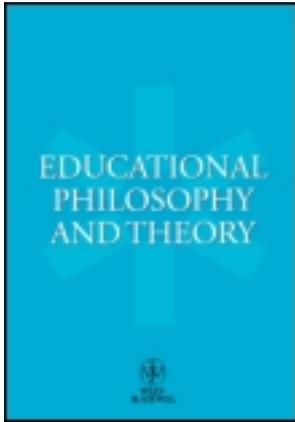


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EDITORIAL

Peirce's New Rhetoric: Prospects for educational theory and research

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Students of Peirce must be animated by the paradoxical realization that, on the one hand, they cannot go beyond Peirce without first catching up to him and, on the other hand, they cannot catch up to him without strenuously and imaginatively trying to go beyond him. (Colapietro, 2007, p. 36)

How can we understand the human capacity to create and articulate knowledge? A Harvard social science review recently pointed to this classical problem as one of the most intriguing questions of social science research today (Giles, 2011), and it is now placed on the US National Science Foundation's list of top-10 priorities as one of the 'grand challenge questions that are both foundational and transformative' (NSF, 2011). The common and renewed interest in this problem—which lies at the heart of the discipline of educational research—relates to current shifts within and beyond the sciences that seem to put conventional metaphors of 'mind', 'society' and 'education' to the test. A key challenge is to identify vital aspects of these shifts, how they open up towards unresolved problems and respond to them by developing a sophisticated theoretical framework relevant for future research on the dynamics of knowledge and learning within and beyond knowledge-intensive societies.

Against this background, I am proud to present this special issue on the relevance of Charles S. Peirce's new rhetoric for educational theory and research. This issue contains five cutting-edge articles written by distinguished Peirce scholars that explore ways in which the later writings of Peirce may offer some new insights to our understanding of the dynamics of knowledge and learning: what are the characteristics of Peirce's rhetorical turn? What are the insights gained? And in what ways may Peirce's semiotics offer fruitful perspectives on the relation between mind, society and educational processes?

Peirce's New Rhetoric

As the dynamics of knowledge and learning lie at the heart of his writings, the philosophy of Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914) enhances our understanding of educational processes. In his early writings Peirce portrayed knowledge as 'a living historic entity', marked by

the communal processes of constructing, reconstructing and validating beliefs. However, the authors of this special issue demonstrate how in his later writings, Peirce offers a richer conception of productive learning processes, as—after a ‘rhetorical turn’—he established an explicit connection between his pragmatism, phenomenology and semiotics, consequently renewing all three (Bergman, 2007). This ‘rhetorical turn’ becomes evident after the turn of the last century, when Peirce claimed speculative rhetoric to be ‘the highest and liveliest branch of logic’ (Bergman, 2007, p. 3). In fact, Peirce’s ‘rhetorical turn’ marks an important shift in focus; from the structure of signs to the mediating and knowledge-creating actions of the flows of signs. Although all Peirce’s writings seem permeated with rhetorical considerations, rhetoric is not given much space in Peirce’s texts. Nevertheless, several contemporary Peirce scholars demonstrate how Peirce’s notion of rhetoric is distinctive from a classical one, and therefore carries both innovation and prospects for a new outlook (Bergman, 2007, 2009; Colapietro, 2007; Freadman, 2004; Kevelson, 1984; Liszka, 1996, 2000; Santaella-Braga, 1999; Short, 2007; Strand, 2004, 2010).

Speculative rhetoric is the third branch of Peirce’s *semiotic trivium*—or general logic—which consists of speculative grammar, speculative critic and speculative rhetoric. Speculative grammar studies the production and forms of meaning; speculative critic studies logical conclusions and arguments; and speculative rhetoric studies the relation between sign and interpretant: ‘Its most essential business is to ascertain by logical analysis, greatly facilitated by the development of the other branches of semeiotics, what are the indispensable conditions of sign’s acting to determine another sign nearly equivalent of itself’ (Peirce, 1904, p. 328). So, Peirce’s new rhetoric appeals to the concerns of both logic and rhetoric as it carries the prospect of a renewed pragmatic epistemology emphasizing the semiotic *production* of knowledge.

In mapping out the historical roots of Peirce’s speculative rhetoric, Liszka (2000) points to the ways in which Peirce’s new rhetoric can be traced back to, but also differs from, ordinary rhetoric. First, the fact that Peirce’s speculative rhetoric is part of his semiotic trivium means that rhetoric is included in Peirce’s general logic. Peirce’s speculative rhetoric expands the field of logic by marrying pragmatism and semiotics. It should thus be noted that Peirce does not validate logic in a formalized logical system, but rather in everyday, communal practices of inquiry. To Peirce, ‘the rhetorical aspect of inquiry is an important and vital aspect of logic’ (Liszka, 2000, p. 441). Second, Peirce’s speculative rhetoric is universal. In a 1904 essay on rhetoric Peirce calls for a ‘generalized’ conception of rhetoric. This universal and speculative new rhetoric is ‘the science of the essential conditions under which a sign may determine an interpretant sign of itself and of whatever it signifies, or may, as a sign, bring about a physical result’ (Peirce, 1904, p. 326). Peirce’s rhetoric concerns the relations of signs to their interpretants, and thus their ‘knowledge-producing value’. A vital distinction between a classical conception of rhetoric and Peirce’s speculative rhetoric is that Peirce’s rhetoric does not consider persuasions, but rather the ‘general secret of rendering signs effective’ (Peirce, 1904, p. 326). Third, Peirce’s speculative rhetoric stresses the social and dynamic character of semiosis. ‘Semiosis’ denotes the creative action of signs and sign-systems. In pointing to this creative action, or influence, Peirce ‘stands Hegel on his head by making representation causative’ (Liszka, 2000, p. 449).

