that teachers can begin to build a whole language philosophy by 'doing' whole language strategies that they find appealing and that fit comfortably within their capabilities and expectations."

entities and their way-of-Being – Dasein enjoys a *familiarity* only through the revelation and understanding of the referential totality. For example, as Heidegger (1985) writes, “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 (2002) continues this line of thought:

I just take in the whole room. I do it by being ready to deal with familiar rooms and the things in them. 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 by crawling and walking around many rooms (Dreyfus, 2001, 103).

“Circumspective” coping is neither reducible to a thematic mode of seeing nor brute intuition, because the ease with which I navigate rooms develops in conjunction with and from out of the many attempts to navigate rooms that have failed, out of the many instances where my coping was disrupted in some way or another. As Dreyfus states, “Any specific activity of coping takes place on the background of more general coping,” and although it is the case that Being-in-the-world is ontologically prior, “in Heidegger’s special sense, *a priori* – as the ontological condition of the possibility of specific activities, it is the case that “being-in-the-world is just more skilled activity” (107). This understanding of “circumspection” occurring within a context or system of related assignments relates to Goodman’s (1989) description of reading wherein the reader already has “expectations” of what she will encounter within the context of reading, based on what she has encountered in the past, because, according to Goodman, reading involves the use of “language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader’s expectation” based on what is occurring within the context (127). The reader navigates the text as a whole, and not by means of focusing on isolated encounters with disparate components of the reading process, rather, because the whole is *laid bare*, or *disclosed*, the reader has the “ability to anticipate that which will be seen,” just as she is able to hear, as a holistic occurrence, based on the “ability to anticipate what has not yet been heard” (128). As Goodman (1996) goes on to say, “Reading isn’t simply recognizing words in succession. Something propels you forward as you read, helps you anticipate so well what’s coming that you simply use *cues* from the print to move constantly toward meaning,” and the “expectation of form, structure and – most of all – meaning is what reading is all about (40-41, emphasis in original).

As stated earlier, the revelation of both *referential totality* and the original *for-the-sake-of-which* as *world* occurs through moments of disruption, and in such moments the *significance* of the various assignments as they relate to and have meaning for my Being shine forth. In a similar manner, disruptions, miscues, and problems in the learning process also reveal instances and opportunities for learning within Whole Language. Reading and writing are undoubtedly structured by a system of interrelated components, which include speech sounds (phonology), spelling (orthography), word meaning (semantics), grammar and syntax, and patterns of word construction (morphology), all of which are essential for fluency and reading comprehension. Since Whole Language instruction recognizes that these components cannot be taught or learned in isolation, it embraces moments of disruption and instances where miscues occur, for example, in spelling, grammar, and the mechanical aspects of writing (punctuation) – when words are misspelled, when grammar shows up in a skewed manner, when the syntax of the sentences one is reading or writing is disrupted due to improper or missing punctuation, all of these moments are instances where the context of reading and the totality of references is *lit up*, and we see that spelling words correctly or grammatically structuring a sentence to ensure its meaning is not for the sake of the mere activity itself, but rather belongs to the *referential totality* that is the process of reading, and is essential if we are to *disclose* and *discover* meaning,

and, in an important manner, acquire the ability to communicate that meaning to the others with which we dwell in the *world-of-reading*.

The same basic philosophy of learning is present when it comes to teach vocabulary: It's integrated into the process of becoming more competent at reading and writing, not presented as a list of definitions to commit to memory. Students might keep their own lists of words whose meanings they want to know and remember, and they might begin in each case by taking an educated guess at what a word means (based on the sentence in which it appears or a part of the word that's familiar) before looking it up (Kohn, 1999, 136).

And the same thing goes for grammar and punctuation, where it is the teacher's job

to help kids become thoughtful observers of what they're reading – appreciating the good and criticizing the awkward – as well as skillful revisers of their own writing...Children are encouraged to write constantly. They write notes to each other (and may have mailboxes in their classroom for exchanging them) and letters to people outside school. They write books that, at least in some schools, are actually catalogued and shelved in the library (136).

