

International Explorations in Outdoor  
and Environmental Education 9

Glyn Thomas  
Janet Dymont  
Heather Prince *Editors*

# Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education

International Perspectives

 Springer

# **International Explorations in Outdoor and Environmental Education**

Volume 9

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This series focuses on contemporary trends and issues in outdoor and environmental education, two key fields that are strongly associated with education for sustainability and its associated environmental, social and economic dimensions. It also has an international focus to encourage dialogue across cultures and perspectives. The scope of the series includes formal, nonformal and informal education and the need for different approaches to educational policy and action in the twenty first century. Research is a particular focus of the volumes, reflecting a diversity of approaches to outdoor and environmental education research and their underlying epistemological and ontological positions through leading edge scholarship. The scope is also be both global and local, with various volumes exploring the issues arising in different cultural, geographical and political contexts. As such, the series aims to counter the predominantly “white” Western character of current research in both fields and enable cross-cultural and transnational comparisons of educational policy, practice, project development and research. The purpose of the series is to give voice to leading researchers (and emerging leaders) in these fields from different cultural contexts to stimulate discussion and further research and scholarship to advance the fields through influencing policy and practices in educational settings. The volumes in the series are directed at active and potential researchers and policy makers in the fields. Book proposals for this series may be submitted to the Publishing Editor: Claudia Acuna E-mail: [Claudia.Acuna@springer.com](mailto:Claudia.Acuna@springer.com)

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Editors

# Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education

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The editors have brought together leading thinkers from university outdoor environmental education (OEE) programs around the world. The book is the first to focus entirely on tertiary sector OEE programming, which has such vital educational, socio-cultural and environmental aims, yet struggles to thrive within the challenging educational setting of neoliberal institutions and populist politics. The chapters are creatively organized around ‘threshold concepts’ collaboratively developed by the Australian OEE in higher education sector. This work promises to make an important contribution to shaping university OEE programs’ curricula, policies and practices globally.

*Professor Simon Beames, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences*

Using the framework of threshold concepts is a novel approach to defining the interconnected ecosystem of outdoor and environmental education, within the context of higher education. Thomas, Dymont and Prince are to be highly commended for compiling such an impressive group of international scholars to contribute. The varied contributions from Canada to Iceland, Sweden to Australia, combine to create an exceptional resource for students and scholars alike. Each chapter offers a lens on one or more critical aspects of the field as it matures and diversifies in the twenty-first century.

*Patrick T. Maher, Ph.D., Dean of Teaching and Professor, Physical and Health Education, Nipissing University, Canada*

An excellent publication containing a wealth of knowledge. This editorial team has brought together a truly international group of researchers, providing readers with current key thinking in developing outdoor practitioners. It is underpinned by leading theory and social and environmental ethic. A must read for outdoor environmental educators, educators more broadly and outdoor re-creationists.

*Dr Barbara Humberstone Professor (Emerita) Bucks New University, UK*

If the out-of-doors touches your professional life, read this book; it is poised to transform not only the preparation of university graduates for their profession, but your own practice, and the field itself. The theoretical and applied breadth of the vital concepts found within make this book a critical research, practical and pedagogical gem.

*Tom G. Potter, Ph.D., Professor, School of Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism, Lakehead University, Canada*

*Glyn would like to thank his partner Tracey and work colleagues at USC for their patience and support whilst editing this book.*

*Janet thanks her Australian and Canadian colleagues as well as her family and friends (near and far) who gifted inspiration, support and joy during the preparation of this edited book.*

*Heather would like to thank her family, Ivan, Angus and Hal Walsh, for their support and encouragement.*

## Series Editors' Foreword

In his Foreword to an edited collection of essays on experiencing the outdoors, Pete Hay (2015, p. vii; italics, capitals and punctuation in original) writes:

*Outdoors. Not, Therefore, Indoors*

Here is one of the great binaries of lived experience, and it is a binary replete with portent. Step outside and you cross one of the great divides of daily existence...

Phenomenologically speaking – experientially – the contrast between the being of outdoors and the being of indoors could hardly be more pronounced... This being so, it is puzzling why the multi-faceted nature of the ‘outdoors’ should have been so little explicated in the literature extant.

Hay’s assertion reminds us that the multi-faceted nature of the *indoors* has been explicated exhaustively in the research literature on *classroom* environments, much of which has been led by our Australian colleague Barry Fraser (1998) in the context of school science education. Hay also reminds us that *outdoors* is a much less ambiguous term than *environment*, a point to which a contributor to this volume, John Quay (2016, p. 1), also alludes when he writes: “In all of its guises, the influence of the ‘environment’ in outdoor education is tangible, no matter how this term may be defined”. We doubt if anyone would disagree with this assertion, but cannot say that the influence of the outdoors in environmental education has equivalent status. As we observe elsewhere (Noel Gough & Annette Gough, 2010, p. 340), Arthur Lucas’s (1979) “model for environmental education as being education *in*, *about*, and *for* the environment...has become a mantra for the field” and has been a persistent focal point for deliberations and debates about how the field is, and should be, conceptualised. For example, in the first issue of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education (AJEE)*, Ian Robottom (1984, p. 11; italics in original) quotes the coordinator of the Australian Curriculum Development Centre’s Environmental Education Project as endorsing the view that “the essence of environmental education lies in its education *for* the environment dimension”:

We can talk about education *in* the environment, education *about* the environment, education *from* the environment and education *for* the environment, but only the last can be called environmental education (Annette Greenall, 1981, p. 4; italics in original)

In the same issue, Max Walsh (1984, p. 14) pointedly disagrees with Greenall's and Robottom's positions:

Such statements give little encouragement to the teacher who is genuinely concerned about the deteriorating world environmental situation and is striving to do his/her own thing about it, albeit through an education *about* and *in* the environment approach. The implication is... that such approaches are inadequate, and insufficient recognition is given to the possibility that education *for* the environment may need to be preceded by an education *about* the environment component.

Walsh's comments suggest that a number of environmental educators are likely to agree that environmental education might at least partly (and perhaps quite substantially) be constituted by an emphasis on education *about* and *for* the environment without venturing out of the classroom (or laboratory) very often. However, we are confident that most outdoor educators would agree with the position taken by another contributor to this book, Andrew Brookes (1989, p. 15), namely that outdoor education is distinguished from other educational pursuits, including environmental education, by "its physical and conceptual isolation from schooling. Conceptual isolation provides the opportunity to construct powerfully affective forms of de-schooled environmental education". Brookes reasons that "conceptual isolation can provide different situational constraints from those existing in schools or other institutions", but also warns that "a technocratic rationalisation of the field associated with its increasing institutionalisation threatens to negate that potential" (p. 15). Quay (2015, p. 22) takes advantage of this physical and conceptual isolation in research that seeks "to better understand life in school as experienced by the young people who live it". He probes beyond what Philip Jackson (1968, p. 1) calls "the ubiquity of classroom phenomena in both time and space" by juxtaposing young people's experiences of life in academic classrooms with their experiences in outdoor education, specifically their participation in an 8-day school camp. Quay (2015, pp. 1–2) writes:

Life in school is ordinary, so ordinary in fact that students (and teachers) become oblivious to much of the routine. The subtitle I have given this book – *From academic classroom to outdoor education* – points to a juxtaposition aimed at addressing this difficulty. To raise this ordinariness to awareness, one must see it against a somewhat contrasting background. For much of academic life in school, outdoor education offers such a background, and vice versa, academic classroom life offers a contrast to life in outdoor education, enabling nuances to be perceived.

This is not the place to discuss Quay's research in further detail, other than to affirm that it supports Jackson's comments about the ubiquity of *classroom* phenomena, but we are a little surprised by his endorsement (Quay, 2015, p. 1) of another generalisation: "there is some truth to the notion to that 'school is school, no matter where it happens' (Jackson, 1990, p. xxi)". We interpret Quay's research as providing further evidence that *academic classrooms are academic classrooms*, no matter where they are, but we doubt that any outdoor educator would suggest that *a school camp is a school camp, no matter where it is located*. To some extent, we are stating the obvious, but the significance of *place* (or rather, of *particular places*) has not always been taken for granted in the research literatures of outdoor and

environmental education, although readers will find many notable exceptions among the contributions to this volume.

The first paragraph of the editors' introduction to this book returns us to considering how it exemplifies another aspect of the "multi-faceted character of the outdoors" to which Hay refers, namely, the "demanding set of knowledges, experiences and skills to be able to provide outdoor, experiential programs that prepare their participants for the challenges that lie ahead". Their assertion that there "has never been a stronger need for outdoor environmental educators ...who understand the ecological crisis confronting our planet and its peoples" is hardly an exaggeration, and the editors have set themselves a formidable task, "to provide and provoke emerging outdoor educators with an understanding of how outdoor environmental education can be part of the transformational process" through elaborating threshold concepts for outdoor educators. It is much to their credit that they have assembled such an outstanding group of academics and other practitioners from around the world to contribute their expertise to this project.

While threshold concepts may be new to the field of outdoor education, the structure they offer to the profession and to this book makes them well worth engaging and discussing in multiple contexts, not only in Australia, as testified by the diversity of the chapter authors locations and experiences.

## Acknowledgement

We edit this series on the unceded lands of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nations; we respectfully acknowledge their Elders, past, present and emerging and what they have taught us about this land and sea.

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# Chapter 1

## Preparing Outdoor Educators to Be Transformational Teachers and Leaders



Glyn Thomas, Janet Dymont, and Heather Prince

There has never been a stronger need for outdoor environmental educators (hereafter termed 'outdoor educators') who understand the ecological crisis confronting our planet and its peoples. These outdoor educators require a demanding set of knowledges, experiences and skills to be able to provide outdoor, experiential programs that prepare their participants for the challenges that lie ahead. The purpose of this book is to provide and provoke emerging outdoor educators with an understanding of how outdoor environmental education can be part of the transformational process. An outstanding group of academics and practitioners from around the world have contributed chapters to this important tome. The foci of the six sections of this book have been informed by research conducted in Australia on the threshold concepts that a graduate from a university outdoor education course might be expected to acquire (Thomas et al., 2019).

In 2015, a small group of Australian academics recognized that there was a lack of clarity about the knowledge, experience and skillsets of university outdoor education graduates. In comparison, outdoor leaders who were educated through the vocational education and training (VET) pathway in Australia have a much clearer curriculum and assessment processes. Previously, Martin (1998) noted how the ideological differences between the VET pathway and university pathway shaped

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the educational process for outdoor educators. The curriculum uniformity in the VET pathway, achieved through a National Training package, does not exist within the university pathway. Consequently, there is often uncertainty for some employers about university graduates' knowledge, skills and experience levels. This led to an ongoing research process that has attempted to resolve this lack of clarity using threshold concepts. This process has included:

- Clarifying the nature of threshold concepts and how they might serve university outdoor education graduates (Polley & Thomas, 2017),
- Using a Delphi Research Method to develop a draft set of threshold concepts (Thomas et al., 2019),
- Conducting a broader survey of outdoor educators in Australia to refine the threshold concepts (Thomas et al., [Under review](#)),
- Identifying how assessment tasks might be used to measure attainment of the threshold concepts (Polley et al., [Under review](#)),
- Identifying how the practical fieldwork skills of outdoor educators might be best described and measured (current project).

The use of threshold concepts in professions can be a slippery and elusive process to describe what graduates are able to do, and there have been detractors and those who have critiqued their use (Morgan, 2015; Rowbottom, 2007). It is also grounded in one country and has not yet gained traction in the global context to which this book pertains. However, for this book, the threshold concepts have served to provide a loose, organizing structure for the content that we as editors think university outdoor education students need to engage with. Figure 1.1 shows how the sections of this book align with the threshold concepts in the aforementioned research (Thomas et al., 2019). Before previewing these sections and their respective chapters, it is important to provide some clarity around the emphasis that we have felt appropriate in this book.

The book centres on outdoor environmental education to highlight the importance of focusing on the more-than-human features of our planet, and the relationships that we have with those features. Unapologetically, the book takes a socially-critical approach to thinking about outdoor environmental education. Martin (1998) argued that a socially critical outdoor educator

does not believe in the mandated authority of the teacher, does not believe in the immutable nature of knowledge, the certainty of assessment, the predictiveness of future behaviour. Most importantly, the socially critical outdoor educator recognises that the natural environment in which she or he operates has been ill-served by the reproductive educational beliefs of the past, and a fundamental change in the way Western society relates to the earth is both called for and compelling. (p. 19)

This socially critical ideology clearly distinguishes this book from other texts that focus on outdoor adventure education, adventure programming, outdoor recreation, or outdoor pursuits. The reader will also note that there is a strong focus on decolonizing outdoor education practices and approaches, a focus that we deliberately seek in recognition of the current focus on this important work in broader society. We also acknowledge, as do the book contributors, that not all outdoor

Book Section Focus	Corresponding Threshold Concept/s
Theoretical and philosophical foundations	#1 An outdoor educator creates opportunities for experiential learning
Pedagogical approaches and issues	#2 Outdoor educators use pedagogies that align their program's purpose and practice
Outdoor environmental education as a social, cultural, and environmental endeavour.	#3 Outdoor educators are place-responsive, and see their work as a social, cultural and environmental endeavour
Advocacy	#4 Outdoor educators advocate for social and environmental justice
Safety management	#6 Outdoor educators understand safety and apply a strict aversion to fatalities
Professional practice	#5 Outdoor educators continue to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise #7 Outdoor educators routinely engage in reflective practice

**Fig. 1.1** Book section alignment with the outdoor education threshold concepts. (Thomas et al., 2019)

environmental education occurs in schools; other educational contexts are valid and purposeful settings.

This text targets the emerging outdoor educator, meaning those students engaged in a formal program of study in a university program. However, there is excellent, thought-provoking content for seasoned outdoor educators, university academics, program administrators and other outdoor educators participating in other training pathways. It is hoped that the book will challenge and confront readers and encourage them to wrestle with their own thoughts, opinions, and ideas across the range of topics. Each chapter includes five reflective questions that encourage deeper engagement. Quite deliberately, there are rarely right or wrong answers to these questions. There is also a list of up to five sources in each chapter that provide recommended further reading for someone who wants to go to a deeper level. In the remainder of this chapter, each section of the book is introduced by the respective section editor.

## 1.1 Theoretical Foundations and Philosophies

The first section of the book is focused on the theories and philosophies that underpin outdoor environmental education (OEE) practice. We argue that the theoretical and philosophical foundations of outdoor education practice are not always made explicit by outdoor educators. This section provides a sample of some of the concepts, theories, and philosophies on which students can draw to inform their



practice. Of course, this is not a conclusive list, but rather a taster of the kind of thinking and writing that can provide a useful grounding for explaining why outdoor educators do what they do. John Quay from Australia starts the section by emphasising the importance of philosophising for outdoor educators. He argues that the process of questioning can lead to a deeper understanding of practice and opens up possibilities for change and improvement. He draws on Dewey's idea of occupations as a way of organizing or thinking about ways of being, ways of knowing, and ways of doing. According to Quay understanding these things helps to understand the relationships that exist between self, others and the environment.

In the third chapter, Kathleen Pleasants and Noel Gough provide a critique of the common worldviews that are employed in tertiary outdoor environmental education programs such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. They argue that considering some broader perspectives and assemblages such as post-humanist and new materialist strategies can allow for a more distributive agency and the exploration of how humans are imbricated through the material and the cultural. In the fourth chapter, UK authors Jamie McPhie and David Clarke challenge emerging outdoor educators to think more critically about the concept of human-nature relationships. They highlight the political nature of the term, and expose some of the political positions that inform Western environmental thinking. They encourage readers to consider how the political ramifications of knowledges of nature may inform our pedagogies.

The fifth chapter introduces the concept of sense of place. Mark Leather and Jakob Thorsteinsson present their understandings of the concept based on their shared place-responsive teaching experiences in the UK and Iceland. They encourage emerging outdoor educators to critically consider human relationships with culture, time, and nature. In particular, they share ways to give space to experiential, aesthetic, and mindful embodied fieldwork experiences as they encourage us to view nature as hyperreal. Heidi Smith contributes the final chapter and calls for a more inclusive and contemporary theory of leadership which embraces gender diversity, minorities and reciprocity for the more-than-human world. She identifies three levels of leadership success as effective, exemplary and extraordinary and presents four key elements of extraordinary leadership. She calls for a new breed of earth leaders who can acquire a nuanced mix of characteristics, values, skills, and behaviours that will allow outdoor education to make a difference.

## **1.2 Pedagogical Approaches and Issues**

The second section of this book brings together nine chapters that focus on the pedagogical approaches underpinning the work of outdoor educators. What is striking in this section is the diverse ways in which outdoor educators can inform and frame their pedagogical practices – in some chapters, readers are invited to dig deep into theoretically dense material that helps explain why we teach how we teach; in other chapters, frameworks, tables, and charts are presented to help articulate our

pedagogical approaches; and in other chapters, pragmatic case studies are presented to help us make visible some of our pedagogical decisions.

In this section we hope that readers will be called on to think deeply about their teaching practices and to be open to re-thinking pedagogies that may no longer be optimally serving the outdoor education profession. Some of the chapters invite readers to re-think how some of the historical foundations of outdoor education need to be challenged; other chapters call on readers to re-position themselves on the margins of learning environments and allow specific places to feature more centrally; still other chapters urge emerging educators to be far more intentional in the big and little decisions they make in the day-to-day realities of being an outdoor educator.

This section begins with a critical examination of two of the foundations of outdoor environmental education pedagogy: experiential education as well as adventure and risk. Although the chapters are very different, there is a similarity in their shared call to challenge, critique, reexamine and re-imagine these long-held foundations of outdoor educators' pedagogies. What is heartening, however, is that both chapters move beyond critique and end in offering helpful ways forward with a reconceptualized framework for these foundational concepts. Leading off, Americans Joshua Meyer and Jayson Seaman's chapter on experiential education invites readers to challenge some oft-held assumptions about the cyclical nature of experiential education. They begin with an overview of the evolution of experiential learning theories before turning to a critique of the conventional mechanistic models, such as Kolb's experiential learning cycle. They conclude their chapter with an invitation for educators to move beyond conventional experiential learning cycles and provide a number of strategies for doing so. The next chapter, Mike Brown and Mark Jones, from New Zealand, also challenges traditional pedagogical practices that emerge from simplistic or reductionist views of adventure and risk. Their chapter begins by unpacking the terms adventure and risk – and in doing so, Brown and Jones highlight some challenges in the ways these terms have been interpreted and enacted in many mainstream outdoor environmental programs. They provide helpful alternatives that invite readers to reframe adventure and risk, and in doing so, prompt different activities and outcomes that are more authentic and support learners to develop an ethic of environmental care.

The next three chapters are, interestingly, written by primarily Australian authors who prompt readers consider how the actual outdoor environment can feature far more prominently in the pedagogy of outdoor environmental educators. The authors use three different framework/theories to argue for the important role outdoor spaces can play in the delivery of outdoor environmental education – and as such, there are important shared but distinct messages. Brian Wattchow introduces us to the notion of place-responsiveness and helps readers understand the historical foundations of place-based education. Marcus Morse and his colleagues present their work on wild pedagogies and introduce practical touchstones that can help educators become wild pedagogues. Both chapters seek to position place more centrally in the teaching and learning processes and this requires educators to de-centre themselves from traditionally held views of what it means to be an OEE teacher. Both chapters are

theoretically rich but also end with practical suggestions for readers on how they can be more place-responsive and challenge the traditional cultures of control and predictability that underpin mainstream education. This section concludes with a chapter by Anita Pryor, Nevin Harper and Cathryn Carpenter that discusses the critical role that nature can play in promoting health and wellbeing. They point to the key health benefits that emerge through spending time in nature, introduce the concept of outdoor therapy and conclude their chapter with a set of outdoor therapy practice principles that can be used by educators to enhance health and psychological safety within OEE programs.

The final four chapters in this section begin with Australian Glyn Thomas. He sets the stage for these remaining chapters with his observation that, “when outdoor educators lead or teach a group in the outdoors, they are required to make decisions on a constant basis about how they will lead and teach their students, to meet the aims of the program.” Thomas goes on to introduce the concept of intentionality – which describes being purposeful and able to articulate why certain decisions have been made. He draws on key theorists to explain intentionality before examining what happens when educators do not act with intention, instead relying on intuition or on copying others’ practices. Thomas highlights the important role that a philosophy statement can assume in helping emerging educators to become more intentional.

The final three chapters in this section pick up on Thomas’ call for intentionality in teaching: Dave Hills and Glyn Thomas invite readers to be purposeful and intentional in their use of technology; Pete Allison (from the USA) and Tim Stott (from the UK) suggest that journeys, which are often used in outdoor education and have many benefits, must be used for the right reasons that are clearly articulated; and finally, New Zealander Chris North and Canadian Janet Dymont have teamed up to present a framework for outdoor education pedagogical content knowledge which invites educators to think careful about their everyday teaching decisions. In all three of these final chapter, the concept of intentionality is helpful.

### **1.3 Outdoor Environmental Education as a Social, Cultural and Environmental Endeavour**

Elsewhere, experiential learning has been critiqued for being too focused on individual cognition without due consideration of the social context in which learning occurs (Fenwick, 2000). The chapters in this section come from the standpoint that in outdoor education “learning does not occur in isolation, and is shaped by the places, cultures, institutions, groups and environments they are immersed in” (Thomas et al., 2019, p. 177). We maintain that a fulsome knowledge of natural and cultural history will help emerging outdoor educators to develop new literacies which offer new ways of being, doing, and knowing.

In the first chapter of this section the UK team of Chris Loynes, Lizzie Freeman and Frances Harris explore the claims that nature connectedness has the potential to

have positive impacts on the wellbeing of people and the planet. They describe the long history of modern societies' disconnections from nature and the renaissance of the urgent need to understand and value humans as a part of nature in order to tackle urgent environmental crises on a global scale. Educational practices that promote nature connectedness are critiqued and alternate, non-mainstream perceptions of nature are discussed, including posthumanism and indigenous perspectives.

Next, Alistair Stewart, Scott Jukes, Jonas Mikael and Anthony Mangelsdorf team up to explore how Western human-centered worldviews, such as colonialism, have re-shaped landscapes extensively. For outdoor educators, who often teach and lead in these colonised landscapes, they examine different ways of reading landscapes that encourage decolonization and less anthropocentrism. Through a series of case-studies, based on their own teaching practices, the team takes a rhizomatic approach to exploring how landscapes may be read differently. In Chap. 18, Indigenous Australian academic and outdoor educator, David Spillman provides an insight to Australian Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. By drawing on the wisdom of Karulkiyalu Country and his grandfather Paul Gordon, Spillman explains how looking, listening and learning on and from Country disrupts the dominance of anthropocentrism in education. He encourages the nurturing of mutually-beneficial partnerships with local Indigenous people to access stories from and stories for Country and promote Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing with students.

Kathryn Riley, an Australian living in Canada, provides the next chapter in this section and she argues for new and different ways of understanding human/non-human relationships by taking up post-humanist and new materialist perspectives. By drawing on her own stories growing up, Riley draws on the concept of the ecotone to highlight how subjects are interwoven through a continuous remaking of each other. She encourages outdoor educators to help their students cultivate and sustain affirmative relationships with more-than-human others. In Chap. 20, Allen Hill from New Zealand (NZ) challenges outdoor educators to move beyond stereotypical, outdoor education activities and think about ways of tapping into the rich learning opportunities that might exist in local communities. Hill is critical of the way traditional adventure activities are valorised along with trips to far-away places. So, drawing on his experience of teaching and leading outdoor education experiences in NZ, he shares ideas on how outdoor educators can develop programs that are more place and culturally responsive. In this respect, Hill provides an example of how outdoor education can contribute to the process of decolonization by tapping into the stories, relationships, histories, and cultures in local communities.

Finally in this section, Australian Tony Keeble draws on his recent doctoral research to describe the process by which outdoor education can potentially contribute to the development of social capital. After a historical narrative on how the concept of social capital has recently developed, he explains how his research explored the nexus between typical outdoor education objectives and social capital indicators. Using a customized outdoor education curriculum in Australia called 'Future Maker,' he reports on his attempt to find out if outdoor education can help

to develop more socially aware humans with a capacity to care for each other and the world around them.

## 1.4 Advocacy

This section of the book provides insight into the ways that outdoor education can be more diverse and inclusive of all people, irrespective of their sex, sexuality, race, class, ability, and religion. Among the three chapters, there is a collective call for a revising of outdoor education practices, programs, pedagogies, policies, and beliefs to support individual and organizational change that will result in a more equitable future for outdoor education.

Canadian TA Loeffler begins with an invitation for readers to examine design assumptions to look for ways in which long-standing practices may keep outdoor education inaccessible and exclusive. She then introduces readers to the concepts of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning, and looks at four Goals of Universal Design to highlight design considerations and practices that can support great inclusion.

In the next chapter, Australian lisahunter reminds readers that gender issues, while attracting much attention in the outdoor education field, are not solved. Drawing on gender scholars from inside (Noel Gough, Barbara Humberstone, Denise Mitten, Tonia Gray) and outside (Judith Butler and Pierre Bordieu) the outdoor education field, lisahunter argues convincingly that there remain significant assumptions that reinscribe an outdated sex-binary of “boy/girl”. They describe the troubling ways these practices continue in outdoor education. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the ways that queer theory may be helpful moving forward as we look to dismantle and challenge the dominant ways of doing outdoor education with non-normative and new ways of knowing-being-doing-valuing which will result in a more equitable and inclusive outdoor education field.

The final chapter ends this section on a hopeful note, as Mary Breunig (dual citizen, Canadian/USA) sheds insight into how outdoor educators can contribute to topographies of hope in regards to social justice issues. Breunig supports readers to develop their social justice literacy as she introduces concepts of microaggressions, unconscious bias, privilege, oppression and intersectionality. She then invites readers to become social justice accomplices, as she offers both individual and programmatic recommendations for engaging in social activism, with a focus on accomplice-ship and advocacy.

## 1.5 Safety Management

No parent or guardian sends their child to an outdoor education program thinking that they will not return safely to them afterwards. Yet, there are still cases of serious accidents and fatalities in outdoor education programs (Brookes, 2018). Most of the time, outdoor educators and program managers do an excellent job keeping students on their programs safe. The need for students to be exposed to risk in order to achieve educational outcomes has been challenged (Brown & Fraser, 2009), yet the practice is still common. Regardless, it would seem that students may through their participation in outdoor education programs be exposed to some risk of injury. Risk management processes are the tools that are typically used to reduce the potential of exposure to loss (health, financial, reputation) for all stakeholders. Safety management is focused more narrowly on the actions that will reduce the likelihood of students or staff being injured or killed on an outdoor education program. The intent of this section is to help outdoor educators to learn how to “continuously and critically evaluate the purposes of a program, the context of the program, and their own practices in relation to safety” (Thomas et al., 2019, p. 180).

In the first chapter of this section, Andrew Brookes provides a synopsis of his view of fatality prevention in outdoor education. He outlines the concept of a strict aversion to fatalities, the importance of local knowledge, and an understanding of past fatal incidents. In this chapter, Brookes provides an approach based on analyzing and understanding past fatal incidents that can be used by both managers and outdoor educators to prevent fatalities and serious injuries. The next chapter, by Marcus and Phillipa Morse, Lucas Bester and Anthony Mangelsdorf, provides a practical application of how one institution has sought to apply fatality prevention principles in their university program. They describe the personal and institutional determination that they have enacted to prevent fatalities. They also report on how staff and students can combine case-based learning with place-based knowledge and knowledge of local environments to provide agency to outdoor educators to help prevent fatalities.

The final chapter of this section is provided by Tony Carden, who describes how a systems-thinking approach, drawing on the safety science literature, can inform risk and safety management in outdoor education. The merits of system-thinking approaches over earlier safety paradigms are discussed, in the context of knowledge that even relatively uncomplicated outdoor education experiences demonstrate characteristics of complex systems. Carden argues that a systems approach provides a richer representation of incidents than methods used in the past, and it allows managers and outdoor educators to understand the non-linear, dynamic interaction between the contributing factors in any incident.

## 1.6 Professional Practice

The final section comprises five chapters on professional practice. For students, graduates and early career professionals, the practice and pathways that they embark on constitute the applied manifestation and integration of their training, knowledge, skills and value base in becoming an outdoor educator. We interpret ‘educator’ in its broadest sense, as that is the context of working in the outdoors in which employment might be as a leader, facilitator, teacher, guide, coach or instructor.

Outdoor educators work in a range of contexts and settings as already described within this book. International professional practice transcends, and applies across, these. The authors in this section identify, debate and critique common threads of: research; professionalisation, professionalism and professional currency; ecologies of skill for outdoor leaders, reflective practice, and managing outdoor fieldwork, activities and experiences.

A common thread running through these chapters is the process of reflective practice. This is identified as one of the seven threshold concepts for Australian Outdoor Education programmes. Morten Asfeldt and Paul Stonehouse propose that the core of being a reflective practitioner concerns closing the gap between theoretical knowledge with everyday professional practice. They suggest an objective of blending the two to enable theory to inform practice and practice to inform theory building on Schön’s (1995) model. Heather Prince, in a similar vein, debates how reflective or reflexive practice can inform research, and how research informs reflective practice. Research is important in outdoor environmental education for identifying the efficacy of an intervention by establishing an evidence base that gives confidence to practice and policy and may effect change. She presents a new model of the relationship between depth and processes of reflection that become more critical, deeper and reflexive with increasing practitioner experience, and the prominence of research in the consciousness of practitioners.

Outdoor environmental educators should engage in practices that demonstrate their ability to maintain and develop their skills and knowledge, professional ‘currency’. Scott Polley debates the professionalisation of the field and the differences across continents and between professions. He reflects on evidence to suggest that outdoor environmental education is recognised as a discipline and a profession but concludes that, at present, there are still aspects of its professional status to be resolved. Phil Mullins introduces us the concept of skill explained ecologically for outdoor leaders. The interrelationships that people have with the world through their skills and practices can enable critical reflection and alternative structures for outdoor programmes. Whilst this might seem a challenging concept to understand, the dynamic of movement and learning in landscapes when involved in an outdoor activity allows participation and inhabitation in those settings. He illustrates how outdoor leaders can influence opportunities particularly on journeys, to extend, re-imagine and alter outdoor education practice for change in diverse contexts relevant to the purposes, values, students, and communities engaged to address such issues as social justice, environmentalism and sustainability.



Fieldwork (the purposeful use of the outdoor environment for educational experiences, including outdoor ‘activities’, ‘experiences’, ‘pursuits’ or ‘practicals’) is a key feature of outdoor environmental education, its ‘signature pedagogy’ (Thomas, 2015). Brendon Munge and Glyn Thomas define its role and purpose as well as the challenges for neophyte and experienced outdoor professionals in leading and managing fieldwork. Beyond the intentions of integrating theory and practice and providing authentic experiences, they argue that a further purpose is creating a community of practice integrated with professional identity.

Whilst the authors in this section introduce some relatively new conceptual frameworks to professional practice, all couch their writing within authentic and lived experiences as outdoor environmental educators and provide examples of practice in these chapters. For outdoor environmental education to grow as a profession, both emerging educators and those with more experience must continue to exchange their knowledge between theory and practice, and each other, through continuing professional development for the benefit of those who learn with us in the outdoors.

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**Part I**  
**Theoretical Foundations and Philosophies**

# Chapter 2

## Philosophizing in Outdoor Environmental Education: How Might Experience Work?



John Quay

### 2.1 Why Philosophize?

Philosophy is not an area that many who want to be educators believe is of immediate importance. My own memories of sitting in philosophy of education lectures, during years of teacher training, include the embarrassing moment where I threw a shoe at the stage, part in jest, part in frustration at the seeming irrelevance of what was being presented. Please do not replicate this act!

So, I can understand why readers of this text, wanting to become educators, might consider bypassing a chapter on philosophy. My task is to shift this perception. It is not hard to do. The key is to highlight philosophizing as a practice, rather than philosophy as some arcane body of knowledge. Philosophizing is an action, a doing, not just knowing or knowledge. It is something that educators do when they wonder about teaching, about outdoor environmental education (OEE). Importantly, philosophizing emphasizes questioning above answering.

Many who come to OEE and teaching will focus, first of all, on “how-to?” questions. This is because the basics of successful practice require practical understanding. However, successful practices sit on a pile of reasons readily accessible by asking “why-so?” questions. “Why is it done this way?” This level of understanding is more developed than just a mere how-to might suggest. Asking questions, and especially why-questions, forms the basis of philosophizing in OEE.

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## 2.2 Asking Why-Questions: Peeling Away Layers of Reasoning

When practices get established, they are often not questioned much anymore. This is because they become part of the everyday way in which things are done, and are considered common sense. Then, if you do question these practices, you can appear less knowledgeable than others – which may present further issues. But remember, with philosophizing, questions are more important than answers.

Questioning everyday practices is an important part of philosophizing in OEE. This is because it is important to know why something is done the way it is, as practices are never perfect, and making improvements helps all involved. But making improvements cannot be done unless the reasons underpinning these practices are understood. Asking why-questions is necessary and asking just one why-question may not be enough.

