Edusemiotics: The Tao of Education

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Abstract
The paper presents a new field of inquiry, edusemiotics, at the intersection of theoretical semiotics and philosophy of education. A brief introduction to the distinguishing features of edusemiotics is offered as including process ontology, the logic of the included middle, the relational self, the “untimely” and posthuman dimensions of experience, the embodied mind, and others. Edusemiotics comes out as partaking of the Chinese Tao in terms of being the way to wholeness and the integration of those dualistic opposites that continue to haunt Western education at the level of both theory and practice. Some implications of the edusemiotic perspective on ethics and epistemology for pedagogy, policy and teacher training are discussed.

Keywords: education, philosophy, Peirce, Taoism, meaning, habits

1. Introduction
Educational theory today continues to be haunted by several ghosts of the past: Cartesian substance dualism; analytic philosophy of language grounded in direct representation, and “the” scientific method of positivist thinking on which educational research is often modelled. Edusemiotics is a new direction in educational philosophy and theory as well as a new sub-branch of the broader field of theoretical semiotics; and it was launched as such at the 12th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2014.

While the latest research in this new field of inquiry is addressed in the most recent publications (Semetsky, 2013; Semetsky & Stables, 2014; Stables & Semetsky, 2015), the term per se has been coined earlier as a subtitle to the Foreword written by Marcel Danesi for the volume Semiotics Education Experience (Semetsky 2010a). Danesi commented that “until recently, the idea of amalgamating signs with learning theory and education to establish a new branch, which can be called edusemiotics, has never really crystallized,
even though the great Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky had remarked … that the ‘very essence of human memory is that human beings actively remember with the help of signs’ … In these words can be detected the raison d’être for establishing a connection between semiotics as the science of signs, learning theory or the science of how signs are learned, and education, that is, the practical art/science of teaching individuals how to interpret and understand signs’” (Danesi, 2010, p. 7). Indeed, in academic departments, semiotics has tended to feature mainly in the schools of media and communication, linguistics, or cultural studies. When marginally present in the departments of education, semiotics is usually reduced to its applied function informed in general by the legacy of Russian cultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Semiotics in education thus so far has tended to remain within the confines of behavioural and social sciences ignoring, by and large, the very philosophical foundations of semiotics. While research in education “has traditionally turned to psychology to help it transform teaching into a more ‘learning compatible’ and ‘performance-oriented’ activity” (Danesi, 2010), the shift to philosophy provided by edusemiotics, brings into sharp focus the often-missing dimensions of epistemology, ontology, ethics, and deep existential questions positing these as especially valuable for education and in an urgent need of exploration.

Edusemiotics represents an integrative conceptual framework for education that uses “sign” as a minimal unit of description. Sign by definition is a relational rather than substantial entity and it cannot be reduced to an individual thing or person. Standing for something other than itself, a genuine sign, ultimately, integrates this “other” in itself by virtue of engaging in a series of relations and translations eliciting a series of transformations. As a philosophy of education, edusemiotics promotes not any personal agency but the value of relations. Developing the networks of relations is especially significant for our real-life practices in interpersonal and socio-political contexts. Semiotics does not limit signs to their linguistic representations. Real-life events can be considered interpretable signs comprising significant human experience on the basis of which we can learn. Semiotics postulates that “the whole of human experience, without exception, is an interpretive structure mediated and sustained by signs” (Deely, 1990, p. 5). And it is due to evaluation, or interpretation, of experience leading to its reorganization that people as signs among other signs acquire capacity to evolve and grow; thus to become other—and more fully developed—signs. While focusing on the signs of experience, edusemiotics has strong ontological presuppositions that affect our very conceptions of what constitutes this very experience, subjectivity and, importantly, reason—which as such transgresses the boundaries of the narrow rationality of the solely conscious Cogito but incorporates a bodily, affective or unconscious, dimension in itself (Semetsky, 2011, 2013).

2. Philosophical Foundations

In contrast to Cartesian substance dualism that lurks at the background of the field of
education, edusemiotics adopts process-ontology whose historical precursors include such philosophical figures as Plato, Leibniz, James, Peirce, Dewey and Whitehead (Rescher, 1996) as well as a number of Hermetic and Neo-Platonic thinkers. The ontology of stable substances prevalent in the philosophy of Descartes with its separation of res cogitans (immaterial, unextended substance) from res extensa (material, extended substance) gives way to the philosophy of sign-relations as processes and events. Process can be defined as a “coordinated group of changes in the complexion of reality, and organized family of occurrences that are systematically linked to one another either causally or functionally” (Rescher, 1996, p. 38). As a function of time, process represents non-biological evolution whence signs grow in meaning. Such dynamics of signs, in culture or nature alike, was called by Charles S. Peirce semiosis.