Within the Whole Language debate, although phonics is really only a concern for early readers, "phonics" is nevertheless a heated point of contention between advocates and critics. "Phonics refers to the relationship between symbols and sounds. A child with 'phonemic awareness' is one who can 'decode a letter or pair of letters (such as *th*) and knows how to say it" (Kohn, 1999, 120). Whole Language proponents claim that early readers do better learning individual reading skills, e.g., letter-sound relationship or morphology of words (graphophonic elements), within the context of reading. Advocates of Whole Language, while certainly not denying the importance of phonics in reading, oppose the teaching of phonics in a "synthetic manner," i.e., at an isolated remove from the context of the activity of reading. This indicates, as in scientific-based strategies for reading, that the cueing systems might be approached and taught in isolation in order to ensure the successful reading instruction. Whole Language proponents are not against teaching phonics, but they are concerned with the manner in which phonics is taught: They vehemently oppose "synthetic phonics," or phonics taught in isolation from the cueing systems, which amounts to separate instructional lessons imparting and honing skill-sets in graphophonic mechanics: "The camp usually designated as 'pro-phonics' believes in teaching sound/symbol relationships mostly, if not exclusively, through direct instruction, in a way that is intensive and explicit, by means of very specific sequence of lessons," and they insist that "such direct instruction has to take the form of repetitive drilling of isolated phonemes" (121-122). This approach is labeled "reductionist" because it reduces the instruction of phonics, in isolation, to the centerpiece of what's required to eventually read proficiently for literacy. This belief misses the crucial philosophical view that "*reading is more than decoding a text*" (124).

As Kohn argues, "A child filled full of phonics rules may be able to pronounce a word flawlessly without having any idea what it means, much less what it's relation is to the words sitting around it" (124). Worksheet filled with unrelated words, stressing perhaps silent-*e* words or words with double consonants in the middle, have little relation to a living text, they sit lifelessly on the page. Scientific reading theories reduce the ability to recognize and pronounce words to an isolated activity that is guided in advance by a theoretical method, which removes the graphophonic cueing system from the context of the three "cuing systems" of reading and then later reinserts it with the belief that the technical-theoretical training is crucial to mastering the process of reading. In moments such as this, according to Heidegger (1962), when the flow of circumspective coping is interrupted, by "thematizing" one or another of the components within the system of relations, a new attitude emerges, we reveal a new

mode of Being that Heidegger calls the *present-at-hand*. “When this kind of talk is so understood, it is no longer spoken within the horizon of awaiting and retaining an equipmental totality and its involvement-relationships” (412/361). Here, we reduce things to and define things exclusively in terms of “functional concepts,” and this indeed leads into Heidegger’s critique of hyper-technical scientific learning theories, which are methods or ways of disclosing things, entities, and Dasein that fail to properly explain “significance-meaning” as it emerges from within the *referential totality* as related to Dasein’s Being. To account for the equipment whole, scientific theories erroneously overlook that “significance-meaning” is always antecedent to the parts of the relationship. Such theories wrongly view the *complex totality* as being “Built up out of occurrent [*present-at-hand*] elements” (Dreyfus, 2001,115).

The basic intuition behind Heidegger’s critique of [hyper-technical scientific theories] is that on “frees” occurrent [*present-at-hand*] properties [components] precisely by stripping away significance. Therefore it is highly implausible that one can reconstruct a meaningful whole by adding [or reintroducing] further meaningless elements...The [scientific learning theorist] would hold that he has merely patiently to spell out the relation of each type of equipment [component] to other types of equipment [components] and thus gradually build up a representation of the equipmental whole (Dreyfus, 2001, 116).

In the following passage, Kohn (1999) describes a method for “teaching” and “learning” phonics, which is contextual and unfolds through the movement from *whole to part to whole*: Teaching phonics might be conceived as beginning from the text, which has “significance-meaning” for the reader (whole) and then within the context of reading explore and address the graphophonic issues as they arise within the unfolding of the other cueing systems (part) and then weave this understanding into the reading while continuing with the text until other issues, disruptions, or miscues arise (whole).

A Whole Language teacher proceeds from the assumption that there are a number of ways to help beginning readers make sense of what’s on the page. They may follow the words while someone reads them aloud to them. They may watch a teacher write down familiar words, or even pick up a pencil and try to do that himself or herself. Once they can recognize the first letter of the word, that, along with other clues from the context, can help them predict the rest...First comes the story, then a brief detour to explain how this particular word is pronounced (perhaps followed by a little bit of discussing about similar words), and then back to the story (124).