Perhaps an example will help here. A question that may seem to make sense to someone learning about OEE and how to be an OEE educator may be, “Why do we go paddling in two-person canoes and not one-person kayaks?” When why-questions like this are asked, the first set of answers may be very practical, even economic or logistic. “Because we only have canoes.” “Because we need fewer boats and so it is cheaper to resource and they are easier to transport.” “Because canoes can carry more food and equipment for a multi-day journey.”

Further why-questions may open up answers connected to basic programming ideas. “Because the students are too young to manage a kayak by themselves.” “Because it is easier to teach a group of first-timers how to canoe on flat water, than it is to teach them to kayak.” “Because it is easier to teach a group in canoes with seven boats than a group in kayaks with fourteen boats.”

But beyond this, further or more specific why-questions may open up thinking connected with the educational aims of the program. “Because in a canoe two people have to work together to get the canoe to go where they want it to go, so social challenge becomes important in the experience.” “Because it is quicker to learn how to canoe in a straight line, which enables attention to shift from mastering the canoe to being aware of the surrounding environment, so there is more chance for broader environmental engagement.”

Why-questions peel away layers of reasoning that surround the ways in which things are done. Some of these reasons may be very practical; others may concern educational aims and methods. Importantly, practical and educational reasons can't really be separated, as both work together. So, in program design and teaching, decisions have to be made which connect practical and educational aims and possibilities.

Every “school” of philosophy, and there are many (just search “schools of philosophy” on the internet), has arisen because people have asked why-questions that trouble everyday ways of understanding. These schools are interesting because they have problematised accepted understandings and have initiated change. A school of philosophy brings together philosophers who have asked similar why-questions and

proposed similar ways of addressing them. Reading the work of philosophers requires understanding the why-questions they are asking, and why they are asking them. And although many philosophers are long dead, it is their why-questions and their responses to these which make their questioning and thinking relevant for people living at other times and in other places.

There are many accepted understandings prevalent today which are based on reasons that can and should be questioned. Issues pertaining to justice, truth, environment, race, are just some which impact education, and OEE program design and teaching, even if this may not be immediately evident. Exploring why-questions that engage with more fundamental issues can benefit from reading about how others have questioned these concerns. If you've been thinking about such why-questions, it is highly likely that others have before you – and some will have written about it.

### 2.3 Questioning Program Design

When thinking about program design, both practical and educational reasons are important. However, it is easy to focus too intently on the practical. When only practical why-questions are relevant in conversations about OEE, educational reasons may not be well developed or understood, to the extent that they may be lacking.

One programming debate involving educational reasons has continued for years. It concerns the need (or not) for participants to verbalise their thinking during a program. The old saying, “let the mountains speak for themselves” (James, 1980; Bacon, 1987), was coined in the early decades of Outward Bound USA as a reaction action against certain educational initiatives of the time that asked students to verbalize aspects of their experience, often referred to as debriefing (Joplin, 1981). Letting the mountains speak for themselves suggests that doing, action, is more important than verbalizing (and reflecting on the doing). This has been captured in the well-known phrase “learning by doing.” By adding reflection, this became “learning by doing combined with reflection” (Priest & Gass, 2018, p. 45). And as Jay Roberts (2012) identified, this idea of learning by doing (with or without reflection) is directly connected with ideas of experience through the well-known phrase “experiential learning” (p. 4), which is different to experiential education (akin to the difference between outdoor learning and outdoor education).

Debriefing became a regular and accepted practice, to the extent that in many programs – such as those I was involved with in the early 1990s – the relevance of the debrief was rarely questioned. As a consequence, letting the mountains speak for themselves – doing without reflection – was somewhat left behind, ignored, or even considered simplistic and criticised. But this is not to say that it ever became irrelevant. Why-questions concerning debriefing or not debriefing may need to be asked and answered again and again, over time.

This is an example of the educational importance of why-questions, of philosophizing, in OEE. “Why do/don’t we ask students to speak about their experiences during our program?” Students will, of course, think about their experiences; they will be asking their own why-questions, and philosophizing in their own ways. But verbalising these thoughts with a group is a further step, which for many students may be a significant challenge. Educators must ask why-questions, then, in order to understand why this is asked for, or not asked for, during a program. If asked for, then there are further why-questions which query how such verbalising is done. “Why is it done in this way and not some other way?” “Why is it done at particular points in a program and not others?” “Why is it done with very little time for participants to gather their thoughts before speaking, which advantages those who can put their ideas into words more easily?”

These questions are presented fairly simplistically, but answering them (or attempting to answer them) opens up a whole raft of further questions concerning students as participants, as people, as human beings. In short, seeking answers to these why-questions eventually leads to questioning experience itself and how experience works. Not just experiential learning or experiential education, but experience.

## 2.4 Why Is Experience Important?

Philosophizing in OEE often opens up questions concerning experience; not a person’s particular experiences, but experience itself, how experience works. Every program is based on some understanding of how experience works, whether this is explicitly acknowledged or not. Unlike in school, it is not subject-matter which is the direct focus in OEE, but experiencing. OEE programs are commonly set up as experiential events.

When subject-matter, such as mathematics curriculum, is the main focus, then teachers set up experiences in classrooms involving activities for learning the subject-matter. And this learning is then checked through assessment tasks such as quizzes, tests or exams. These assess whether someone has learned that subject-matter, for it is learning of the subject matter which is most important. “But why?” is a good question to ask here. This is the beginning of a whole series of why-questions that can lead to querying the purpose or purposes of education. “What is education for?” And I suggest that these purposes of education are themselves underpinned by understandings of how experience works. Why-questions keep coming!

Important to understand from an OEE perspective, is that what goes on in classrooms is still experience. We sometimes think that in OEE there is experience, while in classrooms there is no experience. But not so. John Dewey, an important American education philosopher from the last century, recognised this back in the 1930s (highlighting how reading the work of philosophers who have come before can help, especially when those philosophers have asked similar why-questions to

yours). “It is a great mistake to suppose,” Dewey said, “that the traditional school-room was not a place in which pupils had experiences” (1938, p. 26).

This misunderstanding concerning experience sometimes leads to a distinction being drawn between classroom and OEE on the basis that OEE is more like the “real” world than the classroom, suggesting that OEE is experiential and the classroom is not. Yet the classroom is also real and experiential, but in a different kind of way. To grasp this difference requires a deeper understanding of how experience works. This is what I shall explore next: firstly, thinking about relationships between self, others and environment/nature; secondly, thinking about these relationships as organised in occupations. Please read on!

## 2.5 Experience as Interactions (Relationships) Between Self, Others and Environment

Asking why-questions about OEE, especially questions with an educational focus, often gets the questioner to a point, eventually, where some basic interactions seem to stand out: between self, others and environment/nature. This awareness of interactions between self, others and environment as somehow foundational to OEE has been reached a number of times by different people. Indeed, Rod Walker claimed that “every convincing analysis of outdoor education ... comes up with some form of the ‘*self – others – nature*’ triangle” (1998, p. 6; original emphasis).

Simon Priest captured this understanding of the basic interactions between self, others and environment by focusing on the idea of relationships, stating that “through exposure to the outdoor setting individuals learn about their relationship with the natural environment, relationships between the various concepts of natural ecosystems, and personal relationships with others and their inner Self” (1986, p. 15).

These relationships can be emphasized differently in different programs, but they are always there and in play. In adventure education it is often relationships with and amongst self and others that are the primary focus; in environmental education it is often human-nature relationships. Interestingly, Brian Nettleton (1993) and Peter Martin (1999) both described relationships between humans and nature as friendships. This human-nature thinking has progressed in recent times with the asking of why-questions that draw on understandings of place while acknowledging that the world is more-than-human (Quay, 2021). Again, philosophers have been prominent in asking these questions.

It could be said that OEE educates about these relationships. But is this the end of philosophizing in OEE? Are there no more why-questions to ask? Here are a few: “If OEE is only about these relationships, then why can’t teachers just write a textbook about relationships involving self, others and environment, and teach about them in a classroom?” “Why is experience on an OEE program somehow different educationally, than classroom experience?”

This question again opens up thinking about education and experience. Learning *about* relationships in class, say via a textbook or videos, to then have this subject-matter knowledge checked through a test or quiz, is very different to learning *through* these relationships, experiencing the interactions and trying to understand and improve the way the interactions are lived.

Recalling Dewey's statement about classrooms being places where students also have experiences, means that understanding what is going on in a classroom can be helped by considering the interactions and relationships happening there, between self, others and environment. Here the environment is not "nature" as we usually think of nature and the outdoors. Instead, the environment is all of the things in the classroom (desks, books, computers, whiteboards) including the things that are not so solid (mathematical ideas, equations, concepts, activities). There are many interactions between self, other students and teacher, and things in the mathematics classroom (the environs).

In a sense, then, this is learning *through* relationships, but educators don't often stop to think about classroom learning in this way. Why? Because the focus is so much on learning *about* the subject-matter and checking this learning, that interactions and relationships are seen to be of secondary importance. Yet it is *through* these interactions and relationships that the subject-matter has the meaning and significance that it does. But how does this inform understanding of how experience might work?

## 2.6 Ways of Experiencing: Occupations

Thinking of experience as comprised of relationships involving self, others and environment is a big idea, an idea applicable in all situations, not just OEE. As Walker (1998) reported, this idea has been arrived at by numerous people, via continuing questioning. These ideas have informed understanding of OEE and how it is practised. Philosophizing does help! Further questions can be asked, though.

Because interactions and relationships between self, others and environment are relevant to all situations, philosophizing can now focus on situations and how to differentiate them. "*How* is one situation different from another situation?" The interactions and relationships are different, the meanings and significances are different (like between OEE and classroom mathematics), but "*Why* is it that one situation is different from another situation?"

These questions about situations are important because they begin to get at deeper understandings of how OEE might work educationally. And they are questions, of course, about how experience works. Another important aspect of philosophizing is helpful here: questioning involves investigative work. Such investigating can benefit greatly from speaking with others in order to learn what they think. And this does not have to happen face to face of course, for what others (including philosophers) have questioned, thought and said can be accessed via their writings or other recordings.

One person who has thought a lot about education, especially where experience is concerned, is John Dewey. My reading of Dewey's work gave me an understanding of situations, and how they organise experience. This stands out in one of Dewey's most important claims, from my perspective at least: that "education *through* occupations ... combines within itself more of the factors conducive to learning than any other method" (1916, p. 361, original emphasis). In other words, occupations organise experience; they organise life.

"What is an occupation?" Normally we think an occupation is a paid adult job. But Dewey (1916, p. 359) makes the point that occupations can be understood more broadly – being-a-friend is being someone, it is an occupation; as is being-a-brother or being-a-sister – because they convey being occupied with something; and being occupied with something means being someone in particular. Being-a-bushwalker means being occupied with bushwalking and the things of bushwalking; being-a-climber means being occupied with climbing and the things of climbing; being an OEE educator means being occupied with OEE educating and the things of OEE. "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" are occupational questions.

Occupations can therefore be more than just jobs, to the extent that one is always living some sort of occupation: being-a-car-driver, being-a-podcaster, being-a-dog-walker. It is in this sense that an occupation can be understood as a "way of being" (Quay, 2015). Notably, a way of being is never fixed, it is always changing through learning; and every way of being is shared with others to some extent, otherwise you couldn't know what someone else means when speaking about an occupation. In other words, meanings are "socially constructed" (Quay, 2003). So, an important takeaway message here is that occupations are alive.

Because they are alive, it is difficult to properly describe an occupation. Labels are used, but these are limiting. For example, in a mathematics class, the broad student occupation could be labelled being-a-maths-student. More specifically it could be labelled being-a-maths-student-in-year-nine-with-Mrs-Smith (as teacher). These labels are attempts to convey living experience. This label could be added to, with more hyphenations stretching them out for literally pages, as this living experience is captured in more detail (being-a-maths-student-in-year-nine-with-Mrs-Smith-sitting-next-to-my-friend-Jenny-looking-blankly-at-a-page-in-the-textbook-struggling-to-understand-graphs-and ...). The hyphenations show the aliveness of the occupation: that all of this is happening, at once.

## 2.7 Occupations and Self, Others, Environment

In these occupational descriptions, interactions between self, others and environment become visible. They are practices that go with that occupation as a "way of doing"; also visible is knowledge specific to that occupation, meaning that it is a "way of knowing." Therefore, as well as a way of being, an occupation is also a way of doing and a way of knowing – all at once – as a way of being-doing-knowing (Quay, 2015, p 20).



An OEE example may be helpful. Many OEE programs are designed around activities. Different activities are done at different times, often displayed in a chronologically sequenced program of events. Activities such as bushwalking/hiking, climbing, initiative activities, and canoeing, arranged in a program, are fairly common worldwide.

Each of these activities has its knowledge and its practices. But these are difficult to separate, as the knowledge is embedded in practices and the practices are expressions of knowledge. Thus, each activity is both a way of doing and a way of knowing at the same time. And it is also more than these. Each activity, the way it is set up, is asking the participants to *be* in a way specific to their understanding of that occupation. This impacts the meaning (the being) of others and other things as well. Much concern with student engagement is about young people wanting to be or not to be (that is the question! – nod to Shakespeare) in a way that they believe is expected.

This deeper understanding of OEE, which is informed by an understanding of how experience works, helps guide program design and teaching. Of course, an OEE program is not often thought of as an arrangement of ways of being-doing-knowing, of occupations. However, when an OEE program is thought of in this way, then the experiential event, the journey, is not just a journey through different activities, but a journey through different occupations, through different ways of being-doing-knowing.

Really important is the awareness that each occupation – as a way of being-doing-knowing – positions self, others and environment – interactions and relationships – differently. Have a think about bushwalking during an OEE program and how self, others and environment interact. Think of how these interactions are different in canoeing, in climbing, in initiative activities. There are similarities of course, but even if the same practice, in terms of physical actions, is done across two occupations, the practice may be different because it means something different in each occupation.

For example, meeting as a group is something done in all these outdoor activities. But think about how different “meeting as a group” is along a track during a bushwalk and on the water during a canoeing lesson, or at the base of a cliff during a climbing session. There is actually different knowledge involved in all three of these ways of meeting as a group, so the practices are different, even if only subtly different. These different ways of meeting as a group highlight different occupations, as different ways of being-doing-knowing.

In summary, experience and education come together through occupations, as ways of being-doing-knowing, as the organising features encompassing the relationships between self, others and environment, in different ways. So, in different occupations, self, others and environment and their relationships, are different. For OEE programming, this means that selecting, designing and arranging occupations is the same as selecting, designing and arranging relationships between self, others and environment.

## 2.8 The Importance of Understanding Participants' Experiences

Hopefully you can see more clearly now why philosophizing as an OEE educator is a must. OEE educators must keep questioning. If you ever feel that things are becoming a bit too routine, then instead of lying back and going with the flow, think about what might still be improved, what little issues there might be to resolve.

In order to do this, it helps to be able to put yourself in the shoes of your participants, current *and* future participants. OEE programming is basically setting up occupations for participants, and to do this well, OEE educators need to be able to think through the possible impacts of their planning on participants' experiences. Having said this, OEE programming must also take into consideration the more-than-human world (Quay, 2021). Being aware of this is critical for the future of OEE.

I recall planning programs that didn't work so well, mainly because the way the activities were arranged did not enable the participants to be who they expected they were going to be during the program. One vivid example relates to not being able to have campfires on a program. Campfires are, of course, a wonderful way to bring a group together during and after the evening meal. They offer light and warmth and camaraderie. Without them, people tend to head off to bed fairly soon after dinner, meaning that an important educational aspect of the experience may not so readily happen. But well used campsites often struggle because of the lack of available firewood, meaning that the local area can suffer degradation as campers search high and low and ever more widely afield for wood; or they begin to pull down branches and small trees which shouldn't be damaged.

A question that engaged me, then, was, "How can we run this program and still have some way of coming together in the evening?" In the end we made candleboards, which could replace campfires enough to provide the educational benefits we were looking for. These were wooden boards with holes drilled through them which candles could be stood up in, around eight candles. Together these eight candles made a fire the group could sit around: light, a bit of warmth, camaraderie – a way of being. An alternative would have been not to use candleboards, and have the educational aims modified to perhaps highlight the importance of not thinking that some sort of campfire is required as a normal practice. This is legitimate as well.

These two options reveal how the occupation of being-a-bushwalker (or being-a-camper) can be altered, and how this may affect educational aims. Occupations are being-doing-knowing, and they are the occupations of the program participants, which give specific meanings to places, to others, to things.

There are so many possible questions to ask and investigate about OEE, about education more broadly, about experience. And there are many philosophizing in OEE asking these questions, making connections with other philosophers, all with the aim of better understanding OEE. One very interesting connection, from my perspective, is that being, doing and knowing is spoken about by Indigenous researchers, such as Karen Martin – Booran Mirraboopa (2003) in Australia. Asking why-questions concerning OEE inevitably brings engagement with Indigenous

perspectives, highlighting other significant concerns such as colonialism and the inherent need to decolonise OEE programming and teaching.

On that important note, I shall draw this chapter to a close. I hope that it has achieved its main aim of helping you to see the importance of philosophizing in OEE, as a way of questioning and investigating, not just answering. It is the experiences of participants, their occupations, their engagements with self, others and environment, that OEE educators must continue to strive to understand in order to improve their teaching.

### Reflective Questions

1. What are some of your why-questions about OEE?
2. Why is philosophizing so important for OEE educators?
3. Why do OEE educators need to think about and understand experience?
4. How might self, others and environment be connected with experience?
5. What are some other schools of philosophy which are important in OEE?

### Recommended Further Reading

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# Chapter 3

## Worldviews, Environments and Education



Kathleen Pleasants and Noel Gough

### 3.1 Conceptualising Worldviews

The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular (Haraway, 1991, p. 196)

Worldviews – sometimes called ‘paradigms’ – are sets of axiological, ontological and epistemological assumptions that influence how we see and understand the worlds we inhabit, and where we position ourselves in relation to them. Worldviews determine what we take to be ‘real’ in a philosophical sense, for example, what we presume exists independently of human imagination. They can be understood in a similar way to architectural foundations: buildings are designed with certain assumptions about (or empirical evidence of) their underlying substrate (e.g., clay, sand, rock) in mind. In much the same way, social institutions – including outdoor environmental education (OEE)– are built upon understandings of reality, nature and human nature that are taken for granted in any given culture (see Fig. 3.1).

Worldviews are subjective schemas that provide conceptual ‘foundations’ for specific attitudes, beliefs and behaviours relating to our environments. As Haraway (1991) emphasised, they come from ‘somewhere in particular’: our worldviews are not immutable, but situated, embodied, circumstantial and by no means complete.

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The original version of this chapter was revised: Page 28, first para, line no. 8, sentence starting “We are mindful...” was published with an error which has been corrected now. The correction to this chapter is available at [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75980-3\\_33](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75980-3_33)

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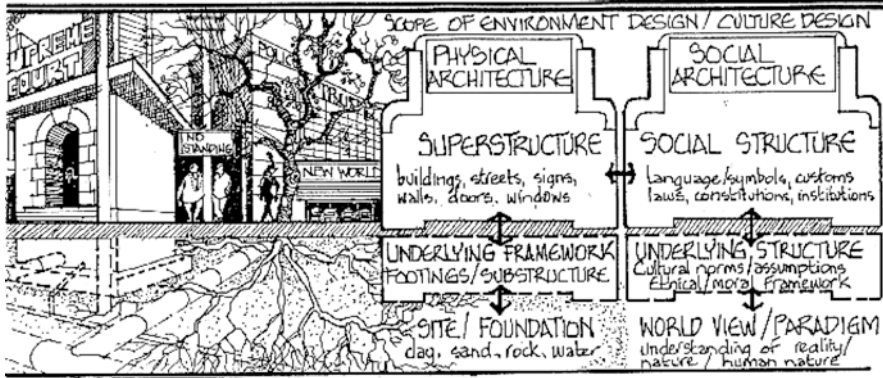


Fig. 3.1 Scope of environment design/culture design. (Image courtesy of Richard Mochelle, 1986)

In this chapter, we explore some approaches to environmental worldviews that are commonly deployed in tertiary OEE programs. There is some overlap and links with other chapters, such as those focused on relationships with nature, post-colonial land ethics, and social justice. Some of the questions we might ask when considering such issues will be specific to us as individuals in particular circumstances,<sup>1</sup> while others relate to the views of groups and communities. Among them might be abstract questions about the intrinsic value of natural environments and their more-than-human<sup>2</sup> constituents. We are mindful that the artefacts that comprise our views of reality and nature are socially constructed and do not exist independently of human agency and activity. We are certainly not seeking to create a grand narrative about worldviews and environments in OEE.

We follow McPhie and Clarke (2018), who demonstrated how thinking with the ‘material turn’ in conceptions of nature, enables them to embrace “some of its key themes, such as a move away from dominant enlightenment epistemologies and anthropocentrism<sup>3</sup> and a move towards distributed conceptions of agency and a focus on materiality” (p. 1523). Similarly, we see opportunities in working with a posthumanist commitment to focussing on the interdependence between humans, more-than-humans and machines, which redefines meanings of human being that have been previously

<sup>1</sup>Returning to Haraway (1991), we are ‘somewhere in particular’. Our homes are in south eastern Australia - Noel in Melbourne, the second largest state capital, and Kathleen in Bendigo, close to the geographical centre of Victoria. Our particular positions and experiences are reflected in our writing in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup>We adopt the position that our connection to the more-than-human world is artificially severed in modern Western culture by mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object dualisms. Hence, we choose the term ‘more-than-human’ to draw attention to our ethical accountability to the world.

<sup>3</sup>Gough (2016) argues that challenging hierarchical anthropocentrism (i.e. challenging the assumption of human superiority) does not prevent us from acknowledging an ‘irreducible anthropocentrism,’ that is, accepting that we necessarily experience the world with species-specific biophysical limitations and possibilities. However, we must also consider how an understanding of irreducible anthropocentrism might be changed by accepting that we increasingly experience the world as *posthumans*, with perhaps (eventually) fewer species-specific biophysical limitations and with further possibilities provided by biophysical extensions and enhancements.

assumed (Snaza & Weaver, 2015). We will draw upon some of the threads of posthumanist theorising in our discussion of environmental worldviews in OEE.

### 3.2 Why Consider Environmental Worldviews in OEE?

Considering worldviews can help us to understand the cultural and historical influences (and standpoints from which) individuals interpret environments and their implications for OEE. For example, consider the effects of settler land management practices and actions such as the introduction of foxes and rabbits in south eastern Australia alongside some contemporary worldviews that encourage sustainable human-nature relationships and recognise the environmental degradation wrought by these same species in Australia. Worldviews are constructed in response to personal concerns of the past, present and future. They embrace knowledge, ideas, feelings, values, assumptions, and beliefs, which may be unstated or subconscious, but manifested in behaviour, attitudes and language. Worldviews generally develop as cultural templates while we are young, but they are continually reformulated and reconstructed through experience and reflection. Worldviews are linked to identity and are therefore inherently anthropocentric.

As an educational discipline, OEE draws from (and is influenced by) the Scouting, and Outward Bound movements, various traditions of bushwalking and nature study in the early 1900s, the establishment of national parks and environmental movements, and narratives of adventure and exploration (Brookes, 2002, 2015). The influences on OEE differ according to context and location (among other things). Definitions of OEE (and associated terms such as outdoor education and outdoor learning) are various, but common referents include, similarly to environmental education, that it entails education in, about, and for the outdoors. Another frequently used construct is that OEE leads to learning about self, others and the environment.

We see merit in critically appraising various understandings of nature/environment and examining the ideologies that underlie human-nature relationships in OEE. Understanding ideas, concepts, attitudes, and experiences that are present in reflecting upon nature and human-nature relationships can be helpful in education focussed on examining beliefs, considering alternative worldviews, and formulating ideas, attitudes, and values that underpin decision-making processes about outdoor environments and their constituents.

Brookes (2006) argued that all outdoor education is a form of environmental education. This is true in part, because it confronts students with their own needs and their impacts on an environment via experiences conducted in predominantly (but not always) 'natural' environments. Claims of significance relating to how OEE provides opportunities for socially critical perspectives and meaningful encounters with natural environments, communities and the self are abundant among OEE practitioners located in the industrial-consumer societies of the global north and west.

The preceding statements are themselves delivered from a specific cultural standpoint which assumes a romanticised perspective on what 'Nature' is, as well as assuming we have experiences 'in' rather than 'of' it. In using them, we are aware that we risk doing exactly that which we discourage: enforcing a nature-culture



dualism. OEE occurs somewhere with someone and those somewheres and someones have cultural and ecological stories embedded within them. The student with the least amount of previous experience in the outdoors will still bring with them a set of expectations and assumptions rooted in the cultural templates that surround them. The role of the educator in socialisation – enacting ways of being in the outdoors – cannot be underestimated or overlooked.

In OEE considerable attention is focussed on the activities that are undertaken and, as Brookes (2002) argued, often the location of an experience seems to be of peripheral, at best functional or therapeutic, importance. He and others have drawn attention to why conceptions of the natural environment should matter in OEE, in order to avoid creating experiences that are “decontextualized and abstracted” (Brookes, 2002, p. 415). Activities don’t occur in a vacuum: they are not limited to the parameters of, for example, completing a bushwalk or climbing route. OEE experiences occur within, between and at the margins of knowledge spaces – assemblages of educators, students, activities, equipment, skills, places, local knowledge, flora and fauna, and so forth. Gough (2009) further argues that specific locations become

‘pedagogical’ through cultural practices that enable or encourage us to attend closely to their multifarious qualities, including not only those that we might consider to be ‘profound’ (such as the deep, pervasive or intense qualities that we sometimes call the ‘spirit’ of a place), but also their more superficial, ephemeral or obvious characteristics. (p. 156)

The ethico-onto-epistemological<sup>4</sup> processes of the new materialisms question that knowing and being are separate: we cannot ‘know’ the world without direct engagement. Relations are not about individual subjects autonomously forming and developing relations with the world but about realising that these relations always already exist and co-constituted. People and activities are implicated in complex matrices that require educators to attend more closely to, and account for, the more-than-human in issues of equality, diversity, community, local ecosystems, global migration, technology, climate change and curriculum.

Gough and Adsit-Morris (2020) argued that practices of scientific naming contribute to maintaining distinctions between “humans and other beings, plant and animal, living and non-living, and so on” and hence “constructs the illusion that what is named is genuinely distinguishable from all else. In creating these distinctions, humans can all too easily lose sight of the seamlessness of what their words and abstractions signify” (p. 218). There are various demonstrations of how and why such orientations can be deployed in OEE. See for example, writing from authors in Australia (Jukes et al., 2019; Stewart, 2020), the UK (Lynch & Mannion, 2016), and the Canadian and Swedish pair of Mikaelis and Asfeldt (2017).

A focus of outdoor experiences in some OEE programs is the opportunity for critical reflection on environmental problems in a wider sense than might be

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<sup>4</sup>Karen Barad’s (2007) notion of ethico-onto-epistemology points to the inseparability of ethics, ontology and epistemology in knowledge production. See <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/ethico-onto-epistem-ology.html> for fuller discussion



available in a classroom. The distinctive nature of trips away from the institutional realm of schools can create situations that “make obvious the connections between human needs and wants, local environmental impacts and long term changes to the environment” (Brookes, 1989, p. 21). Situations arise and are constructed wherein questions can be explored about how and by whom knowledge about the world is produced, distributed and privileged with a goal of changing students’ environmental attitudes and behaviours. Exactly what form these changes in attitudes and behaviours take is often predetermined by our own worldviews and commitments. Haraway (1991) reminds us that “preferred positioning” (p. 191) is something to which we should be alert.

Approaches to OEE that assume students develop an ability to reflect critically on their lives, social contexts, environmental attitudes and behaviours by creating explicit links between outdoor experiences and other ‘real-life’ situations are potentially flawed, rooted as they are in the kinds of rationalist positioning challenged by posthumanist orientations. There is no ‘one true story’ of how to be in the world, nor is any individual position more defensible than another: “the alternative to relativism is not totalization... [but, rather,] is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibilities of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (Haraway, 1991, p. 191).

There is a contradiction between the extensive focus on individual outcomes evident in many OEE curricula, and assumptions that OEE provides opportunities to learn about others, almost always represented as human others. According to Brookes (2002), the self is frequently represented as some sort of blank slate that can be inscribed with meaning by OEE experiences, an individualist view that excuses outdoor educators from interrogating knowledge about nature or culture, because it is predicated on the belief that individuals perceive the world directly and autonomously and that meaning comes from within. This is problematic because it ignores the social functions served by education, the role of government and other institutions, as well as various analyses of individualism in education. The result may simply reinforce pre-existing worldviews. In addition to human concerns, Barad (2007) argues that focussing “exclusively on . . . human bodies [is to] miss the crucial point that the very practices by which the differential boundaries of the human and the nonhuman are drawn are always already implicated” (p. 153). Hence, de-privileging human agency draws attention to how “all bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world’s intra-activity – its performativity” (Barad, 2007, p. 392).

We are mindful of the temptation to fashion particular kinds of OEE students. OEE framed as being about self, others and the environment, is likely to focus attention on individual behaviour change and how this might translate from an OEE experience to the ‘real world’, while ignoring the role of other human and more-than-human actors. Requiring students to situate themselves in particular ways of being in the outdoors by, for example, asking that they reflect on their environmental choices and practices of consumption, produces a form of policing about what values matter. Students asked to consider a situation such as the 2020 blasting of

Juukan Gorge<sup>5</sup> in Australia may identify it as being emblematic of colonial narratives in Australia (and elsewhere): the latest in a long history of European Australians (in the form of big business or government – never ‘people like us’) devaluing Indigenous peoples’ Country for their financial gain. But some of these normative ways of being are situated within visions of the outdoors conceived primarily within largely anthropocentric schemas, despite their alleged eco-orientations.

### 3.3 Environmental Worldviews: Moving Beyond the Usual Suspects

People construct worldviews within their own worlds<sup>6</sup> and with regard to their senses of agency within them. Our standpoints on existential issues, such as death, freedom and meaninglessness are likely to differ from our positions on broad theoretical questions about complex abstract and controversial issues around ethics, politics, education and society, and differ again from the immediate personal concerns that allow us to put these bigger questions about the meaning of life into the context of daily life, activities and relationships.

In terms of environmental worldviews, these differences can determine what we think is important enough to act upon in the future because they inform how people think the world works, what they think their role in the world should be, and what they believe is right and wrong environmental behaviour. For example, concern about the effects of climate change may be immediate for those living in low lying areas of Tuvalu in the South Pacific, whereas it may be a more theoretical and abstract issue for someone living in central Europe. Of course, communities located in central Europe have their own immediate personal concerns, such as soil and air pollution, land and forest degradation.

Three environmental worldviews commonly referred to in OEE literature are anthropocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism. These are frequently represented as a continuum, where within each category there are further delineations or labels that might be applied. For example, elements of stewardship are apparent within both an anthropocentric and biocentric orientation. Although such approaches might be helpful in unpacking the concepts, we remain mindful that they can also have unintended consequences by marginalising (or ignoring), the complexity and diversity of worldviews that might exist. Regardless of labels, the dualism between human and non-human that reifies the culture/nature divide is evident in much OEE literature.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://pkkp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PKKP-20200525-FINAL-Media-Release-Rio-Tinto-Juukan-Gorge-blasts.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Describing worldviews thus, does not rule out the potential worldviews of more-than-human entities

Planetary management worldviews predominate in industrial-consumer societies and their prevalence has increased since World War 2: humans are seen as pre-eminent whereas more-than-human (usually represented as non-human) species are instrumental to human requirements. Analogous with planetary management is the 'spaceship earth' concept, in which all economic growth is viewed as positive, the potential for growth is limited only by the capacity of scientific and/or technological invention, and the ultimate success or failure of the human species depends on our capacity to manage life-support systems. In part, planetary management is based in Judeo-Christian belief systems associated with human dominance, more recently conceived as stewardship, and an ethical responsibility for all other biotic and abiotic species. The planetary management worldview embraces free market economics, globalisation and minimal government interference in private enterprise. Pragmatic variations, based on enlightened self-interest, embrace responsible planetary management insofar as the economic status quo is maintained.

The roots of these types of worldviews are variously historicised and identified as residing in The Enlightenment Age (circa 1685–1815), during which European philosophy, science and politics were profoundly reimagined. According to Hay (2002), this

was the age when the secular and the human triumphed over the ecclesiastical and the divine, the nexus between political power and religious authority was broken, and into the void swept a ferment of scientific, philosophical and technological change . . . that launched the industrial revolution. (p. 4)

There was no single Enlightenment project, but common among Enlightenment thinkers was the notion that humanity could be improved through reason, the capacity to 'master' nature, and a belief in progress. The Enlightenment ultimately gave way to nineteenth-century Romanticism and the industrial revolution. Bowers (1993) identified a set of what he calls 'toxic' cultural beliefs, common to economic growth-oriented worldviews, namely, the ideology of individualism; faith in rationalism; the idea of progress; devaluing tacit knowledge; and anthropocentrism. These beliefs are evident in political discourse that justifies continued resource extraction on the basis that technological ingenuity will ensure continued economic growth.

Critics of planetary management worldviews argue that human exceptionalism disregards the capacity of the earth to self-regulate, that there should be limits to growth and that human knowledge of natural systems is insufficient to replicate nature. Proponents of stewardship approaches invoke human ethical responsibility to care for the earth – i.e., continue to manage the earth, but in environmentally sensitive ways that ensure humans do not run out of resources. Our survival as a species, in this view, depends on our capacity to understand and replicate how nature sustains itself and integrate those lessons into how we think and behave. The inherent anthropocentrism and lingering echoes of Enlightenment thought are obvious in all of these approaches.