The term semiosis derives from the Greek σημείωσις, sēmeíōsis—a derivation, in turn, of the verb sēmeiô meaning to mark. Human experience is always marked by signs, and all thinking and living proceeds in signs. Human beings are living signs amidst other signs that they use, read, and interpret thereby acquiring a capacity to learn, develop, and grow. Edusemiotics sees living in terms of engaging with, and responding to, signs so as to create meanings for lived experience. Life per se, metaphorically, is a school. Signs are always involved in relations, participating in interdependent dynamics rather than remaining static substances independent of each other. Teaching and learning are embedded in semiosis, and the study of processes of learning and teaching is part of, and contributes to, the study of the ontogeny of signs together with the problematic of their communication and signification (cf. Nöth, 2010).

Integrative practices are largely absent among Western educational systems and relegated to Eastern traditions and philosophies. For the modern Western thought historically “there could be no tertium quid” (Merrell, 2002, p. 204) manifesting as such the elusive third in-between the two, considered as opposite, terms. Such tertium is defined as something of uncertain or unclassifiable nature which is related to, yet distinct from, the other two terms that we perceive as logical binaries. Classical tertium non datur principle refers to the law of non-contradiction, the excluded middle, which is the very basis of the either-or logic established long ago by Aristotle’s syllogistic reason. In contemporary analytic philosophy of language the same law is confirmed, even if in the slightly different, semantic, terms as the so called paradox of analysis: either the analysans has the same meaning as the analysandum, in which case the analysis is trivial, or it does not, in which case it is false. In epistemic terms, the same paradox—the paradox of inquiry or learning paradox as it came to be known in the field of education—can be traced to Plato’s Meno dialogue that describes Socrates as having engaged in a conversation regarding education of a slave boy.

Socrates claims that we cannot acquire any new knowledge by learning. Implicitly he is addressing the problem of being as-first-known, later formulated by Aquinas, ens primum cognitum. Meno is puzzled by what Socrates means when he provocatively says that there cannot be any new knowledge and that what is called learning is simply a process
of recollection and we always already possess all knowledge unconsciously. The paradox consists in that we either learn what we always already knew, that is, the concept of learning is meaningless; or we are forever in the dark because it is impossible to recognize this new knowledge even as we are trying to learn something new. Because analytic reason is founded on the logic of the excluded middle, the absent Third that, if present, would have connected the perceived opposites, for the Western mind the very idea of their unity is paradoxical and illogical thus creating an unbridgeable gap between such, supposedly dual, categories as matter and spirit or body and mind. Contrary to the Eastern, integrative, mode of thought, mainstream Western philosophy suffered long enough from the “great bifurcation” (Merrell, 2002, p. 54) between body and mind, and education still continues to model itself, even if implicitly, on the philosophy of Cartesian dualism.

In China, however, “the polar relationship of all opposites lies at the very basis of Taoist thought” (Capra, 1975, p. 112). Merrell (2002) suggests the all-encompassing term *bodymind* as pertaining to both Peirce’s semiotics and Eastern philosophy, including *I Ching* (the Chinese Book of Changes) and Buddhism. For Chuang Tzu, for example, “this” is also “that” and “that” is also “this”. The apparent opposites are united hence cease to be the opposites but complement each other in the manner of *yin* and *yang*, of body and mind, of material and spiritual, of intuitive wisdom and rational knowledge: such is the essence of Tao. Action and contemplation are thus complementary, exemplified in the figures of the sage and the king in Chinese philosophy. As noted by physicist and philosopher Fritjof Capra in his influential book *The Tao of Physics* (1975), “Fully realized human beings, in the words of Chuang Tzu, ‘by their stillness become sages, by their movement kings’” (p. 99). This statement sure sounds paradoxical, yet the paradox—the included Third—is the most important distinguishing feature of edusemiotics. Because of such defining characteristics, edusemiotics can be also described as the Tao of education: the way or the ever-learning process enabled by, and enabling in turn, the harmonious relations that cross the divide between culture and nature. As signs evolve, they indeed furnish both the human mind and non-human, natural, world (cf. De Tienne, 2003).