### Concluding Thoughts

In a highly speculative manner, incorporating an accessible philosophical language for students and educators who might not be steeped in systematic philosophy, I have attempted to distill the essence of both Heidegger’s phenomenology of “concerned, circumspective coping” and the understanding of reading in Whole Language to show that is possible to relate certain notions from Heidegger’s phenomenological-ontology to the understanding of reading in Whole Language, specifically the concern with reading being taught as an activity that does not, and indeed cannot, function outside of a tightly ordered *referential totality* of assignments and meanings. We saw that the *towards-which* Heidegger philosophizes might be related to the “goal” of reading and that the ultimate *towards-which*, the *for-the-sake-of-which*, represents the overarching context of *world* within which reading ultimately has *significance* and *meaning* for our Being. We also saw that scientific methods for teaching reading tend to isolate for direct instruction, through the teaching of skills and techniques, the components of reading that are really inseparable, and when we isolate components for analysis, we impede the process of learning to read as an engaged and holistic activity. It was also possible to understand

“problems” or miscues in the reading process in a new light, e.g., when students encounter words they can’t pronounce or words they cannot spell, as opposed to revealing these disturbances as isolated instances of skills that have failed, we have seen that such problems, when viewed within the context of reading, always refer us back to the system itself and the overarching *referential totality* of which is always a part. When we examine the system of reading we find that it’s far more than learning and applying decoding skills, authentic reading is about meaning, and finally, we saw that in light of Heidegger’s philosophy it is possible to understand reading and writing in terms of meaningful ways to understand ourselves and the world, and beyond, to communicate in a variety of ways our understanding to others. Reading, it is possible to state, in an essential ontological manner, is related to our Being, which, as Heidegger points out, is always an issue for us.

Scientific methods for teaching reading that are isolationist or atomistic reduce reading to a system that must be decoded, assimilated, and performed with accuracy and fluency, and, as we have seen, such a view ignores that reading and writing are primary and original modes of encountering and communicating meaning in our lives. The conception and revelatory potential of disruptions (problems) in Heidegger’s philosophy is radically other than philosophies of hyper-technical scientific learning that seek to eradicate and overcome mistakes through a greater and more thorough accumulation, assimilation, and organization of knowledge, because mistakes indicate a lack or loss of predictable control of the situation within the educational “environment.”<sup>4</sup> Heidegger offers us a unique view of the revelatory potential involved in reinterpreting our understanding of the problems we encounter in the learning process. Traditionally, problems are to be “confronted,” “overcome,” “controlled,” “avoided,” and ultimately, “eradicated.” This view of education, which is linked intimately with *social efficiency*, believes that it is possible, and indeed perhaps best, to deal with our problems from a purely epistemological perspective, and in fact, it is suggested that through the application of one or another scientific method we can solve our problems through the accumulation and the organization and reorganization of knowledge by means of “practical learning theories” or applied “skill sets,” which we marshal with ever greater efficiency and success. Yet, Heidegger offers us a unique way in which to view problems and problem solving which points beyond epistemology to the realm of ontology. For there is a distinct revelatory aspect bound up with moments when things fail, we see beyond the isolated instance of breakdown, beyond the mere “thing-ness” of the tool that no longer functions, and catch sight of the invariant *categorial-ontological* structures of Dasein’s Being and world, or as Polt (1999) nicely articulates the phenomenon, we catch sight of the overarching “*system of purposes and meanings that organize our activities and our identity, and within which entities can make sense*” (54).

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed Taylor & Richards (1989) stress that the issue of knowledge is one of the main factors when determining our conception of education, crucial for the design, make-up, and construction of curricula. They identify the view that knowledge as “objective” as the most prevalent epistemological view adopted within curriculum ideologies: “Conceptions of education also involve important ideas about the nature of knowledge. In most conceptions, knowledge is assumed to be objective; a body of principles, laws, theories, etc. which are external to the learner...Here knowledge is ‘reified’ – made into an object of study which exists independently of the learner and unaffected by his own particular ways of processing data and organizing experience” (23).

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