Blades (2015) provided an example of how some cultural templates described above can be evident in bushwalking practices in Australian OEE:

the walking experience has conventionally involved the learning of a particular set of skills such as navigation, and learning to walk in different terrain that usually requires attention to site-specific safety issues. The emphasis of walking using the guides of topographic maps and compasses has the walker constantly monitoring their direction, progress and location. (p. 15)

This physical and spatial monitoring creates a linear space, circumscribed by predefined routes, with predicted destinations. Students' attention is directed outward, toward the mediating technology of map, compass, path, clothing and communication devices. Subjective experience is limited to self-referential intellectualising of relationships with self, others and the environment. The opportunity to attend to the entangled and liminal intra-actions (Barad, 2007) of encounters is overlooked. The culturally embedded patterns identified by Bowers (1993) and illustrated by Blades (2015) produce effects, which are apparent in how we position ourselves, our curriculum and pedagogy in relation to natural environments and their more-than-human constituents.

Life-centred worldviews – usually referred to as biocentric – hold that all life forms have inherent value regardless of their potential utilitarian value to humans. It follows that human behaviour (including inaction) should not lead to premature extinction of other life forms, however extensive debate exists about assigning hierarchical value to species and individuals within species. Hence, biocentric worldviews are fraught with ethical dilemmas and complexities. For example, which forms of life have value? The debate over feral horses in the Australian Alps is a case in point. Where one person sees a magnificent brumby, imbued with cultural and historical significance, another sees an invasive species that threatens the existence of endemic flora and fauna.

Earth-centred or ecocentric worldviews view the primary role of humans as limiting their actions to those that do not degrade or destroy biodiversity or ecological integrity on a global level. Proponents of ecocentrism distinguish between humans being a part of (and not apart from) ecological processes and communities. Hence, a focus of ecocentrism may be the preservation of ecosystems in favour of individual species, despite the precept of interdependence. Examples of biocentric and ecocentric worldviews include earth wisdom, deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and bioregionalism. Indigenous worldviews are often bundled into the category of ecocentrism, if not elaborated elsewhere as some other way of being.

Deep ecology is a term coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess to distinguish it from what he considered to be shallow environmentalism. He described deep ecology as the “rejection of the man [sic]-in-environment image in favour of the relational, total-field image” (Naess, 1973, p. 95). A cornerstone of deep ecology is that more-than-human entities including all living things, species and environments have intrinsic value. To be completely human in moral, spiritual, emotional and cognitive dimensions therefore requires a oneness with the complete environment, not separation and expressly not adopting a dominant position over it. Advocates of deep ecology claim that their position moves beyond perspectives of traditional anthropocentrism because they prioritise the intrinsic value of more-than-human life forms, natural entities and systems over the utilitarian value. As

primarily a social and political movement, deep ecology stresses policies of noninterference and the harmony of human life and nature. Put simply, deep ecology can be framed as recommending the view that humans are not distinct from any other form of nature and, once humans accept that they are indistinguishable from nature, their ethical obligations become clearer. To wit, humans are a part of nature therefore caring for nature is an act of self-care. Again, elements of anthropocentrism are glaring, not least the emphasis on self-realisation. Other criticisms of ecocentrism include the argument that humans have a responsibility (god-given in some cases) to manage the planet, human growth and ingenuity should not be limited, and that hierarchical domination by some species over others is ‘natural’.

The commitment to intrinsic value espoused by deep ecologists may sound familiar to those acquainted with particular Indigenous worldviews. To equate any environmental worldview to another, perhaps especially that of an Indigenous culture is to oversimplify the complexity of Indigenous cultures’ cosmologies and conceptions of existence within the same geographical location, let alone around the world.<sup>7</sup> While there are similarities between different groups of Indigenous peoples, the differences are innumerable. Indigenous peoples hold language, knowledge systems and beliefs, and have relations with their traditional lands, waters or territories of fundamental importance for physical, spiritual and cultural survival. It is not for us – and well beyond our capability – to attempt to elaborate them here.

### 3.4 Environmental Worldviews: What Does Post-humanism Do?

Posthumanist and new materialist strategies are fruitful because they invite us to think through the types of complexity described above and recognise how the material and cultural are continuous (Barad, 2007), always becoming and intra active – they co-emerge because of their mutual imbrication. Gough and Adsit-Morris (2020) contend that, “multiple modes of thought” are required “in addition to indigenous epistemologies and ontologies” if we are to “grapple with the complex polytemporal multiscalar crises we are (and increasingly will be) facing” (p. 220). These, and other tactics deployed by posthumanist scholars create opportunities to remain mindful, as Haraway (1989) writes, that meanings “include *particular* structurings of objects of knowledge . . . as that which can be known in a particular time and place” (p. 111, her emphasis).

In thinking about environmental worldviews in OEE it is helpful to seek out ideas that challenge redemptive narratives, consider the kinds of ethico-onto-epistemological questions that reveal how normative truths about bodies,

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<sup>7</sup>The *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues* estimates there are more than 370 million Indigenous peoples spread across 70 countries worldwide, each practicing unique traditions, retaining social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live (<https://aiatsis.gov.au/>)

subjectivities and privilege are constituted and contested. New materialist ontologies reveal how relations among humans, the more-than-human, and matter enables “recognition that humans are not the only significant actors in the world and thus enables a more distributive agency” (Sonu & Snaza, 2015, p. 267). Barad (2007) uses the concept of “agential cut” to illustrate how subject-object distinctions are enacted. These cuts are enacted by the material arrangement of which the “subject” and “object” are consequences before they are causes (pp. 175–180).

Posthumanism does not imply nonhuman. It is not a suggestion to do away with the human altogether. As Affifi (2020) argued, both the human frame and the term anthropocentrism, must be “considered with more nuance, and in particular with an eye on what these concepts actually *do*, [or else] environmental educators advocating ‘worldview’ change are bound to continue debating at an overgeneralised and counterproductive level of abstraction” (p. 3). Understanding the paradox of irreducible anthropocentrism – what Affifi (2020) labels (non) anthropocentrism – is a move in accepting the myriad ways we are imbricated with our worlds. If we acknowledge that all possible positions are in some way “both anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric, we are called to ask what a given framing foregrounds and to what effect, and to draw out nascent alternative dimensions when such framings are problematic” (p. 4). Hence, educators can develop pedagogy that can be employed with students to dislodge sedimented thinking.

### Reflective Questions

1. Environmental worldviews are constructed as a result of our combined histories and experiences. They are a particular view from a particular location (Haraway, 1991). The Enlightenment and subsequent Industrial Revolution influenced how western Europeans in particular related to natural environments. Describe and evaluate the effect of these changes in shaping the environmental worldviews and actions of early non-Indigenous settler groups in your country. How are these actions evident today in your experiences of OEE?
2. *The historical roots of our ecologic crisis* was an influential piece of writing published over 50 years ago (White, 1967). In it, White critiqued elements of Judeo-Christian religious traditions and argued that they had significantly influenced attitudes toward the environment. Identify and describe the elements White critiqued. Describe what, if any, influence these elements have in your experience of contemporary environmental worldviews in OEE.
3. Identify an example of art, song or literature that illustrates particular environmental worldviews relating to a place you have encountered through your OEE studies. What can be discerned about this place through the artefact you have chosen? What stories does it tell about the agency of the more-than human world of this place?
4. Since emerging in the 1970s the concept of sustainability remains contested. For example, we might ask, ‘What is to be sustained?’, ‘By whom?’ and ‘For whose benefit?’ An analogy could be made between degrees of sustainability and the construction of deep ecology versus shallow environmentalism (Naess, 1973).

Describe selected practices of sustainability you have observed through your OEE experiences. What elements of environmental worldviews are evident in their choice and application?

- Estimate your individual ecological footprint.<sup>8</sup> Determine what, if anything, you could change to reduce your impact. Evaluate how changing your behaviour might mean adjusting some of your environmental worldviews.

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# Chapter 4

## Human-Nature Relationships: Navigating a Privileged White Landscape



Jamie Mcphie and David A. G. Clarke

### 4.1 Introduction

It may be easy to think that the word ‘nature’ in ‘human-nature’ relationships is a relatively neutral one. However, as humans are the ones who discuss ‘nature’ – describe how it should be related to, and in effect create different versions of it to their own ends – ‘nature’ can be seen for what it is: highly malleable, political, effecting, and culturally constructed. This is particularly important given the increasing influence the far-right has on environmental discourses (Lubarda, 2020) and the way in which the far-right invokes environmental discourses to their ends. We encourage outdoor and environmental educators to be aware of the potential implications of what might otherwise be thought of as relatively neutral or even beneficial ideas and pedagogies.

A ‘human-nature relationship’ is never a straightforward technical or pedagogical matter but also always a conceptual or philosophical one *with political and physical implications*. That is to say, with the very use of terms such as ‘human-nature relationship’, ‘connection to nature’, ‘nature connection’, and ‘nature connectedness’ no straightforward interpretation of meaning exists (although the cultural milieu which promotes these terms do seem to generally mean the same vague thing). Therefore, these terms must be read within the context they are used to decipher the philosophical assumptions they necessarily include. Within the outdoor and environmental education (OEE) literature, positions on these relationships

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can contradict themselves or go unstated, thereby enacting hegemonic and normative points-of-view. This being said, our intention here is not to review the diversity of approaches to human-nature relationships within OEE discourses. We will not focus here on the traditional and contemporary environmental perspectives which often appear in OEE, such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, shallow ecology, deep ecology, feminist, poststructural, indigenous, new materialist, and posthuman perspectives, even though these concepts are implicated in our thinking. These concepts are discussed in *Chapter 4: Worldviews, environments and education* and we recommend you read that chapter before this one. We do, however, urge readers to consider which of these positions might be informing what they are reading and also to seek out alternative renderings (for instance, see Mcphie & Clarke, 2018).

What we offer here is a series of expanded glossary entries designed to remind and provoke the reader of the implications of thinking without theories or concepts from more equitable positions or even heritage. Historicised and implicit cultural bias needs constant disruption in order to break inequitable habits. We believe there may also be overlap with some other chapters of this book, particularly with chapters on decolonial approaches and social justice. This is rectitudinous, because in our view environmental and social justice *need* to be central to the aims of OEE. Our approach, therefore, is to take account of the issues of effects or performative inequities produced by particular invented environmental concepts, such as nature, ecology, holism and ecosystems, due to their usage in OEE. Space precludes a detailed surveyance, so we offer a brief and critical history of some key terms, followed by a short discussion on the present moment and inequitable landscapes, and urge the reader to continue reading on these topics.

## 4.2 Problematic Foundations of Ecological Thinking

As we have indicated, there are very different ideas about what ‘human-nature relationship’ means, and different ideas have different effects. Noel Castree (2005) writes that there exist competing ideas, or knowledges, about nature – competing *ecologies*. For Castree, these ‘knowledges’ are complex enmeshments of cognitive, moral, and aesthetic beliefs which have historical antecedents and concrete effects:

Knowledges of nature are multiple in their origins, their meanings, their referents and their audiences. Together, they materially shape understandings of, attitudes towards, and practices upon those numerous things we describe as natural things. In short, the contest whereby certain knowledges of nature gain purchase in any society (or some part thereof), while others are marginalised, is a high-stakes one. (Castree, 2005, p.18)

Environmental historians have pointed to material effects to demonstrate the ways in which our ecologies (ideas about, or knowledges of, what it means to count as ‘natural’) have performed equitably or inequitably. If we dig deep, we start to unearth some surprising material considering the foundations of concepts such as

‘ecology’ itself, as well as ‘holism’ and ‘ecosystems’, terms often used in the rhetoric of OEE. Below, we offer some potentially problematic origins of these concepts and go on to explore the idea of fascist ecologies.

### 4.3 Ecology

Ecology is often defined as the study of relationships and interactions between ‘living’ organisms and ‘their’ environments, including between humans and so-called ‘nature’. Already, we can spot problems with this definition, concerning what is considered ‘living’ (which culture’s definitions are used over and above another’s?), positioning hierarchical ‘subjects’ in a power relation to what might be considered a mere backdrop (‘their’ environments), and separating humans from a romanticised version of ‘nature’.

In perhaps one of the earliest examples of modern ecological thought, in 1815 Ernst Moritz Arndt stated, “When one sees nature in a necessary connectedness and interrelationship, then all things are equally important – shrub, worm, plant, human, stone, nothing first or last, but all one single unity” (Arndt, 1815, n.p., cited in Staudenmaier, 2011, p.16). Arndt was a lover of romanticised rural landscapes and agrarian cultures, whose xenophobic nationalism led to his belief in an inseparable identity of racial purity and a reconnection to nature (Staudenmaier, 2011). This belief in a xenophobic racial purity emerging from a romanticisation of landscapes/nature/environments can be linked directly to particular moments/movements in history, such as nationalistic idealisations born out of the Roman scholar Tacitus’ descriptions of Germanic tribes as pure-blooded indigenous forest peoples, “a race unmixed by intermarriage with other races” (Tacitus, cited in Schama, 2004, p. 82) and the development of the Romantic Sublime in Germany and England. We may equally ask how modern aspirations to sustainability seek environmental amelioration whilst perhaps blindly retaining various social injustices.

We see similar politics reflected in the birth of the word ‘ecology’. Ecology appears in OEE as a term used for the scientific study of the ‘natural world’ and as an educational aim, for instance in promoting ‘ecological literacy’. Ernst Haeckel coined the term ‘ecology’ in 1866. Haeckel’s racially and specially hierarchical concept of ecology was fascistic. The very idea of ecology, including the formation of the sound of it from its Greek roots, *oikos* (meaning home), is problematic from an equitable positioning due to the manner in which it establishes a hierarchy as ontologically ‘true’ – between humans and other-than-humans, for example. It continues to perform hierarchically in many international curriculums. For example, through Linnaeus’ taxonomy of species, humans are conceived as on top of the tree of life, even though we are assembled from/of many species conceived of as at the bottom of the tree, such as bacteria, viruses, mites, fungi etc. (water or minerals aren’t even considered in this rather limited version of ‘life’). During the many tumultuous global events of 2020, biological conceptions within ecological hierarchies – such as white men being biologically superior – have been called out through

movements, such as BLM and #MeToo, with calls to update the patriarchal white history of pedagogical curriculums, replacing them with more equitable and inclusive narratives.

## 4.4 Holism

Holism appears in OEE with calls to understand the environment more ‘holistically’, or when proponents claim that the ‘whole is greater than the sum of its parts’, which are intimately interconnected. Although holism has ancient origins in varied guises, it was a term (re)invented in 1926 by Field Marshall Jan Smuts, a vocal advocate of apartheid, who devised the term holism to support his theory that nature would find its own stability, once wholes were formed, as long as all the ‘wholes’ were in their correct places (Curtis, 2011). This stability was, of course, one that fitted neatly around his vision of white supremacy and a world stabilised by the order of the British Empire, a view that was challenged by Arthur Tansley, the inventor of the term ‘ecosystems’ (see below).

Holism has been used (and abused) for many different purposes but can be seen performing inequitably (still) in Apollonian ideals of humanism, wholesomeness, and purity. These ideals can lead to experiences of racism and victim blaming. For example, holistic approaches to therapy, such as positive psychology and the alternative health industry, have utilised the concept of holistic living in order to project fantasies of wholeness, happiness and positive thinking that can “weigh on a cancer patient like a second disease”:

I know I have to be positive all the time and that is the only way to cope with cancer-but it’s so hard to do. I know that if I get sad, or scared or upset, I am making my tumor grow faster and I will have shortened my life. (from Holland’s *The Tyranny of Positive Thinking*, cited in Ehrenreich, 2009, p. 43).

Ehrenreich (2009) challenges this wholesome state of mind as “perhaps more accessible to those who are affluent, who conform to social norms, who suppress judgement in the service of faith, and who are not overly bothered by societal injustice” (p. 169, emphasis added). In this way, holism and associated contextual concepts, such as happiness, may privilege “hegemonic groups who have access to what makes us believe we are happy” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 2).

## 4.5 Ecosystems

Tansley's theory<sup>1</sup> of ecosystems, suggesting a law of equilibrium, posited nature to be a self-regulating system that desired stability. Of course, since then, the field of ecology has ostensibly moved on (although humans or human produce is often omitted), recognising that dynamic change is anything but stable. However, many romanticised views of nature still integrate a harmonious Edenic version of self-regulation and stability. Cohen (2013) suggests there is a "utopian emphasis on homeostasis, order, and the implicit benevolence of an unexamined force labelled nature" (p. xxii), "a purified place to which one travels rather than dwells always within: separate from the human, empty, foundationally pure" (p. xxi). This version of nature is sold as "affirmative, extraverted and masculine [...] sunny, straightforward, ableist, holistic, hearty, and 'healthy'" (Morton, 2010, p. 16).

These concepts – ecology, holism, ecosystems – all play a role in promoting a particular vision of 'human-nature' relationships and as such, can influence pedagogy, as well as everyday behaviour, via implicit bias. As such, we could further a critical discussion of the present, and perspectives such as deep ecology,<sup>2</sup> with the controversial addition of fascist ecology, sometimes known as 'ecofascism' or 'eco-xenophobia'.

## 4.6 Performative Implications for the Present

Whilst our brief survey of the problematic origins of ecological thinking may seem anachronistic and removed from the present-day concerns of OEE, we believe outdoor and environmental educators should be aware of the fine line between promotion of environmental concern and nationalism, (including anti-population and bigoted perspectives) implied by some knowledges of nature given the present rise in far-right hate. Although there may be positive attributes to, for instance, a deep ecological worldview when compared to, say, shallow ecology, the implicit dangers of such a view can also strengthen a far-right position, regardless of whether its originators meant well. This is particularly the case given the current moment, when the alt or far-right "deploys ecological discourse, rediscovering older Nazi themes like organic agriculture and animal rights whilst articulating novel right-wing interpretations of concepts like biodiversity, decentralism, deep ecology, bioregionalism, anti-capitalism, Indigenism, and anarchism" (Taylor, 2019, p. 276).

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<sup>1</sup>The idea of which came to him in a dream.

<sup>2</sup>The biocentric perspective of deep ecology suggests that 'nature' has inherent value rather than merely anthropocentric value alone (economic value, for example). It reminds us that we are also part of 'nature', although has been criticised as being highly romanticised and deeply contradictory when it comes to human produce or technology, which many of its proponents' claim is *not* natural.

## 4.7 The Rise of Fascist Ecologies

White supremacists have versions of nature that often distort Darwinian theorisations in order to raise their own idealised positions of power. Many nature writers also fit into this category (see Smyth, 2019, for examples). In the UK, *Tarka the Otter's* author, Henry Williamson famously expressed his fascism through his nature writing. Of course, this fascistic stance does not necessarily mean that people should not share in a 'concern' for environmental degradation. Reddick (2013) points out that the poet Ted Hughes embraced "Williamson's concern about the preservation of the countryside while avoiding the influence of his far-right politics" (p. 353), although we are not certain that this avoidance is possible. The problems start arising when those environmental concerns ostracise, subjugate, or demonise others (humans and other-than-humans). Even deep ecology, one of the more popular proffered solutions to dualistic environmental thinking, can do just this, or at least has the structural foundations and contradictory Cartesian rhetoric to be complicit in this. Deep ecology has been linked to fascism a number of times, sometimes because of the extreme views of some of its proponents (see Bookchin's, 1987 critique, for example). Of course, some nature writers, many of whom follow a deep ecological ideology, may be complicit in this white, privileged version of nature, often without fully realising it themselves (via implicit bias) – here we would include most prominent nature writers, from the transcendentalists to the those praised as forging the 'new' nature writing. "Of course they aren't fascists. But when fascism comes along they may not be best-placed to see it for what it is, or to resist the pull of its song" (Smyth, 2019, n.p.). In fact, by its very nature, there can be no 'writing about nature' or 'nature writer' that is not complicit in co-creating inequitable social environments, if that version of nature is a privileged one. And almost all the versions of nature in modern Western literature are privileged versions, mostly written by white, middle-class men. Therefore, it's crucial to push for more calls for writing with other versions of nature, by writers who are not white, middle-class, or even heterosexual men (as this implicit lens can lead to heteronormative perceptions of a gendered nature, for example).

As is evident above, varied perceptions of human-nature relationships are *always* heavily politicised. Whilst some socialist orientated thinkers prize urban immigration for its heterogeneity (think Lefebvre or Marx), other conservation-minded National Socialist thinkers (think John Tanton) have historically backed anti-immigration policies for fear of tainting their harmonious *Gardens of Eden*.

Contemporarily, if deep ecologists truly believed that humans were also nature, 'letting nature seek its own balance' would incorporate humans giving aid to other humans as this *is* nature seeking its own balance. Cultural bias can make it easy to blame population growth which is happening 'over there'. The idea that population growth is the *largest* 'elephant in the room' of the environmental crisis – of which we can ethically do something about for near term effect – has been debunked (Bradshaw & Brook, 2014, p. 16614). Viewing population in this way can lead to heinous crimes – expanding consumption is the far greater challenge.

It was out of this kind of crude eco-brutalism that Hitler, in the name of ‘population control,’ with a racial orientation, fashioned theories of blood and soil that led to the transport of millions of people to murder camps like Auschwitz. The same eco-brutalism now reappears a half-century later among self-professed deep ecologists who believe that Third World peoples should be permitted to starve to death and that desperate Indian immigrants from Latin America should be excluded by the border cops from the United States lest they burden ‘our’ ecological resources. (Bookchin, 1987, n.p.)

Whilst the above suggests the type of horrendous implicit bias that we saw in *some* uses of the ‘#WeAreTheVirus’ hashtag, explicit bias is of equal if not greater concern. At the time of writing the far-right environmentalism of ecofascism was being actively linked to responses to the Covid-19 pandemic on influential online message boards such as 4chan and 8chan. These connections often start with attempts at humour which then merge into serious political positions in the wider online community (Morgan, 2020).

## 4.8 Inequitable Landscapes

It is becoming more evident that romantically conceived ‘green’ environments, such as national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB’s), are inherently *white*. ‘Parks advocate equal opportunities policies but these are often ineffective’ (Ayamba & Rotherham, 2003, p. 1). There is a good deal of evidence (see national park statistics, DEFRA and Natural England) to suggest an inequitable lack of accessibility to these romanticised versions of nature for many people who are not white (Ayamba and Rotherham, 2003) or who are working class (Suckall et al., 2009) to which the press are now becoming more aware. Recent articles and popular TV programmes are catching up with the social sciences, albeit with a limited translation in many cases to help dilute the often-inaccessible language used in academia. For example, on June 28th, 2020, the BBC programme *Countryfile* highlighted some of the issues around being a black person in the English countryside, emphasising how it is seen as a ‘white environment’ for many people. The lack of epistemological access to these romanticised environments (for many non-white and working-class people) that were particularly emboldened during the eighteenth Century highlights that these are indeed white (and mostly upper/middle-class) environments for a number of reasons that were/are culturally constructed. For instance, the inequity of ‘Walking while Black’ is becoming more obvious. ‘Walking while black restricts the experience of walking, renders inaccessible the classic Romantic experience of walking alone’ (Cadogan, 2016, n.p.). The complexities of historical and intersectional experiences, and advocacy for/of being black in ‘nature’ are beginning to be explored in novel ways, for instance through the hashtag #blackinnature and through contemporary performances such as *Black Men Walking* (directed by Dawn Walton). However, the experience of achieving a connection to a particular vision of nature through aesthetic experiences within traditional Western OEE remains a hangover from transcendental romanticism. Experience of the



Sublime, a culturally constructed embodied aesthetic that embellished the ‘awesome power of nature’ is to be sought within this telling. But for whom? The Picturesque and Romantic periods of the 18th and 19th centuries were driven by wealthy white Europeans and as such limited epistemological access to walking in Sublime landscapes. Poet William Wordsworth knew that the ‘romanticised’ mountains of Cumbria were inaccessible to the working classes and wished to keep them this way. In 1844 in a letter to the press Wordsworth explained “members of the working class would not have the capacity to appreciate the ‘beauty’ and ‘character of seclusion and retirement’ that the Lakes District had to offer [...] it can be produced only by a slow and gradual process of culture” (Wordsworth, cited in Schwartz, *n.d.*, paras. 5–7). What is created here is an elite epistemological (in)accessibility to certain landscapes which is, in turn, an (in)accessibility to an elitist construction of knowledge. Other ecologies may have more luck with producing more equitable actions.

## 4.9 Alternative Ecologies: Social Ecology

Social ecology was coined by Murray Bookchin as a democratic alternative to shallow capitalistic ecologies as well as new age ecologies. Bookchin suggested that human induced environmental inequities were a result of social inequities in hierarchical societies. He described “essential differences in outlook between class and preclass societies”, illustrating “the philosophical linkage between the propensities to objectify nature and to objectify one’s fellow human being” (Szasz, 1982, p. 1475). Bookchin offers this significant critique of deep ecology’s lack of appreciation of sociology:

deep ecology, despite all its social rhetoric, has virtually no real sense that our ecological problems have their ultimate roots in society and in social problems. It preaches a gospel of a kind of ‘original sin’ that accuses a vague species called humanity---as though people of color were equatable with whites, women with men, the Third World with the First, the poor with the rich, and the exploited with their exploiters. Deep ecologists see this vague and undifferentiated humanity essentially as an ugly ‘anthropocentric’ thing---presumably a malignant product of natural evolution---that is “overpopulating” the planet, ‘devouring’ its resources, and destroying its wildlife and the biosphere---as though some vague domain of ‘nature’ stands opposed to a constellation of nonnatural human beings, with their technology, minds, society, etc. (Bookchin, 1987, n.p.)

We think this quote is essential reading for outdoor and environmental educators who hope to promote ‘human-nature relationships’, if only as an antidote to the more popular deep ecological views in OEE discourse. Arguably, social ecology takes into account more equitable human-environment relations than deep ecology does. However, social ecology may be just as fragile as other ecologies given its semantic origins and Bookchin is well known for his overly combative and dogmatic style of persuasion – perhaps not the best tactic when confronting other ‘environmental egos’. Maybe we need to follow philosophers Deleuze and Guattari’s



advice more carefully when they continued to use the language of nature-culture dualities, *just for kicks* – only ‘after’ unearthing, deconstructing, and diffracting the inequities that nature bifurcations encourage (Mcphie & Clarke, 2018). Our own preference here is to pay attention to and think *with* feminist, queer, Indigenous, and posthuman ecologies, and especially to listen to those writing from minority perspectives on human-nature relationships.

## 4.10 Post-natural Landscapes

In this chapter we have emphasised the grave material effects of various knowledges of nature. Castree (2005) reminds us of this seriousness in the following terms:

because nature is such an all-pervasive aspect of our collective thought and practice, the way it is understood is manifestly important. Hegemonic ideas about nature are those general understandings of human nature and the non-human world that are more or less ‘taken for granted’ in any society. These ideas have a history, a geography and a sociology to them. In other words, they begin with someone or some organisation, they then spread across space to influence greater numbers of people, and they reflect in some measure, the agendas of those who promulgate these ideas. (pp. 19-20)

As we continue to see tensions of inequity (for example, racial, economic, North/South, gendered, ableist, colonial, environmental) strain under the combined weight of late global capitalism, climate catastrophe, and economic and health responses to the Coronavirus pandemic, it is apt that outdoor and environmental educators reflect at every level and on every topic on its potential effects within the current political moment. With this chapter we have taken this politically material approach to analysis of the idea of ‘human-nature relationships’ seriously. We have discussed some of the ways in which nature has been envisioned historically so as to highlight the genealogies of environmental thought from which OEE discourses draw. We do this in order to highlight some politically problematic origins, and also to argue for a move beyond simplistic ‘relationship’ or ‘connection’ narratives.

We believe outdoor and environmental educators, as key players in the construction of different knowledges of nature, have a great responsibility to pay attention to the political ramifications of the ecologies present in their pedagogies. Whilst it can be tempting to think of providing experiences in ‘nature’ as politically neutral or beneficial, in truth certain pedagogies may unwittingly promote biases that have the potential to become warped in learners’ future experiences. Further to this, participants bring political ecologies with them to these experiences, understanding nature in different ways, and learn from others whilst engaging in these environments. Experiences in a presumed ‘nature’ may provide as much illiberal as liberal thought, as much direction for social injustice as social justice. These concepts are inextricably entwined with concepts of nature. So much so that when someone says or writes ‘nature’, and its synonyms, we should hear and read ‘politics’. We suggest that philosophic pedagogical approaches, which attempt to unpack the assumptions and bifurcations we bring to environments as learners and educators, will prove more

fruitful in promoting environmental and social justice than seemingly simplistic ‘connection’ or ‘relationship’ pedagogies.

If it is possible to turn the tide on mass extinction and climate catastrophe, we must become socially and environmentally inclusive. We must interrogate our own implicit bias, which means deconstructing the very language we use so as to weed out the roots of oppression which are often hidden behind unexamined white privilege. Environmental movements and conservation practices can whitewash open participation through their inequitable linguistic heritage. We urgently need an ontological environmental overhaul in which we include and pay attention to other voices. Therefore, we will leave you with a contentious thought provoked by the title of this book, *Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education: International Perspectives* – how many of these ‘international perspectives’ are authored by non-white non-middle-class Westerners, and what does that *do*?

### Reflective Questions

1. What differences would we have seen in modern environmental movements if Greta Thunberg were not white?
2. What do you think of when you think of ‘nature’? In your view are some people more natural than others? Why or why not? What are the best objections or challenges to your position? And what are the objections or challenges to those objections and challenges?
3. If ‘nature’ is not politically neutral or beneficial, how should we frame it in our OEE pedagogies or research?
4. Are there other, more equitable worldviews/ontologies/epistemologies regarding human-nature relationships that might be promoted in our pedagogy and research? If so, can, could and should people from other cultures adopt them without misappropriation or implicit bias? Do we need to find the ‘right one’, or should we seek pluralism in our worldviews? What are the challenges and opportunities in each approach?
5. How do we discuss environmental issues whilst keeping multiple perspectives in mind? Do we need ‘nature’ as a term if peoples’ understandings of the word are so diverse? Is ‘nature’ rendered useless?

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# Chapter 5

## Developing a Sense of Place



Mark Leather and Jakob F. Thorsteinsson

In this chapter we consider what is meant by a sense of place, and what challenges and opportunities this brings to outdoor education. We address the challenges and the tensions within the profession and conclude this chapter with a consideration of the future. We use our shared understanding of the concepts of place and our shared teaching experiences at universities in Plymouth, England and Reykjavik, Iceland. The comparison between countries is helpful for our understanding because, as Nicol (2020a) highlights, the affordances of one place can differ immensely from another and we need to understand them theoretically as well as experientially. Our practice has evolved to recognise that a place-responsive approach to outdoor education allows us to develop a sense of place; to connect with our cultural pasts, to understand our present and to imagine and engage in our communities now and in the future.

### 5.1 What Is a Sense of Place?

A sense of place has many contested potential explanations, and what we present here needs to be read through the lens of practicing outdoor educators in higher education. There are multiple key influences (e.g., see Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011) and what we present here reflects our journey of understanding that has influenced our teaching. Firstly, we consider the difference between outdoor *spaces* and outdoor *places* before exploring the three challenges facing the profession: culture, nature, and time.

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## 5.2 When Space Becomes Place

The eminent geographer Tuan (1977) discussed how human experience is affected by dwelling in places and spaces. He made a distinction between *spaces*, which are unspecific and applicable to a range of locations (e.g. a town, a forest, a river delta, a mountain range etc.), and *places*, which are more local, personal and storied (e.g. Dartmoor in Devon, England as the place where Arthur Conan Doyle set *The Hound of the Baskervilles* featuring the detective Sherlock Holmes; or Mount Snæfellsjökull in Iceland as the place where Jules Verne set the *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*). These places are spaces where attachment and belonging are cultivated, by experiencing the space aesthetically – seeing, smelling, touching and being outside in nature – and experiencing it cognitively, by connecting with the culture – either fictional stories, folklore or historical accounts. As such the concept of a *sense of place* may be felt, experienced, understood and then used in different ways by different people. These two aspects of understanding a *sense of place* can be, a) an objective, naturalistic conception, and b) a subjective existential sense of place. The naturalistic view is a descriptive approach to place. The existential notion has a humanistic approach where personal experience and meaning are more emphasised. This has given life to a range of related concepts that are helpful such as: ‘place identity’, ‘personality of place’, and ‘place attachment’.

A *sense of place* is a multidimensional and complex construct used by anthropologists, cultural geographers, sociologists and urban planners to characterise relationships between people and spaces. Attachment is a characteristic that some geographic places have, and some do not. A *sense of place* is often used to describe those characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging. *Place attachment* describes “the emotional bonds between people and a particular place or environment” (Seamon, 2014, p. 11). In *Landscapes of Fear*, Tuan (1980) highlighted how not all *senses of place* are necessarily associated with positive emotions; not everyone lives in an aesthetically pleasing or safe place. Places said to have a strong *sense of place* have a strong identity that is deeply felt by inhabitants and visitors and as such a *sense of place* is a social phenomenon. Place identity can be formed by its inhabitants or constructed (or arguably imposed) by formalised external agency designations. These designations and codes attributed to specific places are aimed at protecting, preserving and enhancing places felt (by some organisation or group of people) to be of value, for example, The Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks are a UNESCO *World Heritage Site*. Importantly, we argue that a *sense of place* can be a much more personal, intimate and locally specific feeling, either at, or near, home, or when visiting a location for the first time. A place does not need to be iconic, famous or aesthetically outstanding, the effects of a place can be much more subtle and finely nuanced.