### 3. The Problem of Meaning

Life is a process, and learning from lived experience elicits the transformation of our beliefs and habitual attitudes due to re-evaluation of this very experience. Indeed, if “education…is identical with the operation of living a life which is fruitful and inherently significant, the only ultimate value which can be set up is just the process of living itself” (Dewey, 1916/1924, p. 248). Experiential learning expands the walls of the traditional classroom and opens it to the greater social and natural world. Analogously, it problematises the role of formal instruction. As Dewey asserted, “to ‘learn from experience’ is to make a backward and forward connection [that] …becomes instruction—discovery of the connection of things” (1916/1924, p. 164). The absence of emphasis on instruction makes learning by means of using signs a modality of *post-formal* pedagogy.
oriented to making connections between events so as to discover their meaning or value; the value-dimension is thus implied and is intrinsic to edusemiotics. Pedagogy in the spirit of edusemiotics is not reducible to teaching fragmented “true” facts, but aims to enrich experience with value and meanings notwithstanding that the “meaning lurks perpetually in the future” (Merrell, 1992, p. 189).

It is the creation of novel meanings for lived experience rather than transmitting some pre-existing facts from a generic teacher to a generic student that can break the old habits of thinking or behaving and should become the aim of education in the framework of edusemiotics. Education, which is traditionally reduced to technical objectives and solely academic success, can be re-conceptualised from the perspective of edusemiotics as a process of the transformation of habits and making learning experience meaningful and significant rather than limiting it to prescribed standardized tests. Indeed, educare (in Latin) literally means to lead out as well as to bring out something that is within, however irreducible to the solely conscious Cogito. Signs cannot be confined inside the egocentric consciousness of the Cartesian subject who, while declaring “I think” with certainty, ignores the dimension of meaning. Human intelligence is not given a priori but is constituted within semiosis, of which it is an emergent property. Indeed, Peirce equated intelligence with the ability to use signs and be “capable of learning by experience” (Peirce CP 2.227).

A genuine sign, however, is full of potential meanings. A relation between a sign and its object is indirect but mediated by the inclusion of the third category that Peirce called interpretant (Fig. 1):

![Figure 1. A genuine sign](image)

Peirce classified signs in terms of basic categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness where “Third is the conception of mediation, whereby first and second are brought into relation…. In psychology Feeling is First, Sense of reaction Second, General conception Third, or mediation. … Chance is First, Law is Second, the tendency to take habits is Third. [In ontology] Mind is First, Matter is Second, Evolution is Third” (Peirce, CP 6.7). A triadic, self-referential (that is logically circular, inacceptable from the analytic perspective) structure is ubiquitous; such structure therefore is not stable but dynamic—it is a process-structure uniting the perceived opposite terms of “structure” (stable, static, being) and “process” (dynamic, changing, becoming). The dynamics of semiosis—as becoming—is the very condition for being. This dynamics is enabled by a string of
infinite interpretants (dotted line in Figure 1) that ensure the development, transformation and evolution of signs. So the process of evolution is bound to exceed a purely biological dimension: it pertains also to the development of consciousness. It is because of the semiotic logic of the included middle that we can achieve new understanding: a sign can become other due to mediation by the interpretant which is thereby producing a sign’s very meaning. Signs dynamically grow in meaning in contrast to stable direct representations posited by analytic philosophy of language.

A sign’s self-referential closure eventually establishes identity, yet paradoxically with a difference: an edusemiotic, interpretive, process not only creates “in the mind of a person an equivalent sign [but] …a more developed sign” (Peirce, CP 2.228) because of a new meaning. Each temporary closure is also a key to open a door to new interpretations, new meanings. It is due to “synthetic consciousness [and] sense of learning” (Peirce, CP 1.377) via what Peirce (CP 5. 181) called the “mediated immediacy” that a novel meaning is created. Mediated immediacy surely sounds paradoxical, yet the law of non-contradiction is definitely not all there is: edusemiotics is informed by the triadic logic which does not deny but celebrates contradictions and paradoxes. As Peirce said, any “self-contradictory proposition is not meaningless; it means too much” (CP 2.352). The meaning however needs to be extracted so as to create order and harmony in the form of new understanding in the midst of the chaos of what we perceive as conflicting opposites that may cause existential angst. Yet this does not mean reducing everything to a single, forever stable, truth or the matter of fact. To repeat, meanings are evolving. The logic of the included Third—the paradoxical logic of multiple interpretations rather than any single representation—defies the reductionist paradigm and the fragmentation of knowledge prevalent in present-day, evidence-based, education. Edusemiotics posits empirical, factual, evidence as always open to further interpretation. It creates a novel—even if unstable due to its processual character—foundation for knowledge always already subject to evolution, development and the intrusion of signs that need to be interpreted anew in the unpredictable circumstances of lived experience for which our old habits of thought and action may be unfit or counterproductive.