Peirce's Metaphor of Mind

Peirce's axiom that thought, cognition and even man are semiotic in their essence carries an extended and post-humanist metaphor of mind and cognition. To Peirce, a sign is a medium and a mediator, a representation which itself is an element of the phenomenon. Our understanding of the world is always embedded in historically based and virtual signs. Thoughts are in signs and, like a flow of signs, a thought interacts with other thoughts and objects in a world of change. Consequently, learning is in semiosis, which to Peirce denotes 'an action, or influence, which involves a cooperation of *three* subjects: a sign, its object, and its interpretant' (Peirce, 1907, p. 411, my emphasis). This 'thri-relative influence' has the power to move agents and to change their habits. In short, learning is in the semiotic transactions of everyday life experience.

Peirce's unconventional, post-humanist and extended metaphor of mind goes well with the contemporary philosophies of mind that are now intersecting with the social and natural sciences. At the turn of the last century, the invention of new artificial memories replaced earlier ways of metaphorizing mind—such as Plato's cave, Rousseau's forest or Froebel's garden—with more mechanical analogies related to photography, the gramophone or cinematography. With the appearance of computer science after the Second World War, the mind was paralleled with neural networks and cognition with information processing. However, criticism of this prosthesis appeared at an early stage and today several schools of thought insist on replacing the computational view with alternatives, such as the 'rhizome' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), 'the extended mind' (Clark & Chalmers, 1998) or 'truth procedures' (Badiou, 2009). Interacting with, and also contrasting, such models, Peirce's semiotic metaphor of mind may provide philosophy of education with a new landscape to think from and thus help to advance the study of educational processes. The authors in this special issue help to demonstrate how.

Prospects for Educational Theory and Research

In his insightful article on the 'Neglected Facets of Peirce's "Speculative" Rhetoric', Vincent Colapietro demonstrates how Peirce's rhetoric invites a reframing of many of the vital questions concerning educational theory. In the first part of the article, Colapietro points to Peirce's rhetoric as the essential part of his sign theory. Next, acting on the assertion that education and rhetoric are extensively bound together, Colapietro maps out the implications of Peirce's new rhetoric for a critical understanding of human learning. Like Colapietro, Mats Bergman contends that a Peircean rhetoric can provide means for reflexive investigations into processes and methods of inquiry, communication and learning. In his clarifying article on 'Fields of Rhetoric', Bergman explores the scopes and functions of Peirce's rhetoric, which can serve both as the pre-theoretical starting point and the theoretical goal of philosophical practice. Bergman demonstrates how Peirce's speculative rhetoric offers higher-order conceptual tools to imaginatively describe, control and transform educational habits: one of Peirce's pursuits of rhetoric seems to be the improvement of semiotic habits. This goal is construed as the third and highest conception of learning provided by Peirce's philosophy.

In his well-written article ‘From Peirce’s Speculative Rhetoric to Educational Rhetoric’, Sebastien Pesce explores ways of designing an alternative ‘educational rhetoric’ based on Peirce. This ‘educational rhetoric’ entails a double perspective: a theoretical viewpoint opened up by Peirce’s speculative rhetoric and a practical viewpoint proposed by the French tradition of ‘institutional pedagogy’, which is a French expression related to critical pedagogy. This school of pedagogic thought questions the classical conception of teaching as transmission, exposes the damaging effects of the ‘phantasm of classroom control’ and stresses the essential character of group activities. Learning processes are here considered the result of collective activity in which teachers and students engage with signs, institutions and meaning to transform their own environment. This outlook is highly consistent with Peircean semiotics. Consequently, Pesce argues that Peirce’s rhetorical turn may inspire a new schooling model that, despite the theoretical character of a Peircean semiotic, helps to promote productive educational practices. This goes well with James J. Liszka’s scholarly argument that a Peircean perspective on education promotes active learning in the classroom. In his article on ‘Charles Peirce’s Rhetoric and the Pedagogy of Active Learning’, Liszka demonstrates how Peirce’s philosophy of education is in line with Dewey’s pedagogy of experiential learning. To gain knowledge, the learning activities should be embedded within a proper community of inquiry. Teachers should therefore venture to create the features of an appropriate community of inquiry in the classroom; a community that emphasizes engagement of the students in doing research rather than passively receiving information about its results.

With my article on ‘Peirce’s Rhetorical Turn: Conceptualizing Education as Semiosis’, I hope to demonstrate how Peirce, in his later writings, offers an extended metaphor of mind and a rich conception of the dynamics of knowledge and learning. Peirce here develops his early ‘semiotics’ into a more general theory of sign and sign use, while integrating his pragmatism, phenomenology and semiotics. In bringing Peirce’s notion of semiosis—the sign’s action—to the forefront, I hope to disclose how Peirce’s ‘rhetorical turn’ not only opens up towards a richer and more nuanced conception of the dynamics of knowledge and learning, but also invites a shift of perspective from the psychological processes of learning to the semiotic processes that characterize the very dynamics of knowledge production.

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