### 5.3 Challenges with a *sense of place*

A critical approach to our teaching is essential, and while we advocate for developing a *sense of place*, we have also questioned this alternative pedagogy for outdoor education. There are three key problems which we have wrangled with so far. That is not to say they are the only ones to be considered, but they have been most significant for us. They are based on human relationships with culture, time, and nature.

#### 5.3.1 *Sense of Place and our Relationship with Culture*

A *sense of place* can be used in relation to place-making and place-attachment of communities to their environment or homeland. The utility of a *sense of place*, the discussion of culture and history, involves grounding ideas and experiences in the local and personal. This becomes problematic when place-attachment to a homeland becomes dominated by localism and nationalism, where the primary emphasis is on promotion of local or national culture and interests as superior over and above that of other peoples, regions or nations. We suggest that place-based educators need to be mindful, reflexive and sensitive to these possibilities when developing a sense of place. It is important to have a balance and to understand the difference between having a sense of pride and the feeling of love, devotion and an attachment to a community, grounded in respect for others who share the same sentiment, and *localism* and *nationalism* which is based on exclusion or detriment of the interests of others (groups, peoples, nations), arguably an excessive, aggressive patriotism. This is not a new critique of outdoor education practice, nor one solely aimed at place-based outdoor education. For example, Brookes (2016) highlighted Baden-Powell's Scouting Movement and the themes of militarism, imperialism, nationalism, masculinity, homophobia and racism that were present during its formation and early years of operation. Scouting developed at the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of British imperial struggles in Africa and not unsurprisingly its origins reflect the beliefs and values of the time.

The places where we teach have a history. There are more-than-human histories, as well as human stories of romantic encounters, ancient horse roads or infamous battles of settler colonialism. Outdoor education is often conducted in places with difficult histories of colonialism, particularly in countries of the British Empire. Henderson (2005) provided a good argument that our heritage stories should not be lost, rather they should be listened to and retold, thereby woven into the narrative allowing this rich history to live in the contemporary world of adventure travel. When we journey in the present, this is shaped, determined and influenced by the past. Place-based outdoor education challenges the dominant discourse of colonial ways of conquering nature – the 'blank canvas' discussed below and allows us to engage with the narratives of others. As Riley (2020) argues, understanding that there are no distinct and unconnected worldviews existing in which individuals act

through autonomous agency, but “worlding emerges through relational agency, teaching, and learning in outdoor experiential education and can generate an intrinsic sense of responsibility to attend to more equitable relationships with Other(s) for/with/in these Anthropocene times” (p. 88).

### 5.3.2 *Sense of Place and our Relationship with Time*

Time(s) reveals itself in a place. Through place we can experience where people lived, and we can put ourselves in their footsteps. We live in the present moment and can think, imagine and speculate about the future. We can be place responsive and act to influence the future of the place. Payne and Wattchow (2008) state: “there are worrying silences in outdoor education about the question of time in the conceptualisation of place and its pedagogies” (p. 27). This phenomenon is not a simple one. They argue that time(s) has different layers; *cyclical* – like the tides and seasons, *linear* – like hours and minutes and *dot* time – instantaneous, like a digital blip, as found in traditional “fast outdoor education” (p. 28). The pedagogical heart of placed based outdoor education is the slowing down of the times during which we introduce our learners to the concept and practices of place. This approach is challenging because an overcrowded school curriculum squeezes outdoor education to the margins. We can see this ‘time(table) famine’ where school-based outdoor education is a reflection of the faster cultural and technological phenomena, and as such the possibility of a sense of place, engagement in nature’s spaces, or some attachment to them, is compromised (Payne & Wattchow, 2008). Given that attachment is important to us when developing a *sense of place*, then *fast outdoor education* proves problematic and so we must acknowledge the potential power of the proximal, the spatiality and geographies of movement in the outdoors, which are compromised by the absence of the consideration and examination of time. Slow pedagogy is a serious response to Dewey’s unheeded call in education for a philosophy of experience.

When on an adventurous journey, places may possibly be passed through and treated as spaces, as a blank canvas upon which to create our own story and place, without the other meanings that are already connected to them. In outdoor recreation for some, the aim is *hunting for trophies* – climb the rock face, conquer the mountain top, ski the black run, and so on. Trophy hunting shows that the owner has been somewhere and done something. For example, in the UK The National Three Peaks Challenge involves climbing the three highest peaks of Scotland, England and Wales, often within 24 hours. Participants may then display their achievements on social media; Instagram has #3peaks for this trophy. These social media posts add to the discourse and social constructs of how to be outdoors. They can shape people’s ideas about what constitutes climbing mountains and being physically active in nature. Our approach in place responsive outdoor education is to harness outdoor recreation activities whilst being mindful of the negative consequences that trophy hunting can have if it is the sole focus of an outdoor education programme.



As an antidote to this approach, our teaching practice is informed by a couple of ideas. Firstly, we use three chapters of the book *Philosophy of Walking* (Gros, 2014) with students: *Walking is not a sport*, *Solitude*, and *Slowness*. The concept of *slowness* is not the opposite of speed, but of *haste*. By slowing down, in silence and solitude, people become more self-aware of their senses, emotions and the places they move through. Leopold (1949/2020) has a powerful message when he describes, “recreation is not the outdoors but our reaction to it” (p. 173). The essential issue is about an embodied sensing of the place – seeing, feeling, touching, smelling, tasting – so that the place can be mentally understood. Secondly, from the book *Psychogeography* (Coverley, 2018) we use the concept of *dérive* – or the drift – as a way of moving through and across the land to help develop our more-than-human connections. The *dérive* can be considered the specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. Similarly, the famous naturalist John Muir disliked both the word hike and the activity hiking. He argued that people ought to *saunter* in the mountains – not hike! He took the meaning from religious pilgrimages and argued how the mountains are our Holy Land, and we ought to saunter through them reverently, rather than hike (Delphi Classics, 2017). Drifting can be carried slowly, by a current of air or water, or other useful synonyms such as stroll, amble, float, linger, wander, meander, stray, and hover. Nicol (2020b) suggests a straightforward “Walking and talking like Socrates once did” (p. 182), which is simply to go for a walk and encourage students to pay attention to something along the way and be ready to talk about it. We all lead busy lives with endless noise and connection to others. There are times with our students that we create opportunities to become more of a *human-being*, rather than a *human-doing*.

### 5.3.3 *Sense of Place and our Relationship with Nature*

The *place* in which we locate our teaching has a more-than-human past. There are ecosystems, inanimate rocks and mountains as well as the highly active volcanoes, tectonic plates, rivers and waterfalls. While many of these places have had human settlement, there are places in the world that have not, for example the Vatnajökull National Park in the interior of Iceland. These places may have been given names (and arguably been settled in that respect) but the point we highlight is that our relationship with *place* is multi-layered with both human and more-than-human influences. It is vital that we learn to see ourselves as part of, and in relationship with, the wider ecology and not maintain anthropocentric lines of thought that seek to artificially separate humans. In doing so Derby et al. (2015) caution that:

we also need to be thoughtful in the process that we do not conflate everything, including wild(er)ness, under the archaic and potentially dangerous umbrella of ‘nature.’ ... We maintain that in our efforts to tackle the divide between nature and culture, we are ignoring the important differences that do exist among the range of human influenced spaces and also those which are still mostly beyond our reach. (p. 8)



As educators, we need to acknowledge the radical differences in the *knowing* and *being* that take place across different settings, from the local urban park to the distant arctic tundra and everything else in-between. For us, the forces and beauty of nature (however conceived) are fundamental to our *sense of place*, for we experience it directly, in all types of weather. Sometimes we are teaching, at others we are doing things for our own enjoyment. Not only because of the fresh outdoor life, or Nordic *friluftsliv*, but also because we love the magnificent natural structures, from the vast mountain ranges to the smallest wildflower, the pebbles on a beach, and the ripples on the ocean.

## 5.4 Tensions in the Profession

Place-based education has been embraced by some outdoor educators (see Henderson, 2005; Mannion and Lynch, 2016; Nicol, 2020b; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). In doing so it shifts the pedagogical approach. This inevitably leads to tensions within as to what really constitutes outdoor education. In a sense, it is a move from a focus on risk and adventure to understanding our adventure spaces as places, and in doing so we need at times to adopt a slow pedagogy, as discussed above. For us it is a reaction and antidote to the traditional *fast and furious* adrenaline-charged ways of consuming and conquering outdoor spaces. That is not to say that this is a simplistic binary either/or choice. We love climbing mountains, running river rapids and biking downhill as fast as we can! However, our understanding and practice of outdoor education is that it is always more than just the activities. It is also about meaning making and the sharing of ideas and conversations in the spaces in-between the activities.

Wattchow and Brown (2011) provide thorough arguments for adopting a *pedagogy of place*. They challenge the traditional Hahnian view of risk and adventure. This is where nature is to be conquered and the great outdoors provides spaces – blue (oceans and rivers), green (mountains and forests), yellow (sandy deserts and beaches) and white (high mountains and polar regions) – as blank canvases in which to prove yourself as a man/woman, developing your character, resilience and leadership. Wattchow and Brown (2011) also critique the commonly held Romantic notions of nature, adventure and the pedagogy of risk, the paradoxical aspects of adventure, the assumptions concerning the benefits of risk and the flawed use of the comfort zone model to enhance learning. When discussing the rise of individualism and the focus of personal development in outdoor education programmes, they challenge the traditional approach to outdoor education that has become a simplistic binary of ‘doing or reflecting on experience’ highlighting how this overlooks the nuanced, highly contextualised and interconnected webs of people, places and contested meanings of experience.

Early definitions of outdoor education included that it was *in, about, and for* the out of doors and that outdoor educators should strive to educate for an increased love and awareness of self, others and the environment. More recently, Quay (2013)

argued how the cognitive aspect of outdoor education (the thinking and reflecting on the experience), has dominated the aesthetic domain, and that all experience is first sensed before we respond to these emotionally and cognitively, both in the moment or at the conclusion of the experience. He argued that outdoor education is *more than* relations between self, others and nature. Outdoor education as aesthetic experience, and cognitive experience, must be understood on equal terms (Quay, 2013). This supports Tuan's (1977) perspective on experience in order to develop a *sense of place*, when he stated that "a place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind" (p. 18). Outdoor education is known for its visceral and embodied experiences, employing all the senses. Tuan (1977) highlights how a sense of place is not a concept determined by time alone stating that "while it takes time to form an attachment to place, the quality and intensity of experience matters more than simple duration" (p. 198). Outdoor education provides for intense experiences, from adrenaline filled activities in groups to silent solo reflections, whether on a mountain summit, a favourite beach or a special place in a local park.

We have considered *why* we may want or need to develop a *sense of place* in our outdoor education practice: to develop an ethic of care for people and the planet, to educate outdoors with a post-colonial regard for the people who have gone before us, and to acknowledge the influences of our more-than-human relationships. But what does the future hold?

## 5.5 The Future of a Sense of Place in a Pandemic/ Post-Pandemic World

Where will we go, what will we do and how will we do *outdoor education* in the post-pandemic world? Place based outdoor education asks us to consider and engage in the present and future. Writing this chapter during the middle of the covid-19 coronavirus pandemic it appears that the world has changed. The encouragement to exercise outdoors on a daily basis for our physical and mental wellbeing, the slower pace of life allowing us to notice the spring flowers and trees (in the Global north) and the abundant, loud birdsong in a time of dramatically reduced travel, traffic and air pollution are noticeable. It's given us an insight of how things could be if we change the way we do things and think and act differently.

As educators, we wish to spend plenty of time under the sky in nature. The perception of authentic or real nature is useful to challenge. Nature as a mediated and groomed experience, utilising Baudrillard's concept of nature as hyperreal (Leather & Gibson, 2019) can help. National Parks around the world are nature as hyperreality. They are managed, policed and have carefully groomed trails, tailored to the needs of humans. For example, the mountains of the Lake District National Park (UK) are often perceived as wild adventurous spaces. However, this is a fiction. Aside from the human management and farming of the land, it has been portrayed

as a primal setting and healing force that is good for us since the time of the Romantic poets and artists, with constructions of nature as sites of sublime experience. As such, hyperreal nature is not a new phenomenon and it does continue to affect our *sense of place*. In the age of mobile technologies, Leather and Gibson (2019) argue how image circulation of outdoor experiences through social media, provide *greater* affordances with nature. For example, you the reader can easily visit us where we teach together; just #reykjavik on Instagram.

Images for meaning making have long been used, however the age of the selfie and live streaming suggest that students are meaning making and reflecting in the moment in ways that are different and new. With the rapidly changing technological world the future is an uncertain and exciting adventure. However, we must exercise caution and ask critical questions. The collective repetition of images and messages distorts and overpowers our perception of reality. Digital reality replaces actual lived sensorial reality, with the narrative becoming mediated by human actors with an agenda. For example, the BBC's Blue Planet series creates an emotive connection between the viewer, plastic waste (and microplastics) in the ocean and its impact on marine life. Without criticality, these curated visions of nature, with a collective repetition of images and messages, could lead to a distortion and overpower our perception of reality. Nonetheless, this may be of use to help develop our *sense of place* if we travel less. We could use place-responsiveness at a distance to do this. Place-responsive education moves to a deeper recognition of an interwoven way of living and learning. It aligns with a postdigital pedagogical perspective, recognising what Fawns (2019) refers to as "an integrated totality" (p. 142); the complex entanglement of learners, embedded in the wider culture. As such, we argue, that there are new, different and exciting ways of developing a *sense of place*.

## 5.6 Conclusion

From our teaching, developing a *sense of place* requires experiential, aesthetic and embodied fieldwork experiences. Using a *place responsive* pedagogy opens connections for students and the meanings they develop through the acceptance of knowledge emerging through their on-going entanglement of people, place, and the-more-than-human becomes evident. Our students research stories about people, places and events that resonate with them, the places that have meaning for them, in Reykjavik, Plymouth or closer to their home. A *sense of place* is developed in multiple ways and expressed in different forms. Some of these we capture through our formal teaching, in student assessments and during in-class discussion. Others, we suggest, remain personal, private and within the individual. As Tuan (1977) describes how "eventually what was strange ... and unknown space becomes familiar place. Abstract space, lacking significance other than strangeness, becomes concrete place, filled with meaning. Much is learned but not through formal instruction" (p. 199).

We recommend the importance of harnessing the power of the informal parts of education outdoors. This is done by designing experiences that include people from that specific place, giving students an aesthetic and embodied experience, and teachers who advocate and facilitate to take time – to be a *human-being* as well as a *human-doing*; to slow down, notice themselves and the place, while reflecting before, in and on the experiences. In the future, in a post-pandemic and digital world, there will continue to be new and different ways of developing a *sense of place*.

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### Reflective Questions

1. What abstract spaces do you enjoy participating in outdoor adventurous sports?
2. What specific *places* do you know and why do you like them?
3. What is your personal cultural heritage?
4. What problems for you are there in developing a *sense of place*?
5. How could you use adventures to focus on nature and the more-than-human?

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# Chapter 6

## Leadership Theory: From Effective to Extraordinary



Heidi Smith

### 6.1 Introduction

We currently find ourselves amidst the sixth mass extinction of our planet, witnessing human and climate crises of magnitudes not experienced simultaneously before. Now, more than ever, we are in need of systemic change in leadership praxis. Leadership qualities are not fixed entities. What is good, and what is of value is culturally defined and ever changing in response to our context and environment. As we bear witness to ways of leading that reinforce and challenge, preceding patriarchal approaches on the global stage, I invite you to leave behind traditional leadership models/theories and embrace ‘new’ ways of old knowing to lead in a socially just way for all: human and more-than-human kin.

In OEE, if we agree that our purpose as outdoor leaders is “to be servants of a holistic heart-centred dynamic with the goal of inspiring students to become their full potential selves and make their world a better place” (Doetzel, 2018, p. 523), then it is immediately evident that traditional models of leadership do not serve our purpose. Leadership in the Western world has been largely grounded in colonial practices and resulted in structural and cultural violence (Cremin & Bevington, 2017), that excludes minorities according to gender, race, sexual orientation and Indigenous peoples. In contrast, contemporary culturally responsive leadership aims to resist oppressive structures, and embraces community-based approaches and epistemologies (Kahlifa et al., 2019). This chapter presents extraordinary outdoor leadership as a contemporary model and/theory for leading, and outlines the characteristics (awareness of self, others and environment), values (relationships with self, others and environment), skills (intuition), and behaviours (spirituality) of

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leaders who achieve extraordinary things. However, reality is far more nuanced and therefore what is required is an understanding of a range of models/theories and experiences in the world (human and more-than-human) in order to lead, in *your* individual way.

## 6.2 Outdoor Leadership: Theories, Models, Competencies

In recent times, the outdoor leadership literature has challenged traditional ways of thinking about and enacting leadership (e.g., Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Gray, Mitten, Potter and Kennedy, 2020). The main tensions within the profession is a continued heavy reliance on literature and texts which list servant leadership, situational and conditional theories of leadership, and autocratic, abdicratic and democratic styles/theories of leadership as ways of learning about how to lead in the outdoors. Alongside these theories, the profession continues to draw on the long laundry lists of core competencies required for effective outdoor leadership (e.g., Martin et al., 2017), despite their effectiveness having been refuted (e.g., Seaman & Copens, 2006). While in OEE we continue to use these models and theories, other theories and models have emerged in the wider leadership literature. The most recent literature emphasises feminist, ethical and ecological leadership theories where potential for transformation lies. By engaging with traditional outdoor leadership theories along with broader preceding theories critically, it is clear how these have together directly contributed to the development of contemporary theories (Smith, 2011). They each build one on the other, and so it is not a process of entirely doing away with the past, rather an acknowledgement of past theories, so that we might move into the future.

## 6.3 Leading with the Head, Heart, Body and Soul

A plethora of leadership models/theories exist, with new ones emerging all the time. These emerging models/theories are a necessary response to cultural and societal change, as they build on previous models/theories. As individuals, and a collective, we must grapple with how to respond and lead our way through. In order to understand how these many theories inform each other, it is helpful to group the many models/theories by identifying how each draws on the various aspects of head, heart, body and soul, and in turn, the three levels of leadership success: effective, exemplary, extraordinary (Smith, 2011; Smith & Penney, 2010). It is also helpful to be clear that 'preceding' refers to all theories that emerged pre transformational, and 'contemporary' includes transformational and all that followed. Preceding leadership theories embraced mainly the head, with some exceptions of head and heart. Contemporary theories clearly built on each other as they emerged, and began with engaging the head and heart (transformational), and moved through to the head,

heart, body (authentic), culminating with the whole: head, heart, body and soul (spiritual) (Smith, 2011).

## 6.4 Preceding to Contemporary Leadership Theories

Philosophers have long grappled with leadership and what makes a great leader. Early researchers identified morality and virtue in Eastern (Confucius) and Western (Socrates, Aristotle) societies as necessary traits of effective leaders. At the same time, power, influence and deceit were also identified as useful ‘tools’ of leadership, with hierarchy and privilege early determiners of who could be a leader (e.g., great man leadership), usually men (Daft, 2005). In the industrialised age, the leader oversaw production, leadership traits and styles dominated theories of leadership (e.g., charismatic leadership, task vs relationships, autocratic, abdicatic, democratic). The general thoughts were that leaders were born into leadership, and it was not possible to learn: reinforcing the monopoly of the aristocracy (Yukl, 2010). Situational leadership theory emerged in stark contrast to the great man theory, stating that a leader could emerge in times of need. Contingency theory followed and identified the relationship between leader and follower, was dependent on the power of the leader over followers and the structure of the task (Blanchard, 2007). Conditional theory of outdoor leadership emerged from all of these and held individual competence, group unity, leader proficiency, decision consequences and environmental dangers at its core (Priest & Gass, 2005).

All of these theories of leadership to some extent relied on a transactional process: rational intelligence, engaging mainly the head. Dominated by reward for performance, these theories did not promote change and have been consistently embedded within a “white male western capitalist Christian hierarchy” (Kahlifa et al., 2019, p. 572). For too long these leadership theories have reinforced practices that marginalise minorities within our society. Instead, we need to decide whether we allow these models/theories to continue to find agency within OEE and today’s world of globalisation and complexity. Leadership instead needs to be about who you are, how you relate to the world, and being able to quickly respond to complex problems with kindness (Smith, 2011).

In contrast, contemporary theories of leadership emerged as early as the 1960s. An obvious shift away from transactional approaches, transformational leadership theory emerged and was consistently described as effective leadership (e.g., Burns, 1978). Authentic leadership followed, described as exemplary leadership, it built upon and reinforced transformational leadership theory (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Spiritual leadership, consistently described as leadership where leaders achieved extraordinary accomplishments, came next as it integrated both transformational and authentic leadership, and integrated the four fundamental arenas that define the essence of human existence: head, heart, body and soul. The defining difference between spiritual leadership and authentic and transformational, was identified as the focus on the natural environment and its benefit for creating leaders



who were more than exemplary in their leadership: extraordinary (Fry, 2003). This direct link with the natural world makes this approach highly relevant to OEE leadership praxis.

## 6.5 Leading with the Head, Heart, Body and Soul

**Head and Heart** Transformational leadership embraces the head and the heart (Avolio & Bass, 2002) and goes beyond reward for performance, instead placing the focus on people, developing leadership in others and is considered inspiring and motivating (Eagly et al., 2003). Leader and follower were united, and worked together for shared goals with aligned values. Transformational leadership was assessed against four main components: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Bass, 1985). The most identifying feature was that when the leader was no longer present, individual and collective leadership growth continues.

**Head, Heart and Body** Authentic leadership as it emerged was viewed as an antidote to the unethical leadership of the past and embraced a collaborative tenet (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Context was central, the leader was in the shared environment with the follower, and together they created the process of socially-just leadership (Cooper et al., 2005). Authentic leaders have been described as creating a positive ethical climate, with self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and transparency with followers. Through the development of connected relationships, clear purpose and practicing core values, they challenged people to make the impossible possible and walked their talk.

**Head, Heart, Body and Soul** Spiritual leaders embody transformational and authentic leadership, and all four aspects of what it means to be human: head, heart, body and soul (Fry, 2003). They lead with clear ethical and moral values, develop harmonious relationships, and love what they do. It is not about what spiritual leaders do, it is about who and how they are in the world. Spirituality, encompasses, self-awareness, virtuous behaviour, ethical way of being in the world and deep connections to people and more-than-human kin. A standalone theory, strong links with feminist, ethical, ecological and Indigenous leadership theories are present. While relating indigenous leadership theory to spiritual leadership theory may potentially result in an oversimplification of what are rich and varied approaches to being and leading across the globe, many similarities have been identified to exist across Indigenous cultures ways of leading (Kahlifa et al., 2019) and align with the core tenets: parallels too strong to ignore (Sepie, 2017).

## 6.6 Rational, Emotional, Spiritual Intelligence

Together these intelligences inform our understanding of, and are consistently explicitly explored alongside, contemporary leadership theories. *Rational intelligence* refers to the rational knowing of a person's intellectual qualities and what is utilised to solve logical problems and engage in strategic thinking (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). *Emotional intelligence* is knowing something is right, from your heart and results in a deeper sense of knowing; the ability to read emotions in self and others, understand the ways in which these impact reason, and solve problems based on this information along with information from the rational mind (Goleman et al., 2002). *Spiritual Intelligence* requires a level of authenticity where the focus is on how we are in the world. Spiritually intelligent people are self-aware, hold strong core values, learn from experience, and are connected individuals who do not shy away from weaknesses, with humility compassion and courage. Spiritual intelligence honours the "heart wisdom and indigenous ways of knowing" (Doetzel, 2018, p. 521). Humans are naturally spiritual and driven by a need to understand themselves and the world around them where culture and community are central.

## 6.7 Levels of Leadership Success: Effective, Exemplary, Extraordinary

When we are engaged with learning leadership praxis, it is helpful to use clear adjectives to describe the various levels of leadership success. Three terms that emerged through doctoral research (Smith, 2011), were consistently used across leadership literature, and aligned with the head, heart, body and soul categorisation are: effective, exemplary and extraordinary (Smith & Penney, 2010). *Effective* leadership is related to transformational leadership (growth continues when the leader is no longer present): leadership of the head and heart. *Exemplary* leadership is informed by authentic leadership (leaders walk their talk): leadership of the head, heart, and body. *Extraordinary* leadership directly builds on effective and exemplary with spiritual leadership (embraces all four aspects of being human with emphasis on the role of the more-than-human world): leadership of the head, heart, body, and soul (Smith, 2011) (Table 6.1).

## 6.8 Extraordinary Outdoor Leadership: The Key Elements

Extraordinary outdoor leadership has been defined as present in individuals who demonstrate four key elements: awareness of self, others and environment, relationships with self, others and environment, intuition and spirituality (how they are in the world) (Smith, 2011). Extraordinary outdoor leaders embody spiritual

**Table 6.1** Summary of leadership models/theories, intelligences, categorisation and levels of success

Preceding	Contemporary	Intelligences	Categorisation	Levels
Great man Trait theory Task versus relationship Situational leadership		Rational	Head	
Charismatic leadership Transactional leadership Servant leadership	Transformational leadership	Rational Emotional	Head and heart	Effective
Servant leadership	Authentic leadership	Rational Emotional	Head, heart, and body	Exemplary
	Spiritual leadership Ethical leadership Ecological leadership Feminist leadership Indigenous leadership	Rational Emotional Spiritual	Head, heart, body and soul	Extraordinary

leadership and lead with purpose: to make the world a better place for all human and more-than-human kin. Extraordinary outdoor leaders are not perfect and have less than extraordinary days. The key elements outlined in this chapter are ones that can be learned by all, as individuals and the collective, to strive to lead well. The following expands on the key elements of extraordinary outdoor leadership (Smith, 2011).

### 6.8.1 *Awareness of Self, Others and Environment*

Awareness of self and others is an intentional process, one that adopts a process of **paying close attention** with presence in the current moment. Developing non-violent internal and external communication (Rosenberg, 2015), and collecting information from self, others and environment (nature and built), in combination with past experiences, making leadership decisions, observing how individuals and groups respond to those decisions and adapting fluidly: a reflexive process. Awareness of others aids in decision making, especially in determining participant readiness for learning along with past experiences of similar people in similar situations attempting challenges that they may or may not be 'ready' for. Also useful in approaching conflict situations, and transforming these into learning experiences. Being aware of self, others and environment, directly impacts your ability to build meaningful relationships with self, others and environment (Smith, 2011).

Environment includes the natural places (more-than-human) and built spaces (urban and rural), in which the leader finds themselves. While the natural environment plays a large role in personal wellbeing, outdoor leaders often find themselves

in both natural and built environments, and on the edges between them. Being aware of how each interact with, and impact, individuals and groups is helpful for leadership in a practical and spiritual way.

**Practical** An awareness of nature is useful where weather and other environmental factors have a direct impact on experience; including safety. Being aware of the weather and its nuanced changes ensures you move canoes before a river floods, are all in a sheltered space before a storm arrives, and know when to turn around, or not head out at all.

**Spiritual** An awareness of the impact of connection to nature includes sense of place, relationships with our more-than-human kin and the affect these interactions have on self, others and environment. By engaging with the more-than-human world, leaders become more reflexive about who they are, how they come across to others and how they and their leadership impacts the world beyond their outdoor programme.

### ***6.8.2 Relationships with Self, Others and Environment***

In order to develop relationships with others, it is important to first have a positive relationship with ourselves. These relationships (self and others) are directly related to our awareness and a clear understanding and acceptance of who we are: core values, strengths and weaknesses. An assuredness of areas of strength, and equally room for growth, allows for the building of positive, authentic relationships with others, including the more-than-human world. Our western culturally driven need to be independent is unrealistic. Instead, we ought to build relational collective communities where individuals are supported and groups are connected, not only with each other, but with the environment (nature, place) as well.

In order to develop deep relationships with the environment, it is essential to consider our ancestors and future generations. We need to recognise ecological sentience and learn to live with/in the more-than-human world(s) through “reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, respect, and relationship” (Sepie, 2017, p. 3). When we consider our more-than-human kin as members of the communities we build (Wright et al., 2012), only then can a place be truly known, with gratitude and reciprocity playing a central role. Connection to environment comes through learning places’ stories (natural and built), their language, and ways to care for and heal the land (Kimmerer, 2013).

### 6.8.3 *Intuition: Leading from Within*

It is not easy to break down intuition into words, as it is an embodied action. Goethe described it as “attuning senses, developing powers of perception and trusting intuition consciousness,” a “seeing that transcends rational thought alone” (Spiller et al., 2020, p. 25). Intuition, leading from within and/or listening to your ‘gut’, is a skill which can be learnt and taught. Paying close attention to intuition is central to leadership decision making and praxis. Profoundly linked to a person’s awareness, relationships and spirituality.

### 6.8.4 *Spirituality: How You Are in the World*

Spirituality includes: how you are in the world, your presence, soulful engagement, being, and a sense of calling to the task (of leading). Knowing who you are, a humble way of engaging with the world (human and more-than-human kin), storytelling, risk-taking and action further help to define how extraordinary outdoor leaders are in the world. A calling to leading outdoors, “spirituality is about honouring the sacredness and wholeness of life and moving past a dichotomisation that results in the oppression of people” (Doetzel, 2018, p. 523). In developing these four aspects of our spirituality (being, risk taking, storytelling and action), we in turn develop our awareness, relationships and intuition.

**Being** is about knowing who you are, where you come from, and what connects you to your land: past, present and future (Spiller et al., 2020). Identity development is ongoing, and directly related to your context. Being is often described as embodying humility, vulnerability, compassion, empathy, ethics, virtue, presence, care/heart and reflection.

**Risk taking** in every sense, is central to developing extraordinary leadership, within a safe and supportive environment. Risk taking (slow to adventurous) through personal/psychological (knowing oneself, leadership), physical (adventurous activities in combination with more-than-human kin), social (relationships with others and environment), and within leadership praxis itself is essential for growth.

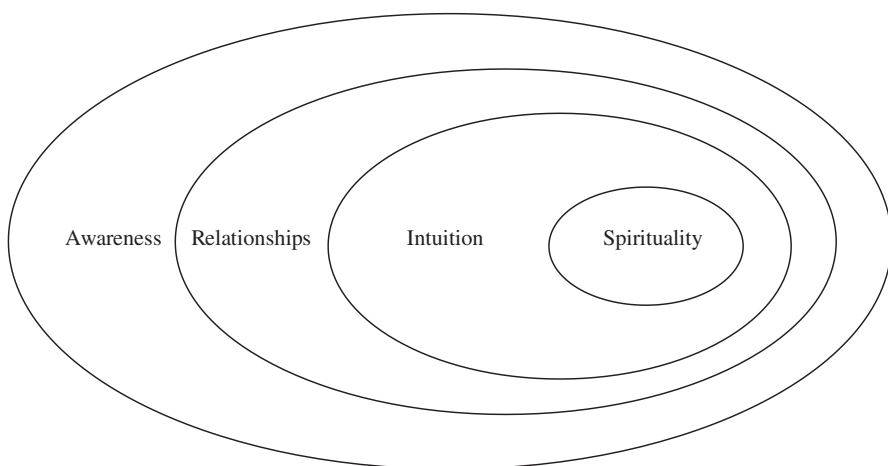
**Storytelling** is how we make sense of the world. Through stories told to us, and those we tell, they shape our world and the worlds of those we lead. Engaging with stories of the land (past, present and future), allows us to create new traditions that connect us to our more-than-human kin. Face to face, and face to place storytelling is a powerful way to connect to people, place and planet. Through deep listening to shared stories, we connect and grow. It is also important to tell and acknowledge which stories are ours, and those of others, as we work towards truth telling and reconciliation. Stories are often embedded in the ceremonies we create and re-create. Storytelling *as* ceremony creates spaces and places for re-imagining our futures: it invokes the heart (Doetzel, 2018) and offers us the space to reconnect.

**Action** is the way in which we embody extraordinary leadership. It is about more than doing good leadership, it is about daily *activism* through our sayings, doings and relatings: praxis (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). In order to achieve this, we must remain hopeful (Kimmerer, 2013) and acknowledge our sphere of influence (Nicol, 2014). Extraordinary leadership is not about perfection. It is about embodying the four key elements authentically each day as well as is possible, and accepting less than perfection. Extraordinary lies in gratitude, the humility to know no-one is perfect, and to take small actions every day that lead us all towards a better world.

## 6.9 Mapping Leadership on the Landscape: Contours of Earth Leadership

Extraordinary outdoor leadership development is a process of making and unmaking, as the four key elements weave together and inform each other. One way to think of them is through the contours of a spur on a map (Fig. 6.1).