4. Habit-Change

It is the triadic structure that serves as a ground for the transformation and evolution of our habits as the defining characteristic of edusemiotics. Habits are described by Peirce as unconscious dispositions to act in a certain manner in certain situations—but real-life situations themselves are never certain and betray their representation by supposedly a priori clear and distinct, Cartesian, ideas. They always partake of the unconscious dimension inaccessible to solely logical discourse but staying at the level of “the Unanalyzable, the Inexplicable, the Unintellectual…whose mediation…is brought about by a real effective force behind consciousness” (Peirce, CP 5. 289) that calls forth the abductive—intuitive and insightful but not logically articulated—mode of inference.
Peirce posits abduction as indispensable for growth in intelligibility; abduction borders on paradoxical “instinctive reason” (Peirce, CP 6. 475) still it conforms to, and is informed by, the greater “continuum of feeling” (CP 6. 152) as living, semiotic reality. Not being a direct psychological intuition posited by Descartes, but a logical category of Firstness, abduction still “comes to us as a flash. It is an act of insight” (Peirce, CP 5.181), while the fully-fledged semiotic reason consists “in embodiment, that is, in manifestation” (Peirce, CP 1.615) at the level of action. Knowledge is necessarily complemented by action.

As synthetic, triadic logic is simultaneously an ethics of thinking (cf. Deely, 2001, p. 622) inseparable from human conduct, that is, ethics as the logic of doing; the circularity of evolutionary Thirdness having provided conditions for observable, “practical, experimental effects” (p. 617). In fact, a series of abductive guesses—perhaps those exercised by the slave boy in Plato’s *Meno*—represent an experiment of live engagement with signs embedded in semiosis in the process of growth and acquiring new knowledge. It is abduction that can insightfully grasp the potential meanings implicit as *primum cognitum* so as to actualize them. A supposedly “transcendental relative” (Deely, 2001, p. 619) is simultaneously *immanent* to our perception—not outside of it—and just needs some experiential conditions as a body part in the bodymind, anti-dualistic, edusemiotic approach to elicit the engagement with signs constituting our lived experience.

It is the triadic, itself paradoxical, nature of signs, that dissolves the learning paradox or, better to say, makes the figure of a semiotic triangle—a seemingly illogical, self-referential structure which is always suspect if not altogether *taboo* from the viewpoint of analytic reason—symbolic of synthetic, holistic thinking in which the unconscious dimension of experience is integrated. *Such is the radical rationality of edusemiotics* that employs the logic of the included middle. It is the unconscious that “gives spontaneity and freshness; [but] consciousness, conviction and control” (Dewey, 1991a, p. 217). Yet these are not opposites but need to complement each other in meaningful education that would have acknowledged the existence of the affective, involuntary hence unconscious, dimension of experience exceeding Cartesian rationality or conscious will. Affects are signs that “hide” behind words and express themselves metaphorically as subtle feelings bypassing the language of propositions. Thus, and as Dewey reminded us, the ultimate task of education consists in nurturing a particular “type of mind competent to maintain an economical balance of the unconscious and the conscious” (Dewey, 1991a, p. 215-216). It is this task that becomes fully realized in edusemiotics especially when verbal signs are complemented by the interpretation of images and pictures (Semetsky, 2011, 2013): indeed, as the saying goes, a single picture may be well worth a thousand words.