This model emerged as a result of putting research (Smith, 2011) into practice through metaphor as a tool to teach leadership to others. As you head out to climb the hill, begin with your awareness of self, then others and environment. As you develop skills in awareness of self, others and environment, this will aide your development of relationships with self, others and environment. And in turn, your ability to tap into your intuition will develop. All the while how you are in the world (spirituality) grows as you mindfully consider awareness, relationships, intuition and who you are. Past experiences help you to situate this growth and development, successes and failures, making and unmaking of extraordinary leadership. Like any good hill walk, weather, injury, change of plans, will impact your journey to the



**Fig. 6.1** ‘Mapping’ leadership on the earth

summit. The true summit is only truly met once you have descended, revisiting the key elements as you go. The summit is not always reached on the first attempt, and is not necessarily guaranteed after an initial success, rather the ‘summit’ of extraordinary leadership is achieved through dedicated ongoing ‘training’ of the whole body: head, heart, body and soul.

## 6.10 Conclusion

I argue, that in OEE what we have are shared values, praxis and purpose directed at supporting individuals to become the best versions of themselves and to make the world a better place. If we can agree on this broad definition of purpose, then extraordinary outdoor leadership offers OEE a way to achieve this through a process of making and unmaking through development of awareness and relationships with self, others and the more-than-human kin, intuition and spirituality. While this model/theory is offered, it is important to acknowledge the importance of avoiding the temptation to use this model/theory, or any, as a step-by-step method for practice (Mahon & Smith, 2019). In doing so, we lose the complexity of both theory and practice.

Leadership is a highly personal, relational and intentional process. One that is directly influenced by the context in which we are working, the people we are working with, and the affordances they allow us in helping them to develop their leadership along with our own personal circumstances. Too often leadership models/theories focus on our practices towards others (linear). It is timely that we reconsider this, and instead think about the reciprocity of the ways in which we act towards ourselves and our more-than-human kin (circular); leadership praxis. When we look to the more-than-human world as educator(s), guide(s), and leader(s), we find the stories that come from the earth between our toes, and we begin to write our own stories of connection and action. In shifting my own thinking around extraordinary leadership, I propose it is in fact, in its very essence, what we might instead call *Earth Leadership*.

### Reflective Questions

1. How do we let go of commonly used leadership models/theories/competencies, and embrace a future in OEE that is inclusive and socially-just for all (human and more-than-human)?
2. How does this theory of leadership feel when you try it on? What is comfortable/uncomfortable about it? How does the ongoing process of making, unmaking, and remaking feel?
3. What are the social, cultural, political, spiritual, psychological factors that impact on a person’s intention to lead?

4. Which Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, myths, legends and stories belong to land where you are? What can you learn from these about leadership for a connected world where the more-than-human and human return as one kin?
5. What stories of reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, respect and relationship do you carry, and can you share through your leadership sayings, doings and relatings?

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**Part II**  
**Pedagogical Approaches and Issues**

# Chapter 7

## Beyond Experiential Learning Cycles



Joshua Meyer and Jayson Seaman

Before exploring what lies beyond Experiential Learning Cycles, it is helpful to know about their origin. This chapter will first explore the development of progressive education before discussing how different strands of that movement led to the development of modern expressions of experiential education. Although there are a variety of models that explain experiential learning, this discussion will critically examine Kolb's (2015) constructivist model of experiential learning as its most recognizable expression. The discussion will also explore the evolution of experiential learning theories (e.g., Seaman et al., 2017) before examining how experiential education has been critically regarded throughout the education profession (Egan, 2002; Kirschner et al., 2006). Next, it will discuss experiential education from the five perspectives described by Fenwick (2001), which provide alternative ways to view experiential learning. Finally, the chapter will close by considering how the field of experiential education could move beyond what Quay (2003) called the "mechanistic" experience-reflect paradigm of experiential learning cycles.

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## 7.1 Progressive Education

Progressive education emerged from a broader social reform movement associated with industrialization, efficiency, economic development, technological innovation, social reform, and scientific advancement. This idea was influential at the turn of the twentieth century and it permeated all aspects of society. It appeared in mainstream education as a movement away from the traditional, classical liberal education and the associated emphasis on the Western canon via rote, top-down instruction. Advocates of progressive education favored pragmatic reforms, exemplified through the development of the elective system in higher education and practical training in K-12 schools rather than the traditional preference for generalized knowledge (Egan, 2002; Kliebard, 1995). Unlike previous educational approaches, progressive education prioritized the individual needs, interests, developmental capabilities, and future social roles of the learner.

## 7.2 Progressive Origins of Experiential Education

Diverse sources of influence confound efforts to clearly define experiential education and demarcate its origins, although it seems safe to say that modern variations emerged from the ethos of progressive education in the early twentieth century. John Dewey became associated with the development of progressive education in the U.S. and, consequently, many of his ideas have been used to explain features of experiential education (e.g., Dewey, 1916/2007, 1925/1958, 1938). However, it is important to observe here that Dewey's association with progressive education (Kliebard, 1995; Westbrook, 1993) and experiential learning is disputed (Seaman, 2019).

Emerging scholarship suggests that the term *experiential* should instead be attributed to social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who in 1946 developed an innovative human relations training process emphasizing live feedback sessions involving 'here and now' action, known as training-groups (abbreviated as *T-groups*; see Lippitt, 1949; Benne, 1964 for definitive accounts). This approach involved group facilitators discussing their impressions of group dynamics in the presence of group participants, thereby enabling participants to experience feedback firsthand. Between 1949 and 1976, the human relations training approach to group development and personal growth came to be known as "experiential" learning (Barrett-Leonard, 1974; Seaman et al., 2017). At approximately the same time period, efforts were formalized to award credentials for learning from life experience, such as the U.S. Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (known as the G.I. Bill), providing federally funded educational opportunities to soldiers returning from WWII. This initiative included awarding academic credit for lived experiences that could be deemed educational. In Europe, pedagogue Kurt Hahn founded Outward Bound as a nautical program designed to train industrial recruits and young public workers in

moral character, social responsibility, and the Protestant work ethic. Between the 1940s and 1970s, Outward Bound evolved from its Christian origins into a secular, adventure-based outdoor survival program using hands-on methods to instill values of personal growth and teamwork in its participants (Freeman, 2011). Although these progressive educational ideas emerged from different sources, they all came to be identified as forms of experiential education, ultimately adopting Kolb's (1984) versatile model of experiential learning, which he had modeled after Lewin's format (see p. 9).

## 7.3 Constructivist Models of Experiential Education

### 7.3.1 Kolb's Model Explained

As experiential education became formalized in practice, efforts were made to explain it in theory. Perhaps the most well-known model of experiential learning originated from Kolb, who became involved in adult, experiential, and outdoor education in the 1960s (e.g., Katz & Kolb, 1968). Kolb originally developed his now-famous schematic model in the 1970s (Kolb & Fry, 1975), expanded it in 1984, and updated it most recently in 2015.

Kolb's model takes as its premise that "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984, p. 38). This assertion is supported with a four-stage cycle (Fig. 7.1) juxtaposing two 'dialectic' dimensions of *prehension* (which ranges from grasping experience via the *apprehension* of the original, concrete experience to *comprehension* as the abstract conceptualization of that original experience) with *transformation* (e.g., how those experiences are transformed via internalized reflection and externalized experimentation). Kolb (2015) defines *dialectic* as "...mutually opposed and conflicting processes the results of each of which cannot be explained by the other, but whose merger through confrontation of the conflict between them results in a higher order process that transcends and encompasses them both" (p. 40).

As Fig. 7.1 shows, Kolb's (2015) cycle begins with a concrete experience followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In this model, a learner has a direct, sensory, perceptual experience, which they then reflect upon, resulting in an internal, abstract conceptualization of the experience, after which those conceptualizations are tested by active experimentation to see how they align with initial direct, sensory, perceptual experience. In this way, Kolb suggests knowledge is constructed through the cognitive transformation of a lived, direct, concrete experience. Thus, according to Kolb, knowledge is constructed as the learner conceptually grasps and transforms a lived experience through reflective thinking. Although Kolb indicates his model unifies the conflict between those dialectic categories into a coherent whole, this claim has been disputed, as we now discuss.

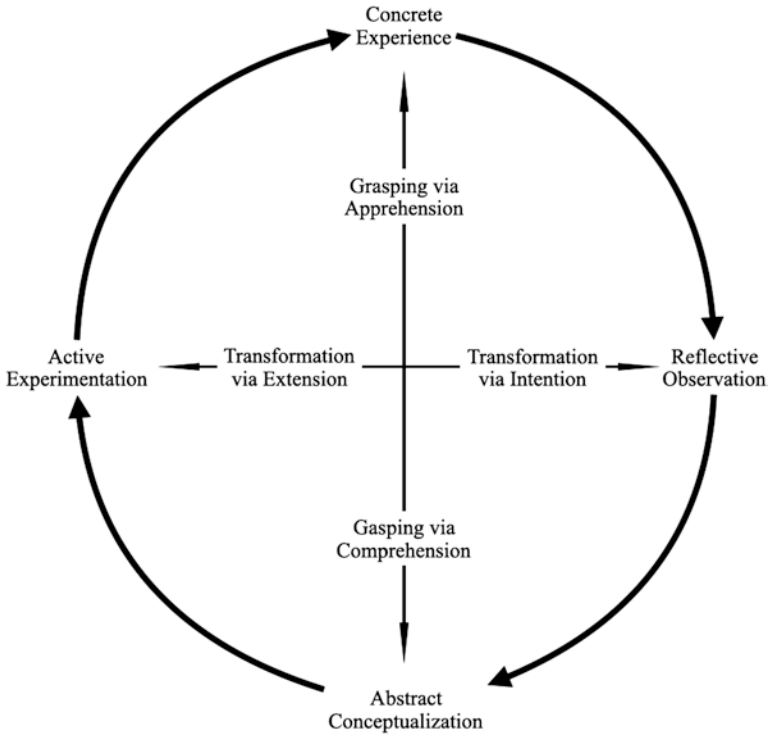


Fig. 7.1 Kolb's experiential learning cycle

Kolb (2015) juxtaposes direct, lived (concrete) experiences with conceptual, internal abstract conceptualizations, reifying the long-held polarization of knowledge acquisition through the senses as opposed to knowledge development by thought. This polarization can, for example, be observed in the implicit assertion that reflection is not an experience. This problem has deep philosophical origins. René Descartes suggested knowledge arises from an internalized process of reasoning, whereas John Locke suggested knowledge is founded on observation and experience. Thus, the two modes of the prehension dimension (i.e., concrete experience and abstract conceptualization) have long been dichotomized as fundamentally distinct ways of knowing. This dichotomy persists in most experiential learning models, which tend to involve some sequence of experiencing > reflecting > learning as the central components of the learning process (see e.g., Joplin, 1981). Additionally, activities promoting firsthand involvement tend to be regarded as “more experiential” than encounters with symbolic media like films and books (Coleman, 1976; Gibbons & Hopkins, 1980). The learner-centered legacy of progressivism and its dichotomization of experiencing and thinking reverberate through the theories of experiential learning that outdoor educators have tended to let guide their research.

Although aspects of the doing/thinking dichotomy can be traced to sources as early as Plato (e.g., *Meno*), Dewey (1925/1958) attempted to resolve this

epistemological dilemma by considering them as two types of experience; that is, as categories *within* experience. Drawing on Dewey, Miettinen (2000) provides perhaps the sharpest critique of the dichotomy in Kolb's model by suggesting Kolb misinterpreted Dewey and over-extended his postulations. According to Miettinen, Dewey's primary experience is composed of material action with the physical environment and secondary experience is an internal reflective experience that makes action with the environment a source of reflection and knowledge; the difference between so-called experience and reflection is one of emphasis and purpose, not of kind. Miettinen asserts that Dewey's notions of failure and uncertainty of firsthand experience (what Dewey called *primary* experience) leads to reflection and resolution in what Dewey called *secondary* experience, with the consequence of learning – that is to say, evolution to a new, higher form of thought and action as the learner cognitively seeks to make sense of the primary experience. Moreover, this process did not require special intervention by a facilitator armed with a formulaic model but was the natural process by which people learn in/from experience. Although Kolb indicates concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are opposite ends of the prehension dialectic, he problematically treats them as separate and distinct stages in his cycle of experiential learning rather than resolving their dichotomization to create “a higher order process.”

### 7.3.2 *Origins of Kolb's Model*

Kolb (1984) overlaid ideas from Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, Jung, and Vygotsky onto the T-group process to explain how knowledge is constructed through a lived, concrete experience. Miettinen (2000) criticizes how Kolb incorporates diverse sources to substantiate his model, labeling his method as “eclectic” because he extracted terms and concepts from originators who were pursuing fundamentally different projects containing incompatible postulations. Although T-groups only accounted for a minor portion of Lewin's original process, Kolb focuses explicitly on the T-group experience as the basis for his model due to its emphasis on the kind of lived, immediate, direct, sensory experience used in adult trainings, which Kolb was involved in promoting. Kolb also uses Dewey's work on reflective thought and action to further substantiate his model by suggesting that Dewey originally proposed a spiral model consisting of impulse, observation, knowledge, and judgment informing the next impulse. Miettinen explains that Kolb erroneously interpreted Dewey's model to support his own.

### 7.3.3 *Fenwick's Categorization of Experiential Learning*

Although Kolb's (2015) model is well known within the experiential education field, there are other ways of understanding experiential learning. Fenwick (2001) identifies five perspectives explaining the relationship between experience and learning. These include the following: constructivist, psychoanalytic, situative, critical cultural, and enactivist. Constructivist perspectives refer the learner reflecting on a direct, lived experience and thereby constructing new knowledge. Fenwick situates Kolb's model in this tradition. Psychoanalytic perspectives consider the intersection of conscious and unconscious desires and fears of the mind (via one's inner world) with the outer world of encountered experiences, juxtaposing internal and external experiences. Situative perspectives suggest "learning is rooted in the situation" (Fenwick, 2001, p. 41); knowledge emerges through participation in cultural activities with learning also involving personal transformation. Lave and Wenger (1991) offer Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as an example, when "drinking nonalcoholics" become "nondrinking alcoholics" by learning to re-story their lives according to AA forms. Critical cultural perspectives explore the imbalance of power as a core feature to experience. For example, to understand cognitions, one must first analyze how power structures social relationships and cultural practices, as when activities like mountaineering are heavily constituted by masculine symbolism (Logan, 2006). Enactivist perspectives suggest that cognition co-emerges from the interaction of the learner within the environment/setting. From this perspective, again knowledge is not a 'substance' one can acquire, but instead something that is formed through the simultaneous interaction of the environment and cognition, like a paddler responding to currents in a river (Haskell, 1999). In each of these perspectives, a relationship exists between a lived, direct experience and a conceptual/reflective experience, although that relationship is uniquely defined within each perspective. Fenwick identifies a tendency to understand experiential education through the constructivist lens via experience-reflect-learn cycles and concludes by suggesting that each perspective provides a distinctive reference point that should neither be used eclectically nor assimilated into a single unified perspective by educators.

## 7.4 Critiques of Progressive and Experiential Education

### 7.4.1 *Egan's Critique of Progressive Education*

In order to think beyond experiential learning cycles, it is helpful to explore the different ways progressive education and experiential education have been critiqued. Egan (2002) critically reviews the history of the progressive education movement, focusing on the influences of Spencer, Dewey, and Piaget on the development of progressive education. Egan concludes that the progressivist inheritance is



problematic. Among his many other points, Egan discusses Spencer's influence on modern, conventional education. Egan takes particular issue with Spencer's assertions that all successful learning comes from direct experience, which occurs, in part, through concrete, empirical learnings, according to the processes by which humankind originally acquired that knowledge, as effortlessly and pleasurable as possible, and with as little direct instruction as necessary.

A contemporary of Darwin, Spencer is credited with first using the term "evolution" to describe the process of "survival of the fittest", which he also coined as Darwin was developing his theory of natural selection (Egan, 2002). Applying an evolutionary perspective to education, Spencer promoted an educational approach called recapitulation, suggesting a child's education should occur according to humankind's conceptual development. That concept was adopted by a variety of early progressive educators including Hall and, to a lesser extent, Dewey (although Dewey outwardly rejected the idea of recapitulation). Remnants of the recapitulation ideology are endemic to some practices of experiential education which suggest learners should directly experience educational principles themselves rather than learn through abstract explanations such as books and lectures.

Spencer also promoted the idea that learning should occur effortlessly (Egan, 2002). He based this assertion on his observations of the way children learn language, which appeared to him to be spontaneous, pleasurable, and effortless. Due to this observation, Spencer promoted the idea that schools should replicate natural learning by emphasizing opportunities to learn effortlessly through play. This idea was reminiscent of Fröbel's concept of kindergarten as a child's garden and educational environment based on natural, play-based learning. We observe aspects of this mentality alive and well today both in kindergarten as well as other play-based learning approaches grounded in, yet often confused with, ideas of intrinsic motivation.

The ideas of recapitulation and effortless learning have been adopted to varying extents within progressive education approaches. Although aspects of each idea have some pedagogical merit, problematic features associated with each approach also suggest that they be incorporated thoughtfully. Recapitulation offers an interesting perspective to conceptualize the learning process, especially if curriculum is designed in such a way that the learner gains knowledge in a process similar to the way humans originally acquired that knowledge; this was, for instance, the basis of Dewey's lab school. But Egan (2002) indicates Spencer was vague about how that approach should occur in practice or what that curriculum would look like. Moreover, the circumstances in which humans originally learned a concept differ from the circumstances of the modern learner; ignoring modern innovations can easily become contrived and may not make sense for contemporary learning processes. The idea that learning should be pleasurable and effortless emerged in contrast to traditional educational models that 'forced' knowledge upon the learner. Egan suggests that learning can be enjoyable and play-based, but that it often requires substantial effort on the part of the learner. Experiential educators would be wise to bear these critiques in mind as they develop curriculum.

### 7.4.2 *A Critique of Minimal Guidance Instruction*

Kirschner et al. (2006) discuss why “minimal guidance instruction,” of which they consider experiential education to be part, is a problematic pedagogical approach. They describe direct instruction as an approach that provides information and fully explains the concepts and procedures students are expected to learn by implementing a learning strategy that adheres to what is known about effective cognitive processing. Minimal guidance instruction presents learners with authentic problems to be solved with limited intervention by an educator. Additionally, minimal guidance instruction suggests learning occurs best through the knowledge and procedures of a given discipline: for example, that new chemists will learn chemistry best through professional approaches common to chemistry rather than approaches derived from other disciplines. This concept is based on the pedagogical assumption that learners will perform better if pedagogical information is made less explicit and learners can create and discover learning processes on their own (resembling a variation of Spencer’s construct of recapitulation).

Kirschner et al. (2006) suggest that minimal guidance approaches are problematic for two reasons. Because working memory is limited, learning is hampered by cognitive load. This means that learners’ cognitive architecture dictates how much information they are able to process. When learners are confronted with a lot of new information, they face more challenges because their working memory is overly taxed by the newness of all the information. Additionally, because novices and experts engage problems and process information differently, novice learners experience a greater cognitive load and are subsequently limited by what they can process and learn. Kirschner et al. suggest that direct instruction reduces some of the problems associated with cognitive load by providing more instructional scaffolding to the learning process.

Although Kirschner et al. (2006) gloss over some of the nuances of Kolb’s (1984, 2015) model, which weakens their critique, together with Egan’s argument it suggests some deficiencies in experiential education in the constructivist mode. Although students may respond favorably to firsthand involvement, the above critiques suggest, first, that some structure in the form of disciplinary knowledge, prefigured objectives, and educator intervention are important elements in the learning process – a critical part of education that constructivist models tend to downplay or omit. Second, they each unearth some problematic assumptions that can be carried forward if educators and researchers do not endeavor to critically assess the history and implicit assumptions of their models.

## 7.5 Discussion

How does this information address the question of what lies beyond experiential learning cycles? First, it is useful to recognize that experiential education emerged from the ethos of progressive education and the pragmatic, learner centered, individually focused, non-didactic approaches associated with that movement. Experiential education today represents an eclectic amalgam of assumptions and purposes selectively drawn from Dewey's publications, Lewin's group techniques, Hahn's adventure-based pedagogy, and collegiate efforts to honor lived experiences with academic credit. Experiential *learning*, as the closely related theory commonly used to explain and justify practice, is traditionally approached through the constructivist perspective (sharing as it does progressivist assumptions). However, experiential learning can also be understood through other perspectives including but not limited to psychoanalytic, situative, critical cultural, and enactivist (Fenwick, 2001). Kolb's model juxtaposes how experience is grasped and transformed in a popular four-stage cycle, yet Kolb has been critiqued for misapplying others' ideas (Miettinen, 2000). Additionally, progressivism has been critiqued for reproducing the pedagogically flawed concepts of recapitulation and effortless learning as underlying foundational features. Lastly, minimal guidance instruction in general and experiential education in particular has been critiqued for inadequately addressing the limitations of human cognitive architecture exacerbated by the different ways novices and experts approach problem solving.

A broad perspective of this history reveals a pattern of ideas contributing to educational innovation on the one hand, but on the other hand promoting a fairly unself-critical posture toward the ongoing desirability of their root assumptions. Progressive education promoted a naturalistic and developmentally sensitive educational approach that prioritized the needs and interests of the learner and fit with the social priorities of its day. However, some of those ideas were taken to an extreme, whereby the teacher's authority was replaced by self-motivated interests of the learner – a position, incidentally, Dewey bluntly called “really stupid” (Dewey, 1926/1987, p. 59). Aspects of recapitulation make intuitive sense, but when taken too far also become problematic, especially when others who have previously navigated the learning process are able to share their ideas with the learner in effective didactic, highly scaffolded, or culturally rich ways (e.g., storytelling, apprenticeships – see Lave & Wenger, 1991). Similarly, the idea of effortless learning is appealing from the perspective of intrinsic motivation, but problematic when students do not learn how to persist through challenges or lack intuitions on how to avoid repeating mistakes.

How do these trends play out in contemporary practice? In a recent study exploring the professional development of nature-based educational practices incorporating ‘experiential’ instruction identified by the experts and practitioners of that approach, Meyer (2020) found the knowledge base and conceptual framework to be eclectic yet rooted in personal experience. The experts identified developmental theory as being a necessary feature for good instruction, yet they did not identify a

central, agreed upon conceptual framework to guide theory and practice for new educators. Additionally, the experts cautioned against dichotomizing learning from direct, personal experience with learning from internal, conceptual reflection, suggesting instead that a blended approach may provide a more holistic experience for the learner. The practitioners identified an eclectic literature base that they have used to support their work, which included Dewey, Piaget, Sobel, and Kolb as well as popular sources such as Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* (2005). More ubiquitous than an agreed upon knowledge base, the practitioners indicated that personal experience was highly influential to their underlying conceptual understanding. In other words, practitioners seemed to rely upon personal experience as a guide to their practice.

## 7.6 Beyond Experiential Learning Cycles

Curiously, from a meta-perspective, Meyer's (2020) study revealed a tendency by practitioners and scholars to rely upon knowledge gained from direct, personal experience over theoretical and empirical knowledge, reminiscent of the empirical/theoretical divide discussed throughout this chapter. Although this approach might support the field of outdoor education for a time, an overreliance on conventional models derived from personal experience renders the field

at risk of remaining a quasi-scientific academic field without connection to the philosophical, anthropological, sociological and psychological studies of learning and thought. Moreover, the belief in an individual's capabilities and his [*sic*] individual experience leads us away from the analysis of cultural and social conditions of learning that are essential to any serious enterprise of fostering change and learning in real life. (Miettinen, 2000, p. 71)

There are a variety of ways to move beyond the problems associated with conventional experiential learning cycles. First, educators and researchers could explore what occurs when the term 'experiential' is no longer used as a qualifier to describe the process of learning. Doing so would result simply in a focus on *learning* and the quest for different theories to explain features of it that are important to understand. Second, they can consciously invoke in future work the perspectives Fenwick (2001) discussed (i.e., constructivist, psychoanalytic, situative, critical cultural, & enactivist) and, rather than using them to augment existing models, simply use them to study experiencing and learning on their own terms. For example, invoking a critical cultural experiential perspective may explore how a learner's lived experience within their social system of privilege and power impacts their worldview. A final method for moving beyond experiential learning cycles could involve adopting concepts that resolve the direct, concrete experience versus internal, abstract experience dialectic. This would involve considering the needs of the learner in the moment and addressing those needs spontaneously rather than prescriptively (by rigidly following an experiential learning cycle). For example, the educator may forgo a traditional debrief in lieu of continuing an important activity in which the

participants are highly engaged. Or an educator may recognize the importance in providing information didactically to a group because doing so is the safest and most efficient way to ensure all participants have adequate entry-level training. This approach simply values learning as knowledge acquisition rather than prioritizing direct over conceptual ways of acquiring that knowledge. Although Kolb's (2015) model failed to accomplish that feat, his definition of *dialectic* provides a way to further explore what that resolution might look like. Recent examples can be found in the literature, where authors have attempted to incorporate Dewey's notion of *occupations* as a nondualistic organizing concept (Quay, 2015; Towers & Loynes, 2018).

## 7.7 Conclusion

Constructivist models of experiential learning deserve credit for fueling the success of progressive educational reforms over the twentieth century. As the variety of progressive reforms have proliferated, however, models of experiential learning have not kept up with the evolution of practice. As well, research standards and norms have also evolved and have become more formalized, demanding increasing precision from scholars and researchers. Familiarity with the basic history and underlying assumptions of classical models of experiential learning will help determine when they are and are not appropriate, at which time people can incorporate other theories that may be more suitable to practical and intellectual problems newly at hand.

### Reflective Questions

1. List five examples of times you have learned from 'experience' in different situations throughout your life. How adequate is the *experiential learning cycle* for explaining your learning process?
2. How did you come to understand the practice of experiential education?
3. How might rigidly following a prescribed learning model (e.g., Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle) interfere with the learning process?
4. How do you envision an ideal balance that incorporates direct, personal experience with conceptual understanding to best facilitate the learning process?
5. How does an educator know when to emphasize learning through didactic instruction versus learning through direct, personal experience? When is each appropriate or justified?

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# Chapter 8

## Adventure and Risk in Outdoor Environmental Education



Mike Brown and Mark Jones

### 8.1 Introduction

In the preface to *Nature First*, Brookes and Dahle suggested that one of the most pressing educational questions of our time was “How can and how should individuals, families, and communities experience nature in the modern world?” (2007, p. viii). Almost 15 years later we think that this question should still remain at the forefront of discussions about the types of outdoor learning experiences we might provide. How we structure outdoor experiences helps to shape attitudes and behaviours in regard to the natural world. In this chapter we discuss the role of adventure and risk in outdoor environmental education and suggest that a reframing of ‘simplistic’ notions of adventure and risk will help to address the educational relevance of these concepts. In doing so the learners’ experiences of nature are less about conquest, or overcoming contrived challenges, and more about competence, the ability to make informed decisions, and being comfortable in places that have meaning in their lives. Encouraging students to feel empowered and capable of making informed choices, where they can take responsibility for their actions and be positive agents of change, aligns with the broader goals of outdoor environmental education.

There has been a growing body of literature which has problematised simplistic or reductionist views of adventure and risk (Beames & Brown, 2014; Beedie, 1995/6; Brown & Fraser, 2009; Lugg, 2004). Lugg’s (2004) paper highlighted the historical and cultural conditions that gave rise to particular ways of engaging in outdoor experiences which, at times, have failed to keep pace with the changing social, geographical, and ecological conditions. Scholars have also highlighted how

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the imperial and militaristic components of nation and empire building have influenced some forms of outdoor environmental education (Beedie, 1995/6; Lugg, 2004). As these authors have stressed some of these practices, based in heroic notions of adventure, were aligned with preparing young men for the battle field or colonial service and are no longer helpful in equipping young people to prepare for the uncertainties of the present times where climate change is one of the most pressing issues.

The previous sentence has hopefully caused some of you to stop and think – yes notions of adventure and risk taking are gendered and often based in cultural assumptions that do not reflect the cultural diversity present in many contemporary societies. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the issue of gender and risk taking in depth; we refer the reader to the chapters on gender and social justice; however, we wish to highlight that constructions of adventurous activities and risk taking are not gender neutral. What this brief paragraph has highlighted is that much of what we take for granted as ‘normal’ outdoor activities have their foundations in a world which was very different from the one in which these activities are undertaken today. What is ‘normal’ is a construction, an amalgam of biases and prejudices that continually need to be questioned. We will now briefly look at two of the central concepts in this chapter: adventure and risk.

## 8.2 Adventure

In outdoor and adventure education texts adventure has been defined as “an experience that involves uncertainty of outcome” (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993, p.6). Ewert and Garvey (2007) suggest that it is “the inclusion of activities and experiences that often include elements of danger or risk and uncertain outcomes” (p. 22) that give adventure education its uniqueness. This notion of uncertainty, and the associated risks, featured in Mortlock’s influential book that championed the inclusion of adventure in education settings.

To adventure in the natural environment is consciously to take up a challenge that will demand the best of our capabilities — physically, mentally and emotionally. It is a state of mind that will initially accept unpleasant feelings of fear, uncertainty and discomfort, and the need for luck, because we instinctively know that, if we are successful, these will be counterbalanced by opposite feelings of exhilaration and joy (Mortlock, 1984, p. 19).

In many ways Mortlock’s definition of adventure as a challenge in nature, where we will be tested, be uncomfortable, face our fears, and ultimately succeed, encapsulates many of the ideas that have come under increasing scrutiny. Such definitions set nature up as an opponent, a place of discomfort, it’s the ‘other’. This adversarial positioning of nature, as something to be tolerated and eventually overcome, is arguably central to the current ecological crisis that we are confronted with. However for many indigenous people nature is not alien, nor does it need to be conquered. For peoples skilled in dwelling in, moving through, or living from the land, nature

was not a place of otherness. For example the Māori proverb “Ko au te whenua, te whenua ko au – I am the land, the land is me”, dissolves such western binaries. Harmony with nature, an understanding of cycles and patterns, rather than as a place to test one’s character suggests that the adventure/nature coupling is complex and rooted in particular world views.

Ideas of adventure based around uncertainty and the need to confront one’s fears represents a particularly western, and predominantly masculine view of the natural world. For example, Warren (2009) has questioned this ‘heroic quest’ metaphor of adventure as it fails to align with women’s meanings of adventure. Wattoo and Brown (2011) argued that the “fingerprints of these traditions are visible in practises where nature becomes a site for building character or self-development through arduous self-propelled travel, or the development of leadership qualities through the performance of contrived tasks in simulations and role playing” (p. 28). It is this ‘compression’ of adventure into series of lessons or activities, to fit within a timetable, that has led to the manipulation of risks to ‘create’ uncertainty which has diminished the educational value of adventure. Our attention will now turn to a discussion on risks.

### 8.3 Risk

Risk has been defined as “the potential to lose something of value. The loss may lead to physical (broken bones), mental (psychological fear), social (peer embarrassment), or financial harm (lost or damaged equipment) ... Risk is created from the presence of dangers” (Priest, 1999, p. 113). This discourse includes the necessity of participants ‘taking’ risks in order to learn and educating outdoor leaders on how to manage risks, whether they be physical, social or emotional. However, the taking of risks and the assumption that the benefits outweigh the consequences in an educational context, has been questioned (Wolfe & Samdahl, 2005). Mitten and Whittingham (2009) also caution that “risk taking without intention and adequate framing for participants can occur at the expense of the environment and others” (p. 256). While few outdoor educators would argue that students should be exposed to ‘real’ risks, where there is a likelihood of physical harm, the practice of presenting students with the perception of risk continues to permeate outdoor teaching practices. As has been pointed out, even the principle of ‘challenge by choice’ can be problematic. For example, in a challenge ropes course setting, a transgender person may feel unnecessarily exposed with little ‘real’ agency in choosing their level of participation when presented with the need to fit a harness in front of their group. It is important that leaders/educators be fully cognisant of, and equipped to deal with, practices that impact on participants emotional, cultural and psychological well-being.

The commonly used challenge ropes course is premised on students’ perception of the level of risk being raised. A series of obstacles or elements are presented and

students are encouraged to step between elevated platforms or leap off a pole in order to overcome their fears or to step outside their comfort zone. The design of these heavily orchestrated courses is based on the perception of risk taking while the reality is that this is a highly constrained, monitored, and well-engineered environment. While observers of such activities may see displays of emotion and students having fun, the benefits of the manipulation of risk and the use of stress/anxiety as a beneficial pedagogical tool is less clear (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Leberman & Martin, 2003). In fact there may be negative consequences, for as Mitten and Whittingham (2009) have cautioned, “learning that risk taking is a good thing without specific parameters relating to when to take risks, with whom, and what risks to take can promote negative risk-taking behaviours” (p. 256). Leberman and Martin (2003) stressed that activities in which students had been pushed outside their “comfort zone” were not necessarily the activities that resulted in peak learning experiences. More troubling for outdoor environmental educators is the concern that students who feel forced to participate in ‘adventures’, that are not of their choosing, will feel disempowered and may see the natural world as a ‘foreign’ place associated with unpleasant memories. It is also worth highlighting that contrived adventures require careful management by experienced and knowledgeable experts. Thus, what is ‘provided’ for the student is often carefully stage managed and astute students quickly work out that options of choice can be quite limited and that their participation is not really essential. What is sold as an adventure is a clever marketing ploy and opportunities for skill development, agency and autonomy are limited. An excellent example of what we are talking about is the use of indoor rock-climbing facilities as part of outdoor education programmes. Such sites are highly controlled, predictable, and reinforce the commodification of adventure into yet another form of consumption (see Beames & Brown, 2014; Loynes, 1998). Activities that feature elevated levels of risk may actually be counter-productive to learning. This is because technical activities demand high levels of staff supervision and provide fewer opportunities for students to make meaningful decisions and experiment. The provision of activities involving highly skilled technical instructors also comes at a cost. This may prohibit participation of learners from across the socio-economic spectrum and raises questions about equity and social justice.

Rubens’ (1999) distinction between ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ adventure provides a useful framework for thinking about how controlled and commodified adventures have permeated education practices. Narrow adventures feature short timescales, high thrills, minimal participant effort and almost no responsibilities devolved to students. The manifestation of narrow adventures is evidenced in programmes built around a series of contrived challenges, or short activity taster experiences, conducted within a framework of instructor imposed and managed safety rules. Broad adventures, however, are characterised by longer timescales, sustained effort demanded of the participant, leading to the development of skills, and increased responsibilities for decision-making given to students. As Brown and Fraser (2009) have pointed out, there are implications for student learning when outdoor learning is provided through a series of short activities that inhibit the development of skills.

However there are alternatives to such narrow conceptualisations of adventure and risk and we wish to highlight the educational opportunities made available by reframing these concepts for outdoor environmental programmes.

## 8.4 Reframing Adventure and Risk

In thinking about how we might reframe adventure in an educational context, to be more student centred and less focussed on the manipulation and ensuing management or risks, it is helpful to disentangle our personal preferences from the educational endeavour. We have no problem with individuals who are skilled going on adventures or taking calculated risks. These are individual decisions and, as research has shown, so called extreme sportspeople (e.g., sky divers or BASE jumpers) do not view themselves as risk takers. On the contrary these activities allow them to exercise agency and be in control (Krein, 2007; Lyng, 1990). This is not to deny that risks are not present but risk taking and embracing uncertainty is not what drives participants – it is to experience a state of flow where skills and opportunities for action intersect (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). Rather than chancing their survival to factors outside their control, adventure sportspeople take great care in their preparation (Lyng, 1990) and are careful to ensure that they maintain control, can meet the challenge and have the ability to exercise agency (Krein, 2007). In an exploration of risk and adventure sports, Krein (2007) explained how the logic that the attraction of adventure is based on a desire to take risks is flawed. According to Krein, while some risk is a part of adventure sports it is not the main point nor is it the reason why people participate. For example, driving a car to go kayaking uses fuel, but the main purpose of using the car is not to burn fuel.

Our primary interest is the context of education, where we are responsible for facilitating learning and enhancing the well-being of others. This brings us back to the opening question of this chapter: How can and how should we help people experience nature in the modern world? We believe that moving beyond ‘narrow’ conceptions of adventure, with a focus on risk, and its management as a defining feature, will help to encourage deeper student engagement with the natural world. One such approach to broadening how we think of adventure is offered by Beames and Brown in *Adventurous Learning*. In proposing four components of adventure they provide opportunities for educators to tailor and contextualise learning experiences to the needs of their students. This non-prescriptive approach gives educators the freedom to experiment and be responsive to the local conditions.

## 8.5 Authenticity

This component calls on educators to locate learning in contexts that are relevant for learners. There is a growing body of research that shows that outdoor learning that connects with the everyday lives of learners can be stimulating and lead to enriching experiences (Beames & Ross, 2010). Authenticity refers to what feels real to us: who we are with, where we are, what we are doing, and most importantly why we are doing it. As an example; an environmental education experience, say hiking the future shoreline of a projected sea level rise in one's city may provide greater insights and calls to action than a simulated exercise where a group is required to investigate sea level rise in the Arctic, or to cross a 'toxic swamp' using planks. Beames and Ross (2010) found that outdoor experiences in the learners' locale can offer a "higher degree of authentic adventure than highly regulated ropes course and rock-climbing sessions that are common at traditional residential outdoor centres" (p. 106). Authentic outdoor experiences are those that require an investment in time and energy, where learners have control over the process and the outcome (e.g., we have options and the outcome relies on skill rather than luck). In other words we have some choice, based on a level of competence, upon which to plan our course of action. Involving learners in the design and planning of their experience will require a commitment and engagement which goes beyond participation in the actual activity itself. This enables them to express themselves, draw on their resourcefulness, think creatively, and potentially learn skills before the physical aspects of their learning adventure even begins. Activities involving high levels of risk management simply don't enable the same levels of student engagement within acceptable safety parameters.

The notion of authentic learning contexts aligns well with place-based or place-responsive learning which meets students 'where they are at'. This allows skilled educators to link learning to students' past and future learning experiences and connect with their local environment. The value of learning in local places, addressing issues of relevance to them, is supported by a growing body of literature (Smith, 2002).

## 8.6 Agency and Responsibility

One of the central goals of educators (and parents) is to encourage young people to develop agency which allows them to "make choices and to act on those choices in ways that make a difference in their lives" (Martin, 2004, p. 135). We would suggest this capability also enables them to make a difference in their broader communities; both socially and environmentally.

Closely linked to the concept of agency is the notion of autonomy. When someone displays autonomy they can take actions based on intrinsic motivation rather than feeling compelled to do something because that's what the teacher or instructor

said to do. Autonomy has been defined as the ability to choose coupled with the taking of responsibility for this choice (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Autonomy can be fostered through providing learners with appropriate and meaningful choices. In an outdoor context this means more than faux choices such as; do you want to do this activity before or after lunch, or do you want to climb or belay first? For learners to be able to make informed and meaningful choices, and take ownership and responsibility for these choices, they must know what they are doing and what the task involves – this requires the development of appropriate skills which we will discuss shortly. When learners are engaged in activities that have meaning in their lives and can gain a sense of accomplishment “their intrinsic motivation increases and they are better placed to take responsibility of their learning” (Beames & Brown, 2016, p. 71). Good outdoor experiences should be planned so that learners can be held responsible for making meaningful choices, develop skills and see the connections between actions and the outcomes. This is difficult to achieve if adventure is conceived as a series of activities where risks are contrived or manipulated and must be constantly managed. As Beames and Brown (2016) have pointed out “it is not reasonable to ask learners to take responsibility for an outcome that either contained an element of luck, or that was predetermined without respect to the level of commitment displayed by the learner” (p. 72). Therefore asking students to take responsibility should come with opportunities to exercise autonomy, display competence, and see the links between the current task to other aspects of their lives.

This suggests that at times the leader/educator will need to be prepared to not be the expert, but instead to adopt approaches that enable the learners to be the researchers, designers, navigators, mini-lesson presenters, pace setters, etcetera. Each learner may be asked to contribute their expertise to the enterprise as a whole. A student-led discovery approach, facilitated by staff willing to not be the font of all knowledge, enables the students to have greater responsibility, make mistakes, to be flexible in their approach, and to take more responsibility and ownership of their learning.

## 8.7 Uncertainty

While the definitions of adventure mentioned earlier spoke of risks in terms of uncertainty of outcome, Beames and Brown (2016) argue that educationally, uncertainty in the *process* provides many opportunities to enrich learning and engage students. “When there is uncertainty, one is required to find new solutions and experiment with new ideas or actions; one has space to be creative rather than repeating previous actions” (p. 74). The idea is to facilitate learning experiences with uncertainty; situations which require the learner to deliberate, be creative, to try imaginative solutions – within acceptable limits of risk and where harm is avoidable (e.g., physical harm is not likely, students will not suffer psychological harm from voicing dissenting opinions). We want to stress here that uncertainty creates opportunities for trial and error, for experimentation; in other words, powerful

contexts for learning. Building uncertainty into programmes is vitally important to helping students to not only survive, but to thrive in the contemporary world. We owe it to students to develop ‘uncertainty competencies’; to grapple with the messiness and unpredictability which is a hallmark of everyday life (Tauritz, 2012). This is especially true as we deal with a global epidemic and a rapidly changing climate.

## 8.8 Mastery through Challenge

The final component of adventure involves presenting outdoor environmental education students with appropriate challenges that build on, and extend, existing skills and knowledge. By building skills progressively students can gain a sense of mastery. This aligns with Ruben’s notion of ‘broad’ adventures. It involves time to gain foundational skills and knowledge, perseverance in dealing with setbacks along with appropriate support and feedback. Challenge is not the same as risk. A challenge should be within the grasp of the learner and while success is not guaranteed, luck should not be the prime determinant of the outcome. As Beames and Brown state, a challenge “does not require the learner to possibly suffer physical, mental, social or financial harm in order to learn, nor is a challenge contingent upon the ‘presence of dangers’, which some have claimed is inherent in a risky undertaking” (p. 86). Progressive challenges, that meet the needs of the learner help to develop mastery, which in turn promotes learner agency, and the opportunity for the learner to make informed decisions and to take responsibility for their actions. This ‘virtuous cycle’ can lead to an improvement in a person’s sense of self-efficacy and provide them with the opportunity to develop the confidence to be active agents in shaping the world around them.

## 8.9 Concluding Discussion

We believe that the concept of adventure continues to be a useful way to engage students in outdoor environmental education. The four components proposed by Beames and Brown (2016) help to reframe and guide educators to include opportunities for students to exercise agency, seek understanding in authentic learning environments, gain mastery through progressively complex challenges and build resiliency skills for uncertain, complex, and rapidly changing times. These components of adventure are not prescriptive and one of the challenges for educators is to understand the needs of their students and embrace the diversity that characterises all learning environments. The trap is falling for the quick and simple solutions that we are familiar with when grappling with uncertainty.

Helping students to connect with the natural world through authentic activities (e.g., local journeys), or projects, in places of meaning to them, will help them to experience the natural world not as a site of discomfort nor associated with fear and



anxiety. Appropriately framed adventures can engage outdoor environmental education students (in fact all students) in a manner which provides positive associations and the skills and attributes to be more environmentally engaged and action-oriented. Adventure can provide one possible answer to Brookes and Dahle's question about how we might consciously plan experiences of nature in the modern world.

### Reflective Questions

1. How much risk is acceptable? How might you, as an educator, decide on what sort of risks to take with/for your students? What sort of risks are these (outcome/process)?
2. As indicated in the opening sentence one of the challenges we face is how to encourage people to experience nature. What are the risks if we don't introduce people in an appropriate manner?
3. One of the claims often made is that participants in outdoor courses learn to be good 'risk managers'. Based on what you have read and your own experiences how true do you think this claim is? Think about how transferable these claims are – do you drive differently or party more sensibly because of what you learnt during an outdoor experience?
4. What biases might we bring with us when we think about risk and adventure? Many of our biases are 'cultural' – that is we inherit them from those around us. This is a tough question and you may find it helpful to engage with a wider student group to help you to understand that some of your assumptions are not universally shared.
5. Looking back on your own outdoor experiences can you see examples of 'narrow' or 'broad' provision of adventure? Think carefully how these experiences have shaped your relationship to the nature world. How might they have developed, or hindered, an ethic of environmental care?

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# Chapter 9

## Place-Responsiveness in Outdoor Environmental Education



Brian Wattchow

### 9.1 Introduction: Why Places Matter

How do people develop attachments to place? What about the OEE educator and their students on a field trip? Is it possible for them to experience the locations they visit as places? Being outdoors is an opportunity to experience the world as something far greater than ourselves. When educators and learners identify with a place it involves a re-partnering with the movements of wind and tide, with the slow travel of stone through the ages, and to hear again the many voices emanating from fin, fur and feather. It also involves re-connecting with stories about how a place has come to be. But this is no easy task in landscapes greatly altered by colonisation and environmental despoliation on an industrial scale.

Aldo Leopold's highly influential *A Sand County almanac* was published just over 70 years ago. In it he wrote that "Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land" (1949/1987, p. 223). My favourite story from his collection is the 'Song of the Gavilan', a story that begins with a description of the acoustic soundscape of a river ecosystem in the Sierra Madre mountain range in Mexico. The river sings its delicate notes of harmony and balance. But not all who venture outdoors, according to Leopold, have a mind tuned to hear it. As was so often the case, Leopold's allegorical style shifts the narrative to broader themes. The story concludes with stinging criticism of higher education, scientific research and the dangers of hyper-specialisation. For Leopold, education and research, if not practiced in a land-centred way, could all too easily

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fragment and rupture the connected webs of knowledge, human experience and nature, until “One by one the parts are thus stricken from the song of songs” (p. 153).

Leopold’s nature writing explored human-land relations. Too often in education breadth of understanding is lost at the expense of depth, and the particular – stories of an individual animal, the ecology of a wetland or restoration of a small farm – are lost to the abstract. And, this is why place matters. Place is a dynamic, unifying and transdisciplinary concept. Using the body’s senses helps us work with, rather than against, topography and season. Learning about the unique history of places assists learners in gaining insights into understanding people and their communities. Place grounds us and is a good fit for the work of OEE educators who are attentive to their learners and locales. For David Greenwood (2013), all places are profoundly pedagogical. However, he cautions that,

... place and outdoors are not the same. In the practice of outdoor education, the outdoors can simply become another decontextualized space for scripted learning outside of buildings; a place is where meaning is made through reciprocal relationships of coming to know. (pp. 455–456)

## 9.2 Foundations of Place-Responsiveness

The phrase ‘spirit of place’ is often used in the Arts, and in professions like architecture, to describe a particular writer, artist or designer’s philosophy and approach. In Christian Norberg-Schulz’s (1980) classic work *Genius loci: Towards a phenomenology of architecture*, he re-animates the ancient Roman belief that every being and location has its *genius*, its guardian spirit: “this spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence” (p. 18). To be attentive to the *genius* of a place is to allow oneself to be guided by meanings and character drawn from the location.

But the geographer Edward Relph (1976) warns, in his seminal book *Place and placelessness*, that there is an irreconcilable gulf between “the existential space of a culture like that of the aborigines (sic) and most technological and industrial cultures – the former is ‘sacred’ and symbolic, while the latter are ‘geographical’ and significant mainly for functional and utilitarian purposes” (p. 15). Perhaps this is why the phrase ‘sense of place’ gained greater currency in Western cultures, where rationalism and individualism underpin much of society. For Lucy Lippard,

The sense of place, as the phrase suggests, does indeed emerge from the senses. The land, and even the spirit of the place, can be experienced kinetically, or kinesthetically, as well as visually. If one has been raised in a place, its textures and sensations, its smells and sounds, are recalled as they felt to a child’s, adolescent’s, adult’s body. (Lippard, 1997, p. 34)

Place is phenomenal in character and has become a significant concept in many disciplines in recent decades. Many of these have drawn from the rich philosophical insights of a branch of philosophy called phenomenology. The primary purpose of phenomenology was to reject the pursuit of pure logic and abstraction and return

philosophy to the study of how people actually experienced life. In particular, the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger informed a phenomenological turn in Human Geography in the 1970s. As a result, the study of people and environments moved beyond abstraction to focus more on the importance of human subjectivity, embodiment, belonging and dwelling. Ultimately, a phenomenological approach is deeply interested in the mundane, habitual and taken-for-granted qualities of everyday experiences. The importance of the scholarship of humanist geographers like Yi Fu Tuan, Edward Relph and David Seamon, is that they reveal how these lived experiences of the everyday is deeply connected to where each of us live. It is through our experiences of *being-in-the-world*, to use Heidegger's phrase, that we live the myriad relationships that collectively make up the phenomenon that is a place.

Place experiences are the result of relationships between people, locality and activity. This definition should resonate with OEE educators. It reminds us that how we act, what we do in the world, has consequences that shape a place and change its future. Places constantly evolve, and so do we with them. But not always for the better. Relph (1976) believed that if a sense of attachment to a place, which he referred to as *insidedness*, was possible, it was equally possible that experiences of detachment could lead towards disconnections with where we live, resulting in *outsidedness* and a sense of placelessness.

Being an insider results in reciprocity between person and place – to *be* in tune with one's location is to care for and maintain it *as* home. Humans, for Heidegger, needed to be shepherds working in fields of care. This dwelling is "the essence of human existence and the basic character of Being" (Relph, 1976, p. 39). Relph (1976) draws upon other concepts from phenomenological philosophy, intersubjectivity and empathy, to create a pathway back to emplacement. He refers to this as *empathetic insidedness*.

Empathetic insideness demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols ... This involves not merely looking at a place, but seeing into and appreciating the essential elements of its identity... To be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it, for these meanings are not only linked to the experiences and symbols of those whose place it is, but also stem from one's own experiences. (pp. 54–55)

It is significant that the earlier works of the phenomenological philosophers and the human geographers have continued to inspire thought and scholarship in contemporary times. David Abram (1996) pushed back the cultural horizon of their work to include the more-than-human-world in his book *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. He noted,

Today we participate almost exclusively with other humans and with our own human-made technologies. It is a precarious situation, given our age-old reciprocity with the many-voiced landscape. We still need that which is other than our own creations and ourselves. This simple premise of [*The spell of the sensuous*] is that we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human. (p. ix)

Social ecologists (like James Cameron, William Adams and Martin Mulligan) and historians (like George Seddon, Peter Read and Geoff Park) increasingly drew upon place, and its phenomenological foundations, to examine the ongoing impacts of colonisation in countries like Australia and New Zealand. For OEE educators this is important work because, they argue, the colonisers have “constructed nature as nothing more than a resource for human use and wildness as a challenge for the rational mind to conquer” (Adams & Mulligan, 2003, p. 5). It *is* possible, in our journeys outdoors that we do little more than sustain these impositions of colonisation and a society hungry for the spoils of industrial production. Failing to be attentive to the more-than-human-world and the unfolding reciprocity between people and location, may be damaging to the future of a place as it may sustain the taken-for-granted actions and beliefs of the coloniser. In OEE the most damaging of these occurs when we treat the outdoors as little more than an arena in which to test ourselves or an object to be studied. If the work that OEE educators do fails to be inspired by place and to develop connections between people and places, it likely endangers the future possibilities of a local ecologies and communities.

### 9.3 Place-Based Education

Many educators have recognised the value of linking what students learn to where they live. In this section I describe the development of place-based education as it has important lessons for OEE. Our experience of place begins in our homes and communities. To avoid OEE becoming only a flight to the *wild* and *natural* we will have to find the more-than-human world on our doorstep, amongst our concrete and steel, under the glow of the streetlight and in the degraded river at the end of the road. We will have to learn to listen, with empathy, for the scurrying feet of mice, the chatter of pigeons and to tend the non-indigenous plants in our parks and gardens. These are the places we have made and these other lives have adapted themselves to ours. This does not abrogate our duty to care for the more distant lives of the wolf, the whale and the wild pine – we should do everything we can to preserve them. And, we might work, through time, to re-establish indigenous species and ecosystems where we live. This is Heidegger’s sense of *sparing* – supporting the local in its flourishing. However, if we are to learn from the insights of the phenomenological philosophers and other scholars of place, it will be how we live our lives today, here and now, that will have the greatest impact on the future of places. This is the challenge of developing a sense of attachment to everyday places and dwelling in the moment.

As with place, spirit of place and sense of place, there are an array of like-terms linking education and places. Since the early 1990s terms like place-based education, community-based education, ecological identity, experiential education, outdoor education and environmental education have developed and all share a degree of common ground. Part of what they share is an educational philosophy that arose

as a form of resistance against the homogenisation of learning experiences and the centralisation of curricula.

Place-based education is analogous with community education where the curriculum begins with the local. Students undertake projects that focus local culture or regeneration of local nature. Subject matter, like local ecology and land history, provide a foundation so that actions become informed, are beneficial and sustainable. Lane-Zucker summarised this approach in the introduction to *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms and communities* (Sobel, 2004).

Place-based education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become a part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it.

North American educators and writers like David Gruenwald, David Sobel, David Orr, Michael Thomashow all published books that specifically argued for a focus on learners' connections to place as being essential for sustainable communities. Local issues provide the curriculum and pedagogic approaches (like problem-based learning, service learning, experiential education) rise up, like fresh shoots, and overcome the specialisation of subject matter. Orr, in a book chapter titled 'Place and pedagogy', states,

A place cannot be understood from the vantage point of a single discipline or specialization. It can be understood only on its terms as a complex mosaic of phenomena and problems ... The study of place, by contrast, enables us to widen the focus to examine interrelationships between disciplines and to lengthen our perception of time. (Orr, 1992, p. 129)

Is there a danger that place-based education can succumb to some of the potential pitfalls of localism? An intense focus on the local can promote self-interest and continue to marginalise some members of the community. Similarly, it might draw unsustainably upon resources from remote ecosystems. For example, a building project could unwittingly source materials that involve unsustainable practices. David Gruenwald (2003) attempts to resolve these kinds of issues through the development of a critical pedagogy of place. In doing so he bridges the divide between place educators' emphasis on ecological and rural settings, with critical pedagogy's focus on social and urban contexts and issues, including "urbanisation and homogenisation of culture under global capitalism" (p. 4). Drawing upon the best from both provides the opportunity to consider a two-step process of decolonisation and reinhabitation.

Human communities, or places, are politicised, social constructions that often marginalize individuals, groups, as well as ecosystems. If place-based educators seek to connect place with self and community, they must identify and confront the ways that power works through places to limit the possibilities for human and non-human others. Their place-based pedagogy must, in other words, be critical. (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 7)

In an age of hypermobility what is needed, across all sectors of society, is a shift in awareness towards the places where we live and learn. For Australian social ecologist John Cameron (2003, p. 180), “the word ‘responsive’ carries with it the impetus to act, to respond.” Responsiveness relies upon the development and sustenance of relationships of mutual dependence. OEE educators, then, have a particularly important role to play in a collective journey towards how individuals and communities dwell amidst their places.

## 9.4 Place Responsiveness in OEE

What, then, might be the contribution that OEE educators make in this wider effort to decolonise ways of knowing and being, and reinhabit our places with the ultimate goal of dwelling? How should OEE educators attempt to design learning experiences that are inspired by, and serve, local ecologies and communities both justly and sustainably? Acknowledging that OEE is part of broader societal efforts to move towards place responsiveness as a philosophical and practical guide, protects against the dangers of specialisation and the potential negative outcomes of localism.

We propose the term place-responsive pedagogy to capture one way of considering how educators make explicit efforts to collaborate in assembling people, places and purposeful activities together, to produce viable and valuable environmental educational experiences. (Mannion et al., 2013, p. 793)

OEE is well situated to make a significant contribution to this broader effort. Being outdoors provides opportunities to experience locations in one’s ‘own backyard’ that might not be possible otherwise. Place can be experienced both at home and when we travel further afield. Outdoor activities can be seen as opportunities that engage us sensually, cognitively, symbolically, empathetically, even spiritually with a place. There is a deep lesson in *learning a place* so that one can live with, and not against, it. The world is, after all, a rich network of connected places. Most of us live in societies that have attached high value to certain locations to conserve them as environmental parks and reserves. These are places where indigenous ecology is often encouraged to flourish. There are lessons to be learned here also, about being deeply attentive to the world.

In 1992 the Canadian environmental educator James Raffan (1992), completed a doctoral thesis which investigated cross cultural perceptions of place. He sought to understand how “the land act[ed] as teacher” (p. 17). He found that Indigenous peoples native to the region had a deep, mythopoetic connection to the land as home. Another group, trappers and hunters, could be deeply observant and come to know the land in extraordinary detail. Their survival depended on it. By contrast, recreational canoeists, packing in their shelter and supplies, developed the shallowest perception of the region as a place.

... it appears that not every experience ... leads to a deepening of sense of place. It is possible, or so it would seem from the Euro-Canadian accounts, for a person to visit the



place ... with perspective narrowed to the river corridor exclusively and/or with sight shortened to map references only, and to return with no appreciable new insights or observation of what the land was like or what the land had to offer. (Raffan, 1992, p. 382)

Raffan's conclusion sounds a warning to OEE. Outdoor activities alone, even when they provide a prolonged immersion in an environment, are unlikely to lead towards a deepening attachment to place. Yet, I think we err if we conclude that the canoe (or any other form of outdoor activity) provides a barrier to place experiences. They do so only when used in ways that fail to respond to a place empathetically. Raffan's (1993) 'Land as teacher' model highlighted the complex interplay of how a place is experienced, stories told about the place, the knowledge contained in place-names and a place's spiritual dimensions. As Molly Baker noted a few years later.

The day has passed when participants can leave adventure-based programs with a sense of accomplishment, but without a sense of their relationship to the land. (Baker, 2005, pp. 268–269)

## 9.5 Recent Books on Place-Responsive OEE

The last decade has seen a significant growth in empirical research and publications about place and its role in OEE. Many postgraduate research studies have been completed and place inspired papers, too numerous to mention here, have been published in OEE, Education and Humanities journals. Perhaps most significantly for an emergent profession like OEE three recent books have directly addressed both the need for place-responsiveness pedagogies in OEE and how they might be enacted.

The first book, by myself and Mike Brown, is called *A pedagogy of place: Outdoor education for a changing world* (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). We critiqued taken-for-granted beliefs and practices in OEE that might inadvertently lead towards placelessness. Based on a re-theorisation of OEE and a series of case studies, we suggest a series of signposts that might point educators in the right direction.

1. Being present in and with a place: Use all of the senses to engage with a locality. This takes time and can easily be missed in a crowded, fast-past program.
2. Use place-based stories: Story-telling is a way that humans pass on knowledge about a place's history and ecology.
3. Apprentice yourself to place: OEE educators are well-situated to develop longer term relationships with the localities where they work. Keep observing, inquiring, learning about a place.
4. Representation of place experiences: Writing poems and stories, creating artworks and films, about a place encourages educators and learners to reflect deeply upon the meaning of their place experiences. (based on Wattchow & Brown, 2011)

The second book, *Diverse pedagogies of place: Educating students in and for local and global environments* (2018) by Australians Peter Renshaw and Ron Tooth, presents a series of case studies drawn from environmental education centres and the educators who live and work there. Collectively, they provide insights into how places can be experienced pedagogically, by both educators and students. The pedagogic practices are diverse, because places are diverse – each having a unique story to tell. As a collection they resonate with a sense of advocacy for place, for the need to experience a place slowly, how to use an activity like walking into place as a form of deep reflection, and of the sacredness and Indigenous ways of knowing. The legacy of Heidegger pervades the writing. To learn and come to know a place, calls for us to act with care, and teaches the skills and values of dwelling.

The third book, by Australian Alistair Stewart, is called *Developing place-responsive pedagogy in outdoor environmental education: A rhizomatic curriculum autobiography* (Stewart, 2020). This book provides an important update to earlier works inspired by the phenomenological philosophers. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizomatic approach to theory (non-hierarchical, limitless starting points for inquiry, no core belief system) is combined with William Pinar's notion of *currere*. For Pinar, being an educator requires an evolving project of questioning, reflection and self-understanding. From his situatedness in the rivers and landscapes of south eastern Australia, Stewart's *rhizocurrere* presents OEE as an "ongoing, lived, enacted, dynamic and responsive" (p. 1) curriculum that is always becoming. As with Renshaw and Tooth's (2018) case studies, the assemblage of inquiries reminds OEE educators that their work will always involve a complex conversation with places whose totality they can only ever know partially. Essential to the work of OEE educators then is to carefully guide that work with an endlessly evolving series of inquiries and questions that help find our way through this complexity, again and again. Stewart does this by framing a series of questions.

## 9.6 How Do I Develop Place-Responsive OEE Pedagogy?

- What types of stories about land are told with/in/through OEE? (What stories are heard and/or silenced?)
- What are the epistemological and ontological dimensions/consequences of place-responsive OEE? (What knowledges are important? What ways of *becoming* are made important?)
- What are the contexts that inform and shape my pedagogy?
- How do I inform my pedagogy with the contexts that surround me? (Stewart, 2020, p. 5)

It is, perhaps, not surprising that place has become such a prominent theme in countries like Australia and New Zealand, the home places of these authors. Place has emerged there as a topic central to the Arts and Humanities as people in these

countries actively question how they identify with where they live and what beliefs and actions are needed to create a brighter future for all.

## 9.7 Conclusion: Learning Through, and for, Places

Much water has gone under the bridge since Leopold sat on the banks of the Gavilan, wondering about its future and reflecting upon the interconnectedness of life. Each generation of thinkers, writers and educators should build on those that preceded them. Belief systems and practices in OEE that are part of broader societal efforts to learn from, and care for, places provides a more just and sustainable future for our work. Place-based and place-responsive pedagogies will, inevitably be home-grown but will be connected by broader relationships across ecologies, communities and professions. They will be acutely aware that all of the local environmental and social issues faced at home, collectively manifest into global challenges. The actions of OEE educators, together, from all of our diverse habitats and homes, will work to disassemble a human-centric education and raise a new pedagogy of dwelling. Only then will we be able to join with the other species, and even the rocks, rivers, oceans and atmosphere which we call Earth – and find ourselves at home.

### Reflective Questions

1. What places matter in your life? Reflect upon the qualities of a place and describe your attachment to it in terms of Relph's (1976) empathetic insidedness.
2. Think of a recent outdoor experience. It could be an outdoor journey or a formal outdoor environmental education field trip. Using Wattachow and Brown's (2011) *signposts*, in what ways was it responding to the location as a place?
3. How can a person travelling away from their home be place-responsive?
4. Using Stewart's questions about place pedagogy as a guide, how can educators design curriculum and educational experiences so that they are more place-responsive?
5. The future of all places is uncertain. What actions can outdoor environmental educators take on an everyday basis to sustain the places where they teach, work and live?

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# Chapter 10

## Wild Pedagogies



Marcus Morse, Bob Jickling, Sean Blenkinsop, and Phillipa Morse

### 10.1 Introduction

Wild pedagogies arises from a convergence of ideas about wildness, education, control and the realities of responding to modernity's troubled relations within the more-than-human world (Blenkinsop et al., 2018, Jickling et al., 2018b). Given the evolving ecological crisis of our time there is a critical need to reconsider those relationships. We cannot continue as we are. The current story of our age is being written in mass species extinctions, catastrophic events and the acceleration of climate change. What might potential responses entail? We suggest any effective response requires not only a rethinking of ideas, but also of actions and ways of being that are less anthropocentric, less hierarchical and more equitable for all. We believe education has a crucial role to play in this process of cultural change (Jickling, 2013; Blenkinsop & Morse, 2017) and that, among other things, wild pedagogies provides important opportunities to reimagine and live alternative and more just relationships—with each other and as part of a more-than-human world.

Our current situation calls for bold experimentation and new ways of educating. Overlapping educational responses focused on enacting alternative relationships within a more-than-human world include critical place responsive pedagogies

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(Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Greenwood, 2013), posthuman pedagogies (Snaza, 2013), dark pedagogies (Lysgaard et al., 2019) and wild pedagogies. As conceived here, wild pedagogies gathers together ideas to guide practice; ideas that provoke a questioning of the *status quo*, seek out opportunities for reimagined relationships that resonate with educators trying to respond to the crises of our times.

In presenting such ideas we recognise, also, that many emerging outdoor environmental educators will recognise existing concepts and practices that have extended histories – providing opportunities for further exploration. Indeed, many outdoor educators may even recognize how their skills can be invoked to assist in attempting a project such as cultural change (Blenkinsop et al., 2016; Blenkinsop & Morse, 2017). Wild pedagogies is an ongoing and continuously evolving endeavour that will appear differently for different people in different places – something worth celebrating. Wild pedagogies begins with the idea of wildness.

## 10.2 Wildness, Wilderness and the Self-Willed

In reimagining relationships, including but also extending beyond those between people, we assert the need to trouble dominant human-centered thinking and hierarchical positioning. To do this we offer the idea of wilderness, and its relative wildness, to leverage our thinking. We suggest it is timely to re-think, once again, what wilderness and wildness have been, what they are, and what they might become.

We acknowledge, at the outset, the colonial legacy of wilderness and the impact this has had in the disenfranchisement of peoples and cultures the world over (Bird Rose, 1996). And we recognize that wilderness can be positioned in a way that reduces its value to a backdrop, an inanimate set of resources, for human-centered self-serving ends (Cronon, 1996). It can also be positioned as a challenge to be overcome which often leads to images of heroic and/or colonial conquest. We acknowledge and concur with these critiques. However, with some reconsideration we believe that there is value in a robust conception of wilderness that does not rest in, or rely on, colonial tropes and heroic narratives.

Despite its historical liabilities we argue that wilderness can be reconceived by tracing its etymological roots to “self-willed land” and, hence, its inherent wildness, freedom even. Such a new becoming points to a deeper understanding of relationship—remarkably different from the colonially infused concept. Capacity for *self-will*, or wildness, hints at concepts like inherent value, independent purpose, resistance, agency, and rights. For the wild pedagogy project, it also helps to problematize ideas about control. Hence, within the concept of wilderness lies wildness, and pedagogical inspiration. Wildness, we argue, resists the kinds of control that can strangle educational opportunities. This also suggest that the wild is not some place at a distance from most human life but that the wild can be found in places close to home, in urban, suburban, and industrial zones, and, that is it within us all. So, our important question becomes: How might we allow the self-willed nature of

others (human and other-than-human), and the places we inhabit, to enter more fully into our practice?