So the integration of the unconscious dimension ultimately leads to habit-change which is a challenging task of education expressed in terms of “modification of a person’s tendencies toward action” (Peirce, CP 5.476) in the form of the final interpretant at the meta-level of practice; a Cartesian mind-body dualism is thus bridged by the flow of semiotic interpretants. The edusemiotic principle of the included middle, analogous to the Taoist principle of complementarity, surpasses the law of non-contradiction on the basis of which
teachers habitually demand unambiguous and the only “right” answers from their students. Edusemiotics contends that it may be precisely what appears to us as contradictions—as well as moral dilemmas that abound in lived experience—that are important and must not be silenced but acknowledged and learned from! Confusing and conflicting experiences represent what Dewey called problematic situations which don’t initially make sense for us, and the existential meanings of which are to be extracted in this very experience if and when we learn from it and begin to understand it. Semiotic, non-analytic but synthetic, understanding replaces reductive empiricism with its separation of the observer from the observed, of subject from object, of self from other, with fecund empiricism that transcends a dualistic split and makes binaries two poles of one, albeit bipolar and Janus-faced, sign.

5. Implications for Pedagogy

Signs are always already bipolar entities and edusemiotics strongly rejects anthropocentrism. Instead it posits the embodied mind inseparable from the greater (physical, posthuman) environment. This presents a challenge to the preferred model in educational research that largely borrows from the outdated positivist natural science, with its request of (supposedly) detached and objective observation and failure to acknowledge the multileveled inter-relational network of signs that perfuse the world in which we participate: it is the experienced world composed not of simple dyads but of complex triads comprising “the observer, the observing, and the observed” (Dewey, 1991b, p. 97) as genuine signs. Surely, a counter-argument may be constructed that any pedagogical practice always already presupposes some form of relation, participation and communication. Yet the triadic, semiotic, logic re-conceptualises the idea of communication per se. To illustrate the difference, consider the two diagrams: the logic of the excluded middle is represented by a direct line from a teacher to a student: there is no triadic structure here (Fig. 2):

Figure 2. The logic of the excluded middle

Teacher ———— Student

Such a straight, push-and-pull, line is not capable of sustaining a genuinely semiotic relation, and a student here opposes a teacher as much as a teacher opposes a student. They function as independent binary opposites. Teacher and student form a dyad and, even if unbeknown to them, such model of teaching conforms to the habitual philosophy of Cartesian dualism. The situation can be partially ameliorated by a developing dialogue that would enhance a straight line—a single line anyway—by a back and forth communication going in both directions. But the dyadic relation still persists.

However the logic of the included middle is triadic, represented (symbolically) not by a single line but the ubiquitous triangular structure that has an included, third, element—a semiotic interpretant on which both a teacher and a student converge as if establishing the
in-between field of shared meanings that enables mutual understanding (Fig. 3):

Figure 3. The logic of the included middle

The relation is indirect, non-linear, and mediated by virtue of relational, coordinating or balancing, dynamics. Only as such can the relation not only be sustained but also ensure its significance. It is the included middle that forms a triadic, genuinely semiotic, relation situated in the field of signs as a unified meaningful whole in which both a student and a teacher are embedded and which is excluded, by definition, in the dyad of direct representation. They are interrelated and interdependent. A teacher–student relation per se is a sign embedded in the network of potential meanings which are realised in experience. Teaching and learning together form a single, integrative and creative process at the core of edusemiotics. Edusemiotics partakes of an open-ended practical inquiry that does not aim to attain finite and certain knowledge as in traditional epistemology. The edusemiotic process of the evolution and transformation of signs intrinsically determines new opportunities for human development and transformative education and necessarily encompasses the future-oriented dimensions of becoming, novelty and creativity. These elements were the defining characteristics of Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy and need to be taken into account in education. They elicit alternative pedagogies irreducible to direct instruction and the unidirectional transmission of pre-given “subject matter” as facts divorced from meaning.

6. Relational Ethics

Edusemiotics progressively ensures our dynamic becoming, in lieu of forever static being; and leads to reformulating the notion of progress that contradicts the received notion of progress in societies based on a knowledge economy, which tends to be equated with numerically measured outcomes as finite goals. Thus edusemiotics changes our very perception of standards as the established policy for testing, assessment and evaluating academic success versus failure. Failure, in accord with the process of signs-becoming-other, may very well turn into its own opposite, that is, carry a positive value of success by virtue of it being a learning process, learning experience. The role of practical experience from which we learn calls forth an ethical dimension; and the edusemiotic perspective leads to positing a new ethics in education. Years ago, educational philosopher Nel Noddings (1983/2004) has already posited the ethics of care as based on relations.
Edusemiotics takes this approach up a notch and formulates a new ethics of integration (Semetsky, 2012a, 2012b, 2013) devoted to creating and practicing reconciling relations between generic self and other that as such can potentially arrive at understanding each other and sharing each other’s values: the way a mother understands her (as yet preverbal) child by means of natural bond. Surely, we are signs among signs. We are relational entities. As Noddings emphasised, “we are [too] defined in relation, [even if] we are individuals – separate physical entities” (Noddings, 2010, p. 113). As individual physical entities we appear to belong to the realm of Peircean Seconds; while as relational selves we by definition also encompass the whole gamut of insights, intuitions and abductions (Firsts) coupled with interpretation and self-reflection (Thirds) whilst “anchored in a relational ontology” (Noddings, 2010, p. 115) recapitulated in the relational ethics.