### 10.3 Education, Pedagogy and Control

The term pedagogy, derived from the Greek *paidagogos* with the root *agoric*, means to lead or guide. The idea of guiding a child is at the heart of education. Pedagogy, then, is a relational and ethical undertaking that requires continuous attention. A wilding of education calls for a reimagining of pedagogical opportunities that might challenge dominant ideas of control and provide students with an ever-broadening range of lived experiences within the world. As many outdoor and environmental educators can likely attest, in the moments where we trust in the potential of others (people and places), unimagined possibilities can emerge.

Wild pedagogies is inspired by wildness. It represent a desire to let go of an overabundant sense of control, to invite the places we visit to become an integral part of our work, and to respond to provocations in spontaneous, and at times unforeseen, ways. As such, wild pedagogies rests on the premise that an important part of education can include intentional activities that provide a fertile field for personal and purposeful experience without controlling the environment and its actors, learners, or educational outcomes.

For some, wild pedagogies will provide recognition of what they already do. For others it might inspire a wilding of their pedagogies—providing opportunities to attend to the wildness of places, themselves, and their students in a much deeper way. And doing this in ways that are less hierarchical and more just and inclusive of all, human and more-than. In attempting to provoke such practices wild pedagogies has been articulated through a series of *touchstones*. What follows is our summary of some of those touchstones. It rests on a substantial corpus of previous work (Blenkinsop *et al.*, 2018; Jickling *et al.*, 2018a; Jickling *et al.*, 2018b).

### 10.4 Touchstones

We offer touchstones as ideas intended to support the work of educators. They are an attempt to recognize the difficulty in achieving sustained cultural change, by providing ideas that can be held and returned to over and over—for potential reference, guidance and support. They are intended to be revisited, refined and reconsidered, but they can also stand as points for departure. These touchstones are drawn from experiments in practice and attempt to bring the more-than-human world actively into educational conversations.

### ***10.4.1 Touchstone #1: Nature as Co-teacher***

We believe that education is richer, for all involved, if the natural world and the many denizens that co-constitute places, are actively engaged with, listened to, and taken seriously as part of the educative process. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018).

At one level this touchstone might appear easy to understand and even put into practice. The claim is that the natural world is a vibrant, active, agential place that is worth listening and attending to, building relationship with, and learning from. Accepting this likely means that educators will spend more time outdoors and thus find different pedagogical possibilities appearing and new affordances being engaged. However, at another level, this touchstone has significant implications for what knowledge is and how learning happens. If nature becomes a co-teacher then the human, often considered as the sole possessor, arbiter, and conveyor of knowledge is de-centered and learning becomes a shared project that is no longer ever complete or human-based (Blenkinsop & Beeman, 2010). If we take this concept seriously, the impacts can be profound.

How might more-than-human and/or material others be understood as active collaborators or instigators in pedagogical activities, rather than objects of study? In other words, how might we move on from learning about the more-than-human world—to learning with and from? How can we acknowledge the role of other-than-human (including the material other) as active agents in their own right, capable of being entangled with/in, and leading, pedagogical events? Quay and Jensen (2018), for example, assert the need to widen educational approaches and reach beyond human-centric ideas of teacher-centered learning / student-centered learning, to include more-than-human-centered learning.

Such opportunities remain strong within the lives of children, and the challenge can, at times, be for adults to acknowledge such possibilities. As Rautio (2013) suggests, “to appreciate also the momentary and the seemingly unguided in children”’s everyday lives ... we would have to embrace the thought that teachers—those who invite, guide, support and steer us—can also be other than human beings” (p. 402). As an example, consider a moment on an outdoor walk when students’ attention is drawn towards some damp moss and micro-worlds atop a rock slab. They may lie down on the warm surface of the rock bringing their eyes to meet the moss world. This change in perspective might create a frenzy of excitement. At this moment, as ant trails emerge here and there, and water seeps through the moss forest creating miniature rivers, nature as co-teacher is taking over. Students are drawn, by the moss, into engaging in conversations with each other and the place— “why does moss feel so soft?” — “who lives within the moss?” — “what systems are they using to organize their lives?” This touchstone is a reminder that pedagogical response in such moments (through language, movement and time) ought to reflect the active agential role of nature.



### ***10.4.2 Touchstone #2: Complexity, the Unknown, and Spontaneity***

We believe that education is richer for all involved, if there is room left for surprise. If no single teacher or learner can know all about anything, then there always remains the possibility for the unexpected connection to be made, the unplanned event to occur, and the simple explanation to become more complex. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 84).

This touchstone prioritizes the unpredictable as it pushes back against the desire to control and contain. Embracing complexity requires acknowledging that not everything can be completely known, and that learning cannot be predetermined or packaged in advance, without the potential loss of serendipitous learning. Complexity can be understood as dynamic, fluid and unpredictable, and is best described in reference to qualities without fixed boundaries. Wild pedagogies call upon educators to be open to spontaneous, complex and sometimes surprising, occurrences. For educators this touchstone can involve risk as the emergent tends to complexify situations and curriculum design can no longer focus on simply positing desired learning outcomes and then pushing students towards those chosen particulars (Green & Dymont, 2018). The world does not in fact work in such a clean, predictable, linear fashion and something important is lost when we assume that it does.

In many educational contexts, there exists a reliance on learning *about* the world through ideas of separation, classification and knowable objects. Learners, for example, can be encouraged to delineate individual objects, identify them, describe them and expound knowledge about them, as objects of study. Yet such ideas continue to reinforce individualistic subject/object relational understandings of the world. This touchstone asks, what might occur if we resist the ingrained urge to classify and define something, and instead search for complexity, permeability, interconnectedness and the unknown as we meet the world?

Consider, for example, a moment when students notice a mushroom growing at the base of a tree. They might be intrigued by the colour, smell and form. There might be an urge to classify the mushroom, to record its colour and form (even to pick the mushroom), and to learn more about this individual species. Yet, if we resist such urges, we might deliberately encourage a search for complexity and spontaneity. If we provide time and encouragement to explore and consider what we might learn from fungi with questions such as—“what do you notice about the trees, plants or surfaces they are growing on or near?”—“why do you think these fungi exists in this place?” We might then feel a hint of the relational way that mushroom exists. Indeed, we might learn a great deal not only from these mushrooms but also from an experience that welcomes complexity and entanglements as a source of knowledge, understanding, and even positionality in the world.

### 10.4.3 *Touchstone #3: Locating the Wild*

We believe that the wild can be found everywhere, but that this recognition and the work of finding the wild is not necessarily easy. The wild can be occluded, made hard to see by cultural tools, by the colonial orientation of those doing the encountering, and, in urban spaces, by concrete itself. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 88).

For many outdoor environmental educators, the wild is more clearly apparent the farther one gets from urbanization. It can be hard to ignore the wild when standing by a waterfall deep in the Australian rainforest, or at the crest of a Norwegian glacier. But this touchstone acknowledges that the wild can be located anywhere—in the rural, standing on the ice, indoors, and in the deeply urban. Yet in any context (including the rainforest or arctic) the wild can be, and often is, obfuscated by cultural and colonial overlays. The child who sees the mushroom pushing up next to the tree, for example, can note its resilience, its wildness and its self-willed nature; or seemingly just as easily reconfirm human hubris by taking it for granted or even crushing it flat. As such, educators will also be challenged to name and respond in critical ways to the language, the metaphors, and the actions that confirm environmentally problematic narratives and prevent learners from encountering the wild, their own or that of others, and enacting their own freedom. In spite of the incredible efforts of many urban outdoor environmental educators the murmur of the wild can, at times, be drowned out by the noises, smells, impositions, and demands of a human culture that claims superiority and buries the other in its myriad constructions (Derby et al., 2015).

This touchstone brings the critical into wild pedagogies. It cautions against the cultural constraints inherent in contemporary public education and modernity's colonial orientations towards the natural world, and many people. Taking this touchstone seriously challenges educators to think about their own positioning and privileges, including those relative to the more-than-human world. It challenges educators to be constantly aware of how the *status quo* is sustained by the language and metaphors, the structures they work within, the tools they employ—and it challenges them to devise ways to disrupt this *status quos*. Wildness asserts a resistance to such implicit means of control. One way to locate this wildness is to be deliberately open to it—to acknowledge and welcome it. This can require a shift in perception. Within education, for example, control is often structurally asserted—through walls of buildings, timing of classes and arrangements of desks, and universal and measurable outcomes. These structures reinforce relationships of power. And, there is something comfortable about going along with known practices. To deliberately seek and engage with the wild, then, can be risky as it disrupts these relationships.

#### ***10.4.4 Touchstone #4: Time and Practice***

We believe that building relationships with the natural world will, like any relationship, take time. We also believe that discipline and practice are essential to this process. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 92).

This touchstone focuses on two key discussions: process and practice. Both are ultimately interested in building and maintaining relationships within the natural world, particularly in places we inhabit. Focusing on process suggests that building relationships is aided by spending time in places, immersed in and listening to the world (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). However, we might also be aided by reconsidering how we conceptualize time; by finding ways to slow down; by changing habits that separate us from others; by listening to our bodies, and the bodies around us, in different ways; and by immersing ourselves in what some have called deep time. Focusing on practice implies discipline. The work required to build rich relationships is reminiscent of the work required to develop a meditative practice. Such practices are about the *how* of teaching, and the habits that underpin this work.

But slowing down and allowing ourselves and our students to be present and engage directly with the work means stepping away from some of the ways we have been taught to teach. It means taking a risk and being willing, as a teacher, to give up full control and make space for the more-than-humans and the unexpected outcome. Giving up control requires trust—trust in our students, but also the places we inhabit. Planning teaching sessions can be uncertain. There can be some fear that the session will not keep students occupied, or that they might not learn enough. But if we trust our students, and places, to generate pedagogical possibilities, then we might be able resist the urge to retreat to conventional sequences of pre-determined activities (see for example, Morse et al., 2018). We might find the confidence to allow students to authentically settle into a place, to listen to myriad voices and to allow experiences to run their course. In doing so, we might resist what David Jardine (1996) describes as “pedagogical hyperactivity”.

Educators, themselves, require time and practice to build and maintain significant relationships with, and in, the more-than-human world. At the heart of this touchstone is making time to deliberately encounter the wild. This means more than just encountering the wild within, but also the actual wild outside—wild landscapes, animals, and situations. Part of this practice is learning—or relearning—how to be outdoors. It can also be considered a practice that requires listening deeply to potential co-teachers as an integral part of recognising and working with wild others.

#### ***10.4.5 Touchstone #5: Socio-cultural Change***

We believe that the way many humans currently exist on the planet needs changing, that this change is required at the cultural level, and that education has an important role to play in this project of cultural change. We also believe that education is

always a political act, and we see wild pedagogues embracing the role of activists as thoughtfully as they can. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 97).

This touchstone begins with a radical premise—that much of current educational practice, particularly that which rests on the same theoretical footing as modern western culture, is anti-environmental. And that by maintaining the *status quo*, or simply trying to tinker with the edges of what currently exists will not be enough to change the human/nature relationship or even limit the destruction being wrought today. As such, wild pedagogies is a project of cultural change. This makes educating an explicitly political act and places the teacher in the role of activist, recognizing that the choices being made in the classroom have explicit and implicit implications for how learners come to understand themselves, what it means to be human, and the importance of the more-than-human world therein.

Education is always a political act. Through language, attitudes and curriculum we either reproduce or disrupt the *status quo*; in turn shaping social, cultural and ecological futures. In many outdoor environmental education contexts, it is possible to assert, through language and narratives, the agency of places. For example, when we arrive in a place, we might initially take the time to introduce it as a place, a community, a culture, with histories (not only human or necessarily in human timescales) and agency. We might even allow the place to introduce itself in subtle ways. In other words, rather than arriving in a place, staking our claim and readying to use the place for an activity; we might rather walk slowly, listen carefully, be respectful, allow time to settle and offer some stories that acknowledge and deliberately pay attention to its agency.

#### ***10.4.6 Touchstone #6: Forming Alliances and Building Community***

We believe that the colonial ethos of resource extraction is not separate from, but is yet another shade of the many hierarchies of dominance that exist amongst humans. For this reason wild pedagogues seek alliances and build community with others not only in the environmental world but across all people and groups concerned with justice. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 102).

This touchstone seeks to remember the importance of, and to work towards building, strong alliances and flourishing communities while at the same time reminding us not to forget the human in all of this work. Here the implicit goal is to push against the challenges of individualization and alienation and, at the same, to resist the colonial move to separate marginalized groups, be they human or other-than-human, and place them at odds with each other. In order to create flourishing equitable communities, we need to listen and learn from each other. Here educators across formal and informal spectrums have the opportunity to work with and learn from others. For example, outdoor leaders from classroom educators, students from community elders, and pre-service teachers from Indigenous practitioners and activists.

Often our intuitive pedagogies can be about asserting control, and in so doing we can shy away from the risks of vulnerability, anxiety and uncertainty both for ourselves and for our students. Yet being open to others and understanding knowledge as situated and incomplete is a critical part of forming alliances and expanding educational opportunities. Liz Newbery (2012) suggests, in considering colonising outdoor environmental education pedagogies, “often, our pedagogies work to contain conflict and anxiety, thereby containing, rather than opening up, possibilities for learning” (p. 38). Proactively forming alliances and building a sense of community could include, for example, engaging with Indigenous community members prior to, or during, an outdoor experience, seeking permission to travel on lands or waterways, taking the time to hear and understand their stories including traumatic histories, and through dialogue that acknowledges our own culpability in colonizing practices.

Taking risks, forming alliances and strengthening communities offers new and exciting educational possibilities. How, for example, might Indigenous knowledges offer pedagogies of kinship with places. How might such ways of knowing provide alternative relationships? And, how might the lives of our students be strengthened through an enlarged sense of community? Building community can provide connections, support systems, and resilience as everyone works towards shared goals, as well as important experiential opportunities for understanding relationships. Forming authentic alliances with others involves acknowledging, welcoming, and appreciating differences such that together change might begin to happen.

## 10.5 Concluding Thoughts

In responding to the ecological and social crises of our time we must urgently “educate a generation of students who grow dangerous to the *status quo*” (Orr, 2017, p. x). By framing key underpinning ideas of wild pedagogies, and situating them through the more practical touchstones, we hope to have offered ways forward that provide possibilities for a reimagining relationships and that might challenge us all to be better educators and allies of, for, with, and in the more-than-human world.

### Reflective Questions

1. How can I plan for, and facilitate, opportunities for students to experience place as co-teacher?
2. In what ways might I provide space for complexity, spontaneity, and unexpected to appear, and be taken seriously in my practice?
3. How can I promote encounters with the wild and/or self-willed communities that inhabit spaces in which I work?
4. In what ways might I actively disrupt individual and hierarchical human-centered ways of thinking and acting in my classroom?
5. Which allies can I work with to provide my students with an enlarged and strengthened educational community?

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# Chapter 11

## Outdoor Therapy: Benefits, Mechanisms and Principles for Activating Health, Wellbeing, and Healing in Nature



Anita Pryor, Nevin Harper, and Cathryn Carpenter

*Land based experiences evoke a different sensibility in me: my  
pace slows,  
I trust, I connect, I embrace the rhythm of change.  
Belonging in the Cosmos, Jane Riddiford (2015)*

### 11.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the benefits, mechanisms and principles of Outdoor therapies, with practical application for the work in outdoor and environmental education (OEE). This exploration centres on the following questions: How does time in natural environments support human health? How do human-nature relationships support healing? What is it about nature contact that encourages people to seek healthier lives? How are these benefits activated within Outdoor therapy, and related practices like adventure therapy, wilderness therapy and bush adventure therapy? And what might the Outdoor therapies offer OEE?

While Outdoor therapy programs hold different intentions and tend to emphasise different features within the outdoor experience for participants than OEE, both have potential to support human health, wellbeing and healing across many domains,

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including areas of physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual wellbeing (Carpenter & Harper, 2016).

A seminal meta-analysis on adventure therapy outcomes and moderators found that therapeutic outdoor programs support outcomes for participants across areas of physical-, behavioural-, psychological-, social/family-, and academic- wellbeing, with an overall effect size slightly higher than for outdoor education programs and slightly lower than one-to-one psychotherapy (Bowen & Neill, 2013, p.40). Within this large-scale study, Clinical (psychological) changes were found to be largest (.50), followed by Self-concept (.43), Social development (.42), Behaviour (.41), Academic (.41) Family development (.36), Physical (.32) and Morality/Spirituality (.17) (p. 37).

Smaller scale program evaluations of individual Outdoor therapy programs illustrate biological-, psychological-, social- and ecological wellbeing benefits for participants (e.g., Pryor et al., 2018). The following participants' comments illustrate psychological benefits across the breadth of need, from 'emotional rest' to 'mental health treatment', and the ripple effects of such changes:

- "The memories of the program take your mind off things – it supports you and puts your mind at ease" (p. 50);
- "I tried to commit suicide last year and I couldn't do it. The program had started resilience and confidence within me - really I think it was the start of my character to be who I am - the knowledge of that stopped me (from going through with suicide)" (p. 58).
- "I can (now) talk to people who are down and say let's just go bush and escape: it's just you and the environment. Touching the environment is very therapeutic" (p. 58).

This chapter provides a perspective on the necessity and benefits of human contact with nature, while also recognising that humans are nature. For First Nations people and many place-based cultures, healing, health, and wellbeing are located within the knowledge that "The land is us, and we are the Land" (Turner, 2010, p. 132). While recognizing most land and nature-based practices have ancestral and Indigenous origins, the evolution of 'practices' in nature and their naming continues to this day. We have chosen to return to the roots of some of the English key words used in this chapter—health, therapy, intervention—and to examine these in light of our exploration of Outdoor therapies and OEE. At the outset, we wish to acknowledge that nature-based health practices have been used for millennia and are currently limited by our common use of Western languages, in particular English.

Maller et al. (2006) defined nature as relating collectively to the geological, evolutionary, biophysical, and biochemical processes that have occurred throughout time to create the Earth as it is today, and humans within it. These authors refer to the Greek origins of the word *health*, *Hal* meaning 'whole' (Maller et al., 2006). Ayto (1990) described how the English term *therapy* derives from Greek origins Theraps, meaning 'an attendant' and verb Therapeuin, meaning 'to attend to,' and 'administer treatment to.' *Intervention*, 'to come between or among,' 'the arrival,' or 'the coming together,' in the context of public health can describe the amelioration

of a difficulty, disadvantage, or disconnection. Through this etymological lens, Outdoor therapies activate health, wellbeing, and healing through the benefits of time in nature, and the key mechanisms at work within Outdoor therapy practices.

## 11.2 What Is Outdoor Therapy?

For the purpose of this chapter, Outdoor therapy includes all nature-based interventions that intentionally access the benefits of nature for health, wellbeing, and healing. Outdoor therapy modalities include adventure therapy, wilderness therapy, bush adventure therapy, equine therapy, horticultural therapy, recreation therapy, forest therapy, surf therapy, nature-based therapy, eco-therapy, care farming and animal-assisted therapies, to name a few (Harper & Dobud, 2020). We are yet to fully understand the dynamics of the specific nature of engagement (what is unique about the surf, horses, or gardening?) however these approaches have several features in common: are all grounded in outdoor settings, the vast majority include active bodily-engagement, and most adhere to principles of ecological care, with human-nature relationships at the centre of their work.

From a broader perspective, Outdoor therapies can be seen to encompass the cultural health practices of Indigenous/First Nations people, nature contact prescribed by medical practitioners, outdoor interventions by occupational therapists, and ‘walk and talk’ therapy provided by counsellors and psychotherapists.<sup>1</sup> Theoretical investigations in areas of green social work, environmental psychology, and therapeutic landscapes support these healing practices and are complimented by significant research endeavours (e.g., Dominelli, 2014). We note that these lists are in no way complete; rather they illustrate the breadth of Outdoor therapies and ongoing emergence of nature-based health interventions around the world.

## 11.3 Teasing out the Differences: Contrasting Outdoor Therapies with Outdoor and Environmental Education

The fields of Outdoor therapies and OEE are closely related and complementary, and each have practical applications for the other. Both will likely be educational, with a focus on developing the participants’ knowledge and skills through safe, enjoyable outdoor experiences with an ethic of environmental care. Both can also be therapeutic and enhance participants’ health and wellbeing through physical activity, positive social connection and time in outdoor environments.

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<sup>1</sup>This wider field of outdoor health practices is coming to be called Outdoor Healthcare within the Australian context: <https://outdoorhealthcare.org.au/>

A key difference between these two fields of endeavour may be the participants' reason or rationale for participating in the outdoor experience. Whereas educational approaches often focus on opportunities for personal development, skills and knowledge of outdoor pursuits and environmental awareness and stewardship, Outdoor therapies tend to tailor the experience in consultation with participants to identify ways in which the facilitators (practitioners, therapists, and leaders) can best support individual safety, wellbeing and therapeutic outcomes.

To the passive observer, differences between Outdoor therapy and OEE may be difficult to differentiate; however certain characteristics are usually evident:

- Facilitator training – within OEE most facilitators will be trained in educational pedagogies, outdoor skills and group process skills (to name a few). Within Outdoor therapies, facilitator teams will tend to include trained counsellors, psychologists or social workers.
- Participant needs – within most Outdoor therapies, participants tend to bring more complex needs, meaning complex risk management plans are required, such as consultation of support services, safe group selection, development of individual treatment plans, smaller group sizes, and higher ratios of staff to participants.
- Participant goals – within most Outdoor therapies, participants are supported to develop specific personal goals within programmed conversations with trained healthcare workers before, during and after the program.

Having outlined some differences between Outdoor therapies and OEE leads us to an exploration of how *both* approaches differ from indoor experiences.

## 11.4 Outdoor Therapies in Practice

Supporting the health of participants in natural environments informs the fundamental structures and conditions of the interactions between facilitators and participants (and the facilitation team and participant group). The following continuums illustrate how this role can change with the incorporation of more or less time outdoors. Please note: while Outdoor therapy practices may operate anywhere along the continuum and move within the continuum as services are tailored to the needs of participating individuals, only the extremes or outer edges of this diversity are presented within this table (Table 11.1).

These variables significantly change the dynamics and experience of the therapeutic support. Outdoor therapies tend to provide longer time in a more dynamic environment, which tends to lead to contextualised insights and the development of more appropriate strategies. By understanding how therapeutic support is experienced out-of-doors compared to within conventional indoor settings, we can now focus on the role nature is explicitly assigned within Outdoor therapy encounters.

We offer four concepts as examples of the way that facilitators of Outdoor therapy may choose to engage and activate nature within the Outdoor therapy

**Table 11.1** Indoor - Outdoor Therapies Continuum

Conventional indoor therapies	Dimensions	Outdoor therapies
30 minutes to 1 hour. Contact is usually determined by availability rather than need. The consultation is fitted into everything else that happens on the day. The pace of life is maintained.	<----Time---->	There is a longer timeframe to explore actions and reactions, from one day to multiple days, weeks, even months, and consultation takes priority. Responses can be immediate, holistic, and systemic. The pace of life slows.
Office or room where the provider ‘owns’ the space and is understood to be the expert. The number of professionals tends to match or outnumber clients. This space is often experienced as hierarchical, confined, sometimes oppressive.	<-----Space---->	Neutral spaces in which both the facilitator and participant experience the same conditions. Space is often experienced as egalitarian, stimulating, and restorative. Participants tend to outnumber professionals.
A specific difficulty, disconnection or dysfunction is usually the focus of the interaction, with verbal communication and cognitive understandings dominating. The relationship is usually one to one. Both parties can maintain a role or facade for the short duration of the interaction.	Interactions and Relationships <----->	Individual health is often addressed as a whole within the broader experience. This is often informal, even non-verbal while both are involved in walking, cooking, or perhaps watching the stars at night. The longer time frames mean personal concerns are shared honestly, and ‘facades’ drop away.

experience: (1) Nature as place, (2) Nature as bodily-felt, (3) Nature as metaphor, and (4) Nature as co-therapist. We note that these concepts are best explored and enacted after establishment of a personal connection to nature first, just as the pedagogy and practices of OEE educators benefit from deep personal relationships with nature. They are offered as ways for educators to better support health and wellbeing for students, and ideas for consideration in planning and programming OEE experiences for students.

### 11.5 Activating Nature Within Outdoor Therapies

**Nature as place** The evolutionary role of nature is to provide a home, potentially a place of belonging, a place of opportunity, challenge, and nurture. One’s sense of place is inextricably linked to one’s sense of self, and how one comes to know a place can be facilitated in multiple ways. Raffan (1993) offered a typology of ‘ways of knowing a place’ which we have applied to the Outdoor therapy framework to connect humans with landscapes: experiential, toponymic, narrative, and numinous (Harper et al., 2012). Outdoor therapy practitioners facilitate experiences that allow for exploration and discovery of the environmental features, and of ourselves. Toponymic and narrative ways of knowing nature allow participants to learn place names, the species of place, and the histories of place, including Indigenous, settler,

newcomer, etc. The numinous way of knowing nature includes the spiritual bonds and special feelings of place established through experiences within it. Participants may come to describe places in nature as special places, attain place affinity or identity, or even recognize them as sacred places.

***Nature as Bodily Felt*** Outdoor therapy practices often include activities which contain elements of challenge, risk and adventure. These experiential practices engage the body and produce a state of mind different from everyday norms. Participants and practitioners experience body attunement to changing weather, terrain, physical and emotional reactions of others, and all live the feedback and consequences provided in nature. Corazon et al. (2011) posited that learning and change processes are accelerated through bodily engagement with the environment. In contrast with traditional therapeutic settings, participants and practitioners are engaged in movement and activity which often requires natural movements relative to the activity, terrain, and conditions; this shared ‘lived’ experience is very different from a conventional indoor talk-therapy experience.

***Nature as Metaphor*** Humans commonly use analogy or metaphor at times when we cannot clearly articulate what it is we are thinking or feeling. In Outdoor therapy settings, metaphors may be generated by the participant, the practitioner, or co-created, and are often derived from current lived experiences of the more-than-human world. Ideally, metaphors ‘emerge’ from participant responses to landscapes and experiences that parallel personal narratives and/or challenge individual stories (Harper et al., 2015). Last, the formulation and verbalization of metaphors is often privileged to those with cognitive abilities to do so, and so considering nature as bodily-felt, we must honour participant experiences of nature and our activities, and recognize and honour other ways of knowing, being and expressing. With this in mind, metaphors can be shared through other mediums with less verbal interpretation (e.g., art, song, dance, etc.).

***Nature as Co-therapist*** Time in nature provides consistent, clear and unambiguous feedback. When the wind picks up, you need to secure clothing and objects from getting blown around, making you cold, or reducing your ability to communicate with others over distances. There are always natural challenges inherent in experiencing the outdoors which can teach us lessons, support our learning, and in many ways provide us with the mentorship and care of a therapist. The concept of nature as co-therapist is becoming more commonly identified in the literature (Berger & McLeod, 2006; Harper, Rose, & Segal, 2019) and yet how these processes and relationships are established is largely unknown. What we can say with assurance, is that natural environments can be meaningfully engaged and impactful in both educational and therapeutic relationships.

While further exploration is needed to better understand the role of nature in Outdoor therapies, the next section identifies some additional research that

consolidates understandings of the human health and wellbeing benefits of accessing nature, whether that be within Outdoor therapy or OEE.

## 11.6 Mechanisms, Pathways and Benefits of Human Contact with Nature

Theorists and researchers from a broad range of scholarly fields have long posited that meaningful and appropriate contact with nature is a positive determinant of health. The body of literature—across health, science, medicine, landscape design, human services etc.—has remained diffuse, however recent efforts to consolidate this breadth of knowledge are valuable in capturing the diversity of evidenced benefits. For example, Mantler and Logan (2015) reviewed and reported on the nascent literature from the perspective that our ancestral minds and bodies may not remember how and why we innately desire to interact with nature for our own benefit, and how these drivers may be leveraged for clinical application. These authors shared a range of benefits of contact with nature: psychological (positive mental outlook, emotional stability, altruism, empathy, improved mood states), physiological (lower cortisol, sympathetic tone, inflammation, and improved blood pressure and heart rate variability, etc.), and cognitive (mitigation of cognitive fatigue, improved memory, reaction time, academic performance and logical reasoning, reductions in hyperactivity and/or inattention).

As a second example, the practice of *Forest Bathing* or *Forest Therapy*, originating in Korea and Japan, is underpinned by a significant and growing body of evidence which lends further support to the above reported psychological, physiological, and cognitive benefits, and advances the scientific understanding of the human-nature relationship related to health. Li and Kawada (2014) reviewed the curative and health enhancing effects of the forest therapy approach. Their conclusions include those already listed, as well as medical benefits such as cancer fighting properties (natural killer cells and intracellular anticancer proteins) of exposure to the pollens and essential oils from plants and trees, as well as properties of the soil from the forest floor. Research regarding the clinical applications of nature contact is advancing at a rapid rate and continues to highlight the breadth of benefits from nature. These findings locate nature as an ideal location for many preventative and treatment-oriented health approaches, from wellness to counselling, and the treatment of cancer and other sedentary lifestyle diseases (e.g., diabetes, obesity, and hypertension).

From a review of biomedical studies, prominent environmental health researcher Howard Frumkin et al. (2017) hypothesised that five mechanisms account for the majority of health benefits that come from human contact with nature: (1) psychological pathways, (2) enhanced immune function, (3) physical activity, (4) social contact, and (5) improved air quality. Frumkin et al.'s five mechanisms are

presented here for consideration in planning and programming outdoor experiences for students.

In relation to *psychological pathways*, Frumkin et al. (2017) cited studies that have shown nature contact results in reduced stress, restoration of directed attention, improved mood states, and the role of awe (sense of wonder, amazement, mystery). These are valued assets to assist in emotional self-regulation and executive functioning (Kaplan & Berman, 2010). In relation to *enhanced immune function*, these authors cited evidence that improved immune function accounts for the magnitude of observed health benefits and the specific health outcomes observed across all other possible pathways. *Physical activity in nature* was also identified as a plausible mechanism for many observed health benefits of nature contact, citing evidence in relation to the prevention and/or amelioration of obesity, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, diabetes, some mental illness, osteoporosis, gallbladder disease, and other conditions. Finally, Frumkin et al. (2017) cited research that identified a strong association between *social connectedness* to the extent that this mechanism may subsume some other associated health benefits. The benefits of *air quality* were also mentioned by these authors, who cited research on the generally superior air quality of rural or wilderness settings compared with urban settings, notwithstanding individual allergies within some natural environments.

Recent research in Australia identified four key mechanisms of change within bush adventure therapy experiences for participants (Pryor et al., 2019; Pryor et al., 2018). From an analysis of multiple data sources, key mechanisms were found to include: (1) physical activity through experiential adventures designed to meet participant needs, (2) mental and emotional safety and support, (3) facilitated social relationships and intentional conversations, and (4) time in nature. These four mechanisms were found to contribute to the majority of health outcomes achieved by program participants and helped to account for the breadth of outcomes reported. Such mechanisms are arguably also found in safe and effective OEE programs and contribute to health benefits for students in educational contexts.

This same body of Australian research led to articulation of causal pathways across biological, psychological, social and ecological domains, and a bio-psycho-socio-ecological outcome framework in Table 11.2 that may be useful for articulating some of the health benefits of OEE experiences. The bio-psycho-social-ecological outcome framework can be used to describe mechanisms of change, causal pathways and outcomes arising from Outdoor therapy or OEE experiences.

**Table 11.2** Bio-psycho-socio-ecological outcome framework

Mechanisms of change	Physical activity and embodied experiences	Mental and emotional engagement and support	Healthy social relationships and intentional conversations	Contact with nature and time in natural environments
Health and wellbeing benefits	Biological outcomes (physiological, neural and so on)	Psychological outcomes (mental, emotional and so on)	Social outcomes (peers, family, community and so on)	Ecological outcomes (cultural, spiritual and so on)



## 11.7 Principles for Enhancing Health Within Programmed Outdoor Experiences

While not descriptive of a single training pathway or accreditation process, with all their diversity, Outdoor therapies play a role across the continuum of public health-care, from health promotion and building wellness (prevention) through early intervention, treatment, continuing care and even palliative care. Outdoor therapies have a role to play in supporting the health of general populations, and specific roles with targeted groups at risk of, or already experiencing ill health. For many, Outdoor therapies will support the promotion of lifestyle changes to maintain health and wellbeing throughout the life course - just as OEE experiences provide. For others, Outdoor therapies will complement conventional therapies and treatment options or provide a stand-alone treatment option. We note that Outdoor therapies may *not* be a suitable option for all; for example, nature-based health services may be inaccessible, unaffordable, too logistically intensive to coordinate, too uncomfortable to engage in, or inappropriate or contraindicated (e.g., when surgery is needed, or a contained private space required for disclosure).

For those willing to contemplate engaging in nature-based practices, or for health practitioners seeking to refer individuals, couples or families to Outdoor therapy services, finding safe and effective providers may be difficult. To support such choices, Table 11.3 offers a list of attributes that have been found to underpin safe and effective Outdoor therapy services. We offer the list as a starting place for assessing the quality of Outdoor therapy services, and a set of guidelines for enhancing health outcomes within OEE program experiences. The reader is invited to consider how they could include each of these attributes in their design of safe and effective OEE experiences.