As far as moral education is concerned, edusemiotics challenges the practice of the direct inculcation of values that often partakes of indoctrination and tends to present the indubitable “good” values in the form of commandments. Edusemiotics is future-oriented and somewhat “untimely” in terms of both epistemology and ethics. Education from the viewpoint of edusemiotics interrogates values that are set in stone and is capable of anticipating new values “that are yet to come” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5): values as the signs of the times are also evolving. The “fashionable” concept of lifelong education thus becomes problematical: rather than focusing on continual professional training and emphasizing the necessity to acquire new technical skills, it extends to the level of informal edusemiotic pedagogy that also includes personal development and self-formation outside of the walls of formal classrooms in institutional settings. In fact, one, unorthodox, skill is involved in such pedagogy: the ancient Stoics developed the idea that virtue is a kind of technê or craft of life which, when blended together with the theoretical knowledge of the world, forms the art and science of living. A moral dimension is part and parcel of edusemiotics. However, even if classical ethical theories are included in teacher preparation courses (and often they are not included at all), the adequacy of those theories becomes doubtful in contemporary global contexts permeated by cultural differences and conflicts of values.

The continuing debate regarding the methods of ethics appears unending: “since Socrates [philosophers] have sought...criteria for distinguishing between right and wrong and between good and evil” (Baron, Pettit & Slote, 1997, p.1). What is common to all approaches, however, is that they are framed by the reasoning of an independent moral agent that presents ethical categories in the form of dualistic opposites. Yet we understand that the real-life interplay of signs embedded in human experiences erases the borders between categories and makes it impossible to lay down strict theoretical rules as indubitable moral yardsticks. The edusemiotic perspective on ethics overcomes the dualistic split inherent in simplistic moral algebra with its traditional binary division into good versus evil or right versus wrong. It enables us to move beyond such separation and towards the integration of those dualistic opposites that are still deeply ingrained in individual and cultural consciousness. When the walls surrounding the rigid
logical categories crumble and open the gates for the fuzzy included middle to slip in-between, this inadvertently does away with egocentric moral judgement! While the goal of traditional ethics is illusory perfection and an adherence to the absolute good that necessarily leads to the appearance of its binary opposite, the absolute evil as the eternal other, a new edusemiotic ethics aims towards wholeness rather than having as its goal some ideal betterment and perfection. Edusemiotics is oriented to the pedagogy of values (Semetsky, 2010b) with values per se continuously re-evaluated, re-interpreted and created anew in the manner of signs.

As such, edusemiotics also influences the approach to teacher training and, potentially, the whole gamut of educational policymaking. Teachers should be exposed to the fundamentals of edusemiotics together with its constituting part, the ethics of integration, both at pre-service level and in the form of their own professional development, which is inseparable, in the semiotic framework, from their personal growth. Because semiosis is a never-ending process of signs becoming other signs, education cannot stop when a child grows up: personal development theoretically proceeds through the lifespan. Edusemiotics brings to mind the notion of us as always subjects-in-process (using Julia Kristeva’s expression); this conception affects the traditional approach to teacher preparation. From the view point of edusemiotics, it will demand a continuing engagement with signs located in life, in experience inclusive of moral and intellectual growth and the transformation of our habitual attitudes—and we impoverish our very existence if we comply with the current policies of confining education to formal schooling towards formal qualification, for children or adults alike. Teacher preparation courses should include educational theory emphasising relations and connections, and not only with other disciplines but also, more importantly, with real life encompassing the common problems of humanity and the problematic of relations so as to create meanings for those problems, to make sense out of them. In other words, problems (and problem-solving) are to be treated as signs, which are subject to interpretation and meaning-making. Importantly, teachers’ self-knowledge becomes a must: without it one would be unable to establish a genuine relation with their opposite, their “other”. Self-knowledge as a paradoxical relation to oneself is a prerogative of edusemiotics and is a prerequisite for knowing others. However self-knowledge would be impossible without the process of self-reflection. It is such semiotic self-reference (exemplified in the triadic structure of genuine signs) that enables ourselves to evolve and become other in this process.

7. Conclusion

A question arises: why is edusemiotics so far absent in the departments of education, the theoretical foundation of this discipline thus remaining unchallenged and often counterproductive to the growth of students (and teachers for that matter)? Why is the research program in edusemiotics also missing? Why hasn’t the logic of signs become our new habit of the mind? Why do we habitually subscribe to a dualistic worldview?
Why do we continue to implement fragmentation and separation instead of wholeness and integration? Well, old habits are resilient and die hard! We tend to act in a repetitive manner in line with a gamut of old habits of which we are likely to be unaware because, intentionally or unintentionally, we take such ingrained patterns of thoughts and actions as norms. Worse, we tend to believe in the righteousness of our actions without ever questioning them because, as Peirce said, “belief is... a habit of mind essentially enduring for some time, and mostly (at least) unconscious” (Peirce, CP 5.417). We not only remain unaware of our very assumptions, but, based on these, continue to repetitively indoctrinate younger generations. It is the very nature of habits that, “when imagination and perception and conceptions of a sign” (Merrell, 2002, p. 128) occur again and again, the signs may sink deep into the unconscious and turn into fixed and rigid habits. An old belief becomes “sedimented into bodymind; it becomes habituated, it becomes part of individual or cultural practices” (Ibid) and therefore needs to be revaluated and re-interpreted so as to raise the level of consciousness.

Still, Peirce considered consciousness a vague term and asserted that “if it is to mean Thought it is more without us than within. It is we that are in it, rather than it in any of us” (CP 8.256). Everything is a sign: the whole universe is perfused with signs; yet—paradoxically—“nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (Peirce, CP 2.308). The meaning and essence of every conception depends, in a pragmatic sense, on the way the latter is applied: it “lies in the application that is to be made of it” (Peirce CP 5.532) at the level of our practices, be it research, teaching, writing, or bringing up younger generations. And human experience spills over the boundaries of individual analytic consciousness but conforms to the radical and “different logic of social practice: an intensive and affective logic of the included middle” (Bosteels, 1998, p. 151). It is practical experience full of (mostly unconscious) behavioral patterns that demands interpretation and critical self-reflection, so that it can provide a glimpse into the reality of signs as dynamic processes and events pregnant with meaning.

The grand overall, bordering on political, aim of edusemiotics, besides personal development and as grounded in self-other relations, is the creation of “the open society” (Peters, 2009, p. 303) as the transformation of the whole of knowledge economy. Instead of fragmented building blocks comprising finite knowledge, edusemiotics amounts to the unlimited learning process as the way (notably, using the Taoist metaphor) to wholeness and harmony via the common field of potential meanings and values that may be compared to the Neo-Confucian concept of \( ch'i \) wherein our “selves” are always of the nature of semiotic relations, hence partaking of transpersonal dimension of experience. They do not oppose each other but are interdependent and, as inherent in semiosis, are ultimately coordinated. At the level of organisations, including schools, the urgency of re-reading, re-evaluating, and re-interpreting current approaches to educational policies and aims is paramount in order to “reveal underlying forms of rationality, identify unspoken interests, focus on unintended consequences, point out the contradictions, or map the field of contingencies” (Simons, Olssen & Peters, 2009, p. 8). Edusemiotics as grounded in
relations will inevitably change educational policies that so far remain by and large oriented to the solely academic achievements of individual learners with the implicit goal of enabling the constant flow of capital to support this very knowledge economy. Edusemiotics as a novel, and broadly transdisciplinary, field of study must transform the knowledge economy of the 21st century so that the science of signs serves as its theoretical foundation. It can and should become a guideline for individual, social and cultural change and for creating innovative communities of inquirers who can learn how to read and interpret diverse signs not isolated from life but embedded in it. Such communities of “edusemioticians” will be able to promote educational reforms, using edusemiotics as a conceptual framework for this transformation and putting in practice the value of sign-relations.

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