The content of this table has been developed through consultation over many years and is drawn from a literature review on outdoor adventure interventions, which combined research and practice-based evidence and ethical guidelines from the Australian Association for Bush Adventure Therapy (Pryor, 2018, p. 67–69). These principles can be applied to most outdoor programs whether they be for educational, environmental, or health outcomes, and encourage us all to strive for more effective and ethical outdoor programming.

## 11.8 Conclusions

The intersections between Outdoor therapies and OEE are as numerous as the ways in which all humans benefit from nature (under certain circumstances). Whatever the desired outcome, all outdoor facilitators need to reflect on and acknowledge the



**Table 11.3** Attributes of health-promoting outdoor experiences

Attributes	Health-promoting practices
Positive	Recognising participants' expertise in finding solutions to their own dilemmas helps support participant-driven change, and mobilises participants' capacity to determine their own preferred futures.
Inclusive	Holding a sense of curious fascination towards participants with different values, lifestyles, and relational patterns shows respect for diverse backgrounds and identities.
Integrative	Involving significant others and wider community members at strategic points can help to strengthen participants' social supports and extend benefits.
Collaborative	Relating with participants as experts in their own lives and as collaborative partners allows practitioners to maintain confidentiality while also working towards genuine informed consent, shared decision making and co-created solutions.
Voluntary	Enabling group experiences to be influenced by the needs and hopes of participating individuals enables genuine voluntary participation. If participation is mandatory, motivate participants to 'opt-in' for their own reasons.
Readiness based	Working in partnership with potential participants and significant others to determine individual suitability and timing of participation.
Responsive	Understanding participants' stories enables effective consideration of individual and group needs. Safe services are trauma-informed and responsive to participants' individual histories.
Holistic	Establishing a holistic safety net includes consideration of biological, psychological, sociological, and environmental risks and benefits. Participants are more likely to challenge themselves to grow and learn in healthy ways if they are grounded in feelings of safety and security.
Tailored	Designing effective group experiences involves consideration of individual needs and strengths. The benefits of healthy risk-taking are optimised when experiences are tailored, personally chosen and self-directed by individuals within a group context.
Flexible	Providing genuine options and choices for participants supports generative change. Participants benefit from opportunities to experience the direct consequences of their own actions, including the choice to opt out of participation or leave a program early.
Cultural	Building relationships with local traditional land custodians and asking permission before accessing or visiting places is as important as respecting the cultural heritage of participants, staff, and places.
Reflexive	Working to increase personal self-awareness as a practitioner, both in the moment and retrospectively raises safety and effectiveness.
Responsible	Safeguarding participants and staff from physical, psychological, social, cultural and environmental harm is our legal and professional duty of care, and safeguarding natural environments from harm is our ethical duty of care.

potential for physical harms (from bee stings and sunburns, to broken bones) – along with potential psychological harms of the outdoor experience. Because of their holistic and dynamic milieu, outdoor experiences have potential to trigger traumatic memories or responses from people who have experienced adversities such as neglect, abuse or other harms. Outdoor facilitators of all kinds need to be aware of the different ways their approach and style and chosen program design

may become unhelpful, unhealthy or even harmful if these possibilities are not considered and addressed.

On this point, we do not subscribe to any uncritical universal beliefs that ‘nature contact is a panacea’ or ‘all nature contact is beneficial’; these statements are soon grounded in the realities of spending time with others out-of-doors.

However, under ideal circumstances, when our aspirations are aligned with our participants’ needs and hopes, and when we can attune to the environment and what is happening in the moment, nature can be a powerful school, colleague and clinic. We need to remain present to the potential benefits of educational and therapeutic outdoor experiences and make use of principles and practices that promote safety and efficacy. Just as the theoretical basis, pedagogical processes and skills of OEE educators can assist nature-based health practitioners to facilitate experiences of growth and learning, this chapter has shared ways in which the underpinning theories, evidence and principles of Outdoor therapies can support OEE educators to enhance health and healing benefits of their programs for staff and students.

We welcome feedback on the necessary ingredients of legitimate, reputable, reliable Outdoor therapy services, and invite collaboration with OEE educators to better develop and activate the known and yet-to-know benefits of nature for health, wellbeing, and healing.

### Reflective Questions

1. Identify all the ways nature or outdoor settings influence your current practice?
2. We have shared a framework for sorting the health benefits of nature across areas of biological, psychological, social, and ecological well-being. Identify where the benefits of being outdoors fit for you.
3. Where within this framework would you place cultural wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing, or economic wellbeing?
4. As an outdoor educator, what are some of the ways you may enhance the health benefits for your participants?
5. As you reflect on Table 11.3, how might you incorporate some of the attributes into your pedagogies and practices as an outdoor educator?

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# Chapter 12

## Intentionality for Outdoor Educators



Glyn Thomas

### 12.1 Introduction

When outdoor educators lead or teach a group in the outdoors, they are required to make decisions on a constant basis about how they will lead and teach their students, to meet the aims of the program. For example: Should I try to run a debrief, or let the experience speak for itself? Does this student need more encouragement or do I need to back off? Should I confront that student for that racist slur privately, or with the whole group? I'm not connecting with this small group of students, do I raise this with them, or am I being oversensitive? For the purposes of this chapter, when an outdoor educator is able to explain the reasons for their actions, their practice can be described as being intentional. The aim of this chapter is to explore the concept of intentionality for outdoor educators, to consider what this means for pedagogical practice, and to examine some advantages and disadvantages of intentionality in outdoor education. There is not a strong focus in the outdoor education literature on the need for outdoor educators to describe how theory informs the pedagogical choices they make in the field, however, there are a few noteworthy exceptions which will be discussed in this paper. Before embarking on a more thorough exploration of this theory-practice relationship in outdoor education it is worth interrogating the very idea that theory can and should inform practice. Sociologist Anthony Giddens' (1984) *Theory of Structuration* provides a useful grounding for the rest of this chapter.

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## 12.2 Giddens Theory of Structuration

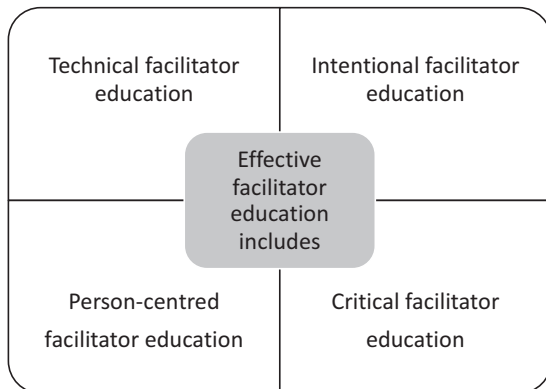
Giddens (1984) developed his Theory of Structuration to explain that not only is human behavior influenced by society and its structure, but that individuals also have the capacity to shape society and its structure. Although the writing of Giddens is largely indigestible for all but ardent students of sociology, he provides a framework for thinking about decision making that has relevance for all teachers, including outdoor educators. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex theory, one of the key practical implications is that as outdoor educators we don't just have to do things the way they have always been done, we can change the accepted norms, and improve our practice as a community. Giddens's three levels of consciousness explain how this is possible.

Giddens maintained that there are three levels of human action that contribute to the production and reproduction of social systems: *unconscious*; *practical consciousness*; and *discursive consciousness*. When an outdoor educator functions at the unconscious level he or she is not able to articulate the rationale or motive for an action he or she has taken. Giddens explained that this occurs "because there is a negative 'bar' of some kind inhibiting its unmediated incorporation within the reflexive monitoring of conduct" (Giddens, 1984, p. 49). At the second level of practical consciousness, an outdoor educator has only a tacit awareness of the reasons or motives behind actions and they have difficulty explaining what they know. When an outdoor educator is able to demonstrate discursive consciousness they are able to "give a coherent account of one's activities and the reasons for them" (Giddens, 1984, p. 45). These three levels of thinking and action are a useful tool for exploring how we make sense of what we do as outdoor educators.

Outdoor educators often choose to work in outdoor education because of its practical, 'hands-on' nature. Encouraging emerging outdoor educators to explore theory-practice relationships can be challenging and one of the dangers is that a narrow or technical view of theory may be adopted. Mahon and Smith (2019) suggest that from this technical perspective, theory and practice are viewed dichotomously, theory is only valued to the extent that it is practical, and theory is viewed as a set of procedures that can be applied formulaically. For example, this technical view is demonstrated when the philosophy of experiential education, aptly described by Dewey (1938), Itin (1999), and Simpson (2011), is reduced to a four-step experiential learning cycle while the potential for the rich philosophy to shape our values, beliefs and pedagogical practice is ignored. Although this shallow approach to considering theory may be a valid starting point for outdoor educators, it is reasonable to hope that they might move beyond this "methodising" (Mahon & Smith, 2019, p. 6) of theory. A deeper, and more critical, theory-practice relationship can help outdoor educators to contribute positively to the outdoor education community by fostering their own self-awareness, guided reflection, and reflexive dialogue (Clayton et al., 2014).

In my own research with facilitator educators (Thomas, 2008a, b), Giddens' (1984) work informed the development of a framework that was useful to categorise

**Fig. 12.1** The components of effective facilitator education



different aspects of the facilitator educators’ practice. A variation of that framework, shown in Fig. 12.1, can also help us understand how an outdoor educator can be developed or taught. In the model, *technical facilitator education* focuses on leading and teaching skills and strategies that would be helpful to the work of an outdoor educator. *Intentional facilitator education* is concerned with helping outdoor educators to understand the theories and values that can inform decision making and the use of technical skills and strategies. *Person-centered facilitator education* helps outdoor educators to understand that their attitudes, presence, and self-awareness have an impact on their students. Finally, *critical facilitator education* encourages outdoor educators to understand the political nature of outdoor education. My research reasoned that effective facilitator education incorporates all four of these approaches. In this chapter, it is the concept of intentionality that is of most interest.

### 12.3 What It Means to Practice Intentionally

Over the last three decades, there have been writers that have discussed the importance of intentionality across a range of fields including group facilitation, organizational development, and outdoor education. Ewert and Sibthorp (2014) dedicated a whole section of their text on outdoor adventure education to the discussion of theories and models that could underpin practice. They explain: “Masters of their craft ... understand *why* they are applying particular methods and skills to accomplish their goal. In education, the ‘*why*’ is recognized as the theories that guide practice” (p. 78, emphasis in original). As a small, emerging field, outdoor education lacks specific theories and models that have been developed for its specific context. Fortunately, theories and models from parent disciplines such as education, social work, and psychology can be adapted and applied to outdoor education (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014).

Brockbank and McGill (2007) argued that facilitators should be intentional, “in the sense that the facilitator is conscious of what she is doing and why” (p. 213),

which aligns well with Giddens' (1984) level of discursive consciousness. Intentionality can be demonstrated: in the dialogue outdoor educators use; through a demonstrated awareness of the process; by making otherwise hidden processes explicit; by developing an awareness of personal stances; and by modelling desired behaviours (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). Schwarz (2017), another facilitator educator, argued along similar lines that:

you not only need a set of methods and techniques but also an understanding of how and why they work ... you see the reasoning that underlies each technique and method ... you can improvise and design new methods and techniques consistent with the core values ... you can discuss your approach with clients so they can make informed choices about choosing you as a facilitator. (p. 9)

Schwarz (2017) was a participant in my own research on facilitator education, and he was very clear on the importance of intentionality for facilitators. He had three questions that he expected would guide emerging facilitators to follow to when facilitating:

1. Do you know what values and assumptions inform your practice?
2. Can you articulate them to clients so they can make a choice about whether they want to work with you?
3. Do you have a way of identifying and closing the gap between the values/assumptions you espouse to use and the ones that you actually use? (Thomas, 2008b)

In his third question, Schwarz was drawing on the language and ideas developed by Argyris and Schön (1996), whose work highlighted the difference between *espoused theory* and *theory-in-use*. Applying these ideas to outdoor education, espoused theory is the explanation an outdoor educator uses to describe what they do while leading or teaching a group in any given situation. In essence, espoused theory describes the thinking behind an outdoor educator's leading or teaching interventions — or their intentional practice. In contrast, theory-in-use is what actually guides an outdoor educator's actions when leading or teaching. When an outdoor educator is leading or teaching well, and they feel respected by their group and able to deal with their current situation, there may be no difference between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use. However, when an outdoor educator finds themselves in a more challenging situation where the overall conditions of favourability are lower, they may revert to a theory-in-use that is less helpful or effective for their group. The compounding problem is that the outdoor educator would likely be unaware of the inconsistencies between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use because they are caught up in the complexities of the situation. For example, if some members of my group are challenging my authority when I am leading in the outdoors, I may act defensively which would probably lead to an escalation in the conflict. Sadly, there have been many times when challenging group situations have resulted in my theory-in-use not being aligned with my espoused theory, which negatively impacted my effectiveness.



Clearly, it is preferable for outdoor educators to align their espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1996) and to work towards having a stronger self-awareness in situations where leading or teaching groups is challenging. However, creating something else to be worried about is not helpful for outdoor educators. My own research in group facilitation (Thomas, 2019) suggests that outdoor education groups don't need perfect leaders and teachers, but rather "they need 'good enough facilitators' who can be authentic and fully present" (p. 12). The call to be more intentional is not meant to provide additional sources of doubt and guilt to make the job of outdoor educators even more difficult. Rather, the move towards intentionality is a journey of improved self-awareness and greater clarity about why we lead and teach the way we do. Martin et al. (2006) seem to strike the right balance when they recommend that:

We learn our craft by understanding the foundations of or (*sic*) theories associated with leadership, group development, and facilitation. We learn by being self-aware – knowing our own abilities and limitations – by knowing how we interact with small groups of people and how we affect change in a larger organization. (p. 101)

As this chapter builds the case for intentional practice, it is worth pausing to question the validity of this call for rationality and logic. Is it possible that outdoor educators sometimes don't practice with intentionality, yet still do a good job of teaching and leading their students? The work of Schön (1995) and Gladwell (2005) can inform this critical reflection.

## 12.4 Can an Outdoor Educator Practice Without Intentionality and Still Be Effective?

Schön's (1995) writing on how professionals practice would suggest that it may be possible for an experienced outdoor educator to function effectively without being able to articulate clear rationales for their actions, thus operating at Giddens' (1984) level of practical consciousness. Schön's concept of a knowing-in-action acknowledges that not all practice can be justified using a verbal description, and that it is perhaps not useful to always require intentionality. Schön effectively argues the case for an acceptance of practical consciousness when professionals act and that "our bias towards thinking blinds us to the non-logical processes which are omnipresent in effective practice" (Schön, 1995, p. 52). Gladwell's (2005) exploration of effective decision-making can also improve our understanding of this bias towards thinking.

Gladwell (2005) called the part of our brain that allows for fast decision making the "adaptive unconscious" (p. 11) and it works quickly and quietly to process a lot of the data we need in order to function effectively as human beings. He described how "our snap judgements and first impressions can be educated and controlled" (p. 15). As a caution, Gladwell warned that there may be circumstances when



making quick decisions (what he calls rapid cognition) leads to poor decision making based on incorrect first impressions.

However, we are not helpless in the face of our first impressions. They may bubble up from the unconscious – from behind a locked door inside of our brain – but just because something is outside of awareness doesn't mean it's outside of control... . Our first impressions are generated by our experiences and our environment, which means that we can change our first impressions ... by changing the experiences that comprise those impressions. (pp. 96, 97)

Therefore, whilst it seems inevitable that rapid cognition or intuitive processes are likely to guide emerging facilitators, Gladwell (2005) argued there is no excuse for using them carelessly, and that we can learn to be more aware of the way that our practical consciousness can inform decision making.

My own research with facilitator educators suggests that one of the primary uses for intuition is that it can help an outdoor educator with hypothesis formation. If outdoor educators treat information gleaned through intuitive processes tentatively and use that information to form a hypothesis on what is going on for a group in the outdoors, they can then test the accuracy of that hypothesis with the group. For example, you are leading a multi-day paddling journey on a class III river. A number of students capsize in the morning and have unplanned swims in the cold river. Over lunch, you get a nagging concern in your 'gut' about continuing onto the more challenging section of the river in the afternoon. So, you decide to get the group together and check-in on how everyone is feeling. Unbeknownst to you, several group members are very tired after not sleeping well last night and indicate they would rather not paddle in the afternoon. Together, the group decides to set up camp and spend the afternoon doing some nature journaling. This would be an entirely defensible way for an outdoor educator to use their intuition, intentionally. The balance of this chapter will explain explore how an outdoor educator can increase their level of intentionality in their practice.

## 12.5 The Perils of Uncritically Copying Another's Practice

Schwarz (2002) warned aspiring facilitators of uncritically borrowing methods and techniques from other people and sources, because basing methods and techniques on conflicting values and principles can also lead to ineffectiveness. However, this is a pretty normal part of the development for most outdoor educators. One of the ways that we learn is to copy what we see other outdoor educators doing. This process has been described as an *apprenticeship of observation* (Lortie, 1975). Typically, emerging outdoor educators have been exposed to many examples of outdoor education leadership and teaching. However, the mentors or experienced practitioners that emerging outdoor educators are likely to model their own practice on, will not always have made explicit their reasons for doing what they were doing. Consequently, the danger of an apprenticeship of observation is that an emerging outdoor educator is not privy to the knowledge or theories that underpin their

mentor's actions. In the field of teacher education, this problem has been highlighted and pre-service teachers are encouraged to take a more critical perspective of all that they have observed and experienced of teachers throughout their education (Churchill et al., 2019).

The importance of aligning practice with theories and values is illustrated with the following example. When schools send students on outdoor education programs in Australia, it is common for a visiting teacher from the school to accompany the group and help lead the trip with an outdoor educator. Often, this shared leadership situation succeeds, particularly if the teacher has been on the program before. Other times issues can emerge. For example, an outdoor educator may intentionally allow a group of students to struggle with an activity in order to create a teachable moment. If the school teacher is more accustomed to using direct instruction pedagogies at school, they may find it difficult to watch the students 'waste time and energy' and they may want to intervene and 'rescue the group' from their struggles. This example illustrates the danger of assume that the theories and values that underpin outdoor education practice automatically align with those of the visiting teachers. This is not to suggest the theories and values of outdoor education are universal, or that they can't be learned. Naturally, if an outdoor educator is practicing intentionally, they will be able to share the reasons behind their teaching and leadership strategies with the visiting teacher at the start of the program. In the next section, I will focus on some practical steps that outdoor educators can take in their journey towards higher levels of intentionality.

## **12.6 Increasing Intentionality by Developing a Personal Leading/Teaching Philosophy Statement**

To improve an outdoor educator's intentionality, it can be helpful to develop a personal leading/teaching philosophy statement. Teaching philosophy statements are most commonly used within the higher education sector and their purpose is to "reveal what is hidden, yet essential, to understanding someone's teaching" (Pratt, 2005, p. 35). There is considerable literature available to guide the development of teaching philosophy statements (for example, Schönwetter et al., 2002), while others have developed practical tools to help teachers to write their statements (Coppola, 2002). Although these authors are describing teaching in more traditional classroom contexts, their recommendations are just as relevant to outdoor educators.

A personal leading/teaching philosophy statement will take some time and effort to craft, but will allow for discursivity, which is essential for job interviews, promotion applications, applying for teaching awards, or developing a new program. The statement typically includes some discussion of the following:

- Beliefs about learners, learning, leading, and teaching in outdoor education,
- Values that are important to leading and teaching,
- Principles and guidelines that guide practice,

- Expectations of students,
- Typical aims and goals for programs,
- Strategies and tactics to realise those aims and goals.

In the next section, I will share an excerpt from my own personal leading/teaching philosophy statement and describe how some of the theories and values that underpin my own intentionality.

## **12.7 An Excerpt from a Personal, Outdoor Education, Philosophy Statement**

The work of three key authors underpins my approach to teaching and learning and allows me to teach intentionally, the values, philosophy and theories of: experiential education (Dewey, 1938); person-centered education (Rogers, 1983), and learner-centered teaching (Weimer, 2013).

### ***12.7.1 Experiential Education***

Experiential education is a transactive process between an educator and a learner where carefully designed experiences and a process of reflection and critical analysis are used to extrapolate learning (Itin, 1999). I try to follow Dewey's (1938) lead by helping to develop critical thinking, self-motivated, problem-solving individuals who actively participate in their communities. I believe the learner needs to take some of the initiative, make decisions, and share the responsibility for the results or outcomes. Ultimately, my goal in an experiential education approach is to foster learner independence and reduce the learners' reliance on me as their teacher. Dewey was particularly interested in providing experiences that encouraged and motivated students to stay engaged in the learning process (Simpson, 2011). In order to keep my students engaged and to help them to become life-long learners, the experiences I provide must have a level of "agreeableness" (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). This doesn't mean that the experiences I provide are always fun, but they should leave students wanting to learn more.

### ***12.7.2 Person-Centered Education***

I have also been strongly influenced by the work of Rogers (1983) who emphasized the importance of the personal relationship between educators and learners. When I am teaching and leading, my goal is to be authentic with my students, modelling the reflective practice and critical thinking that I encourage my students to engage in,

treating all students with respect, and recognising that one of my main roles is to create an empathic climate in which learning can proceed. Maintaining an unconditional positive regard for my students is one of Rogers' key platforms which I aspire to maintain. In my view, student learning is also dramatically improved by optimising my inter- and intra-personal effectiveness. Glen Ochre (2013) was an experienced Australian facilitator educator and I agree with her key recommendation that I must learn to "first manage thyself" (p. 31). Improving my awareness of how I help or hinder the process has been a key focus of my own research and practice (Thomas, 2008a, 2019).

### ***12.7.3 Learner-Centered Teaching***

The way I lead and teach groups has also been influenced by Maryellen Weimer (2013) who identified five key principles of learner-centred teaching. As much as I can, I share with my students the decision making about how we are going to learn. Despite the initial resistance common with such redistributions of power, my students quickly adjust to, and appreciate, this role. In response to student feedback, I now cover less material and aim for more depth. I now use teaching content as the vehicle to develop my students' learning skills and their self-awareness of their learning. I have learnt to resist the temptation to use my experience and facilitation skills to provide tidy, entertaining activities. Rather, I now see my role as one of carefully crafting and facilitating learning experiences and providing opportunities for student discovery. I'm learning to embrace the messiness of learner-centred teaching. I share the responsibility for learning by giving students real choices and allowing the students to safely experience the logical consequences of those choices.

Ultimately, the work of these three authors has helped me to teach intentionally and provide educational experiences that aim to transform the lives of my learners and equip them with the capabilities to make the world a better place. I do not include these excerpts from my personal outdoor education philosophy statement in the hope that emerging outdoor educators would adopt the same values and philosophy. Rather, I hope that my statement encourages others to engage in a similar reflection on why they teach and lead the way they do, and to recognise the values, principles and theories that underpin their own practice. This is the essence of what it means to practice with intentionality.

## **12.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that outdoor educators should be intentional in their practice and be able to demonstrate Giddens' (1984) discursive consciousness. There are many advantages of being able to describe why we teach and lead the way we do. Intentionality improves our ability to communicate with others and can

guide our own reflexive practice. There is an abundance of theoretical frameworks and values that can inform and guide outdoor educators, but the challenge is to engage deeply with ideas and thinking and avoid falling into the trap of methodising (Mahon & Smith, 2019) those theories. The important role that intuition, or practical consciousness, can play in an outdoor educator's practice has been noted. If we privilege logic and rationality, and ignore the possibility for some knowing-in-action (Schön, 1995), we lose some of what it means to be human. Learning to embrace the tension and paradox between intuition and intentionality is part of what makes leading and teaching intriguing. Finally, I concur with Gladwell's (2005) assertion that we can educate ourselves about how we use intuition, which equates to using intuition with more awareness and intentionality. Hopefully, this chapter encourages outdoor educators to continue the developmental journey of practicing with higher levels of intentionality.

### Reflective Questions

1. Find an experienced outdoor educator that you respect and ask them what guides their practice. Why do they lead or teach the way that they do? Do their answers align with any of the three stages outlined by Giddens?
2. Reflect on your journey to becoming an outdoor educator. What values and beliefs underpin how you think outdoor education activities should be designed and facilitated. Can you draw on theories covered in this chapter to help ground your values and beliefs?
3. Who has most influenced or shaped your values and beliefs? Why have they had that influence on the way you want to lead and teach? As you reflect on their practices, are they leading from a place of intentionality or intuition or both?
4. To what degree, do you think intuition can be used to guide the leading and teaching strategies that an outdoor educator uses in their practice?
5. Write a short (500 words) personal outdoor education philosophy statement and ask someone you respect for feedback. In your essay, draw on at least one theorist whose work provides a rationale for your outdoor education practice.

### Recommended Further Reading

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# Chapter 13

## Digital Technology in Outdoor Education



David Hills and Glyn Thomas

### 13.1 Introduction

Should digital technology be included in outdoor education? This is the question that almost every outdoor educator has asked themselves as digital technologies like smartphones, have the potential to both distract and enhance the achievement of learning objectives (Cuthbertson et al., 2004). Smartphones are now commonplace for students, so outdoor educators also debate whether to exclude technology as well. These decisions can be complex for novice outdoor educators. This chapter will explore the issues of inclusion and exclusion of digital technology in outdoor education.

In this chapter, the term ‘technology’ refers to *digital* technology and is defined as anything that can record, store or present information (Curriculum, 2020). A compass, a tent and a waterproof jacket are recognised as technology, but as they are not digital, they are not the focus of this chapter. The term ‘outdoor learning experience’ refers to actually being outdoors in ‘the field’ as opposed to the term outdoor program, which may include classroom-based activities before or after the outdoor experience.

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### ***13.1.1 A Turbulent History of Technology and Outdoor Education***

Strong (1995) contributed to the early debate about the use of technology in outdoor education and he opposed the use of any technology, arguing that it detracts from the overall outdoor learning experience. In his opinion, technology “insulates one from the conditions of the place, smoothing out even the forbidding ruggedness of the crazies, narrowing one’s contact with them ... making wilderness an easily consumable package” (p. 8). The change of the millennium saw a rapid increase in the use of personal technology and smartphones became commonplace items for outdoor educators and students. Today, the use of educational technology is a well-established practice in classroom-based learning. However, the role of technology in outdoor education remains a debated topic. Recognising both sides of the debate, Cuthbertson et al. (2004) famously described technology in outdoor education as a “double-edged sword” (p. 1). Authors who support the use of technology argue that it can enhance the outdoor experience and create additional learning opportunities (Chia et al., 2019; French, 2016; Houge Mackenzie et al., 2017). They argued the use of technology further engages students in the outdoors and allows them to share their experiences on social media (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2017). Authors who contest the use of technology argue that it places a barrier between the student and the outdoor environment (Hills & Thomas, 2019; Hodges, 2017; Smith et al., 2016; Strong, 1995). They also argue that technology distracts students from the task or environment, for example, staring down at a smartphone screen in a unique environmental setting (Hodges, 2017).

This chapter will explore including technology, excluding technology, the pedagogical consequences, the pedagogical considerations and highlight a framework that could be used to make this decision.

## **13.2 Including Digital Technology in the Outdoor Education**

By understanding and making explicit the possibilities for inclusion, outdoor educators can consider the options available to them at the beginning of the session or program. Outdoor educators may choose to include technology before the outdoor experience, during the experience by; recording the experience, using location data; managing information; communicating with others, and post-experience reflection (Hills, 2019). These inclusions will now be explored.



### ***13.2.1 Before the Outdoor Experience***

The inclusion of technology before the outdoor experience is becoming commonplace with outdoor educators. This is less contentious than including technology in the outdoor experience as students are often already in a classroom or home setting with technology ready at hand. Outdoor educators are harnessing a wealth of websites and software to connect with students before their outdoor experience. Outside of the administrative and logistical functions, outdoor educators use technology to communicate the aims and goals of the program, information about the outdoor experience and collect information about the ability of the students. In planning for the outdoor experience, outdoor educators may utilise mapping applications like 'Memory Map' or 'Google Earth' with students to plan their journey, collaborate with other students and gather their own data upon the environment. This means that students are able to maximise their often limited, outdoor experience time and group formation can already occur remotely.

### ***13.2.2 Recording the Outdoor Experience***

The digital camera is currently the most common inclusion of technology that outdoor educators use in outdoor learning experiences (Hills, 2019). Outdoor educators record pictures and videos of the outdoor learning experience using digital cameras, smartphones, drones and point of view (POV) cameras. French (2016) used qualitative measures to evaluate the use of POV cameras in outdoor education and highlighted the advantages of outdoor educators recording outdoor experiences hands-free. This media can then be used by the student to give feedback on performance, gather information, enhance a reflection and share the outdoor experience. However, collecting media may not always be beneficial and stopping students for pictures during their outdoor learning experience may take something away from the natural flow of the activity. Students may also behave differently when they know that they are being filmed and when an outdoor educator is looking through a lens, they may be distracted from the rest of the students and the environmental conditions.

### ***13.2.3 Using Location Data***

Educators may use global positioning system (GPS) data through a phone app or stand-alone device. This aids outdoor educators and students in navigating their journey, communicating their position in an emergency and giving them feedback upon their map and compass skills (Veletsianos et al., 2015). Various tracking applications also use this data to provide journey metrics which can enhance a review

after the outdoor experience. However, accidents have been recorded after the failure of location devices when combined with poor map-reading skills by the outdoor educator. Whilst GPS devices are now more reliable, map and compass skills are still taught by outdoor educators and it is recommended that a physical map and compass is still carried as a backup.

### ***13.2.4 Managing Information***

A fourth common inclusion of technology in outdoor education are laptops and tablets which provide and record an almost unlimited amount of data during an outdoor learning experience. These devices have been shown to increase student-centred learning and are described as digital swiss army knives (Hodges, 2017). Over 1000 outdoor education apps are now available to students and outdoor educators for; identifying species, gathering information and live environmental conditions which has become essential information in high-risk environments like winter hill-walking (Hodges, 2017). On the other hand, laptops and tablets can provide too much information, and threaten the sense of adventure and hamper engagement with the natural world. Individuals can be distracted by other unrelated activities on these devices (for example, emails, and social media) disconnecting them from the environment and the activity.

### ***13.2.5 Communicating with Others***

Educators often choose to use technology to improve communication during outdoor learning experiences using smartphones and radios which has been shown to increase the safety of the outdoor experience in an emergency and allow outdoor educators to manage logistical issues easily. Furthermore, for some students, this technology allows them to maintain emergency contact with dependants allowing them to attend an outdoor program when they may have previously not felt comfortable being uncontactable. Smartphones have also been shown to connect urban youth to nature and engage them with the environment (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2017).

On the other hand, many authors actively oppose using phones in outdoor learning experiences and talking on a phone is the most common negatively referenced function of technology in outdoor settings (Shepherd, 2017). Historically, outdoor educators carried a separate device for recording media, location data, managing information and communicating with others. However, the smartphone is now becoming the all-encompassing device for these applications and is seen by many as an essential outdoor educator tool.

### ***13.2.6 Post-experience Reflection***

Reviewing is a key part of the outdoor education process (Chia et al., 2019) and data gathered from media, location data and digital field notes can be used effectively to recall the outdoor experience, discuss the outcomes, and consolidate student learning. Students also enjoy sharing media of their outdoor experience online and this has been shown to aid the transfer of learning from the outdoor environment. For the outdoor educator, technology can be used effectively after the outdoor experience to recognise the achievement of learning outcomes, promote outdoor education programmes to prospective students, advocate the values of outdoor education to key stakeholders. This is often an overlooked by-product of technology in outdoor education but an essential one to strengthen what is at times, an undervalued subject area within education. For the students, technology allows them to maintain connections with the outdoor educator and other group members to maintain connections well beyond the experience phase.

## **13.3 When Technology Is Excluded**

Smartphone addiction is now a recognised chronic condition and some have argued that it has never been more important to disconnect students from technology and re-connect them with the environment (Shepherd, 2017). For many outdoor educators, outdoor education is best experienced by students without technology (Smith et al., 2016) and others also argue that the outdoor educator's use of technology should be minimised (Hills, 2019).

### ***13.3.1 Student Use of Technology***

Technology is often excluded by removing a student's phone or smart watch and by asking students not to bring music players, digital cameras, tablets or laptops. For many students, this is often regulated by the educational institution and technology is more commonly excluded in programs with students under the age of 18. It is also recognised by many outdoor educators as good practice to manage the expectations of the students by explaining why their personal technology is being excluded, how it is stored safely, and what they can do if they feel that they need to access it for pre-approved reasons negotiated with the outdoor educator. Clearly, some students use phone-based apps to manage medical conditions or mental health issues and in these cases the outdoor educator cannot exclude the use of phones for those students.

### ***13.3.2 Outdoor Educator's Use of Technology***

If the student's personal digital technology has been excluded, the outdoor educator should be aware of when and how they use their own personal digital technology in front of students in the outdoor experience. Regardless of how important some uses are, an outdoor educator looking down at their phone is often *perceived* by students as hypocritical and an example of disengaging from the experience. Some outdoor educators manage this by explaining to student's what they are using their personal technology for in the outdoor experience, by consciously limiting smartphone use in front of students, and by managing the notifications that they receive. Having explored both the inclusion and exclusion of technology, we will now discuss some of the pedagogical consequences of these decisions in outdoor education.

## **13.4 Pedagogical Consequences of Including and Excluding Technology**

Regardless of the decision to include or exclude technology, it is likely there will be both intended and unintended consequences of technology integration (Thomas & Munge, 2017).

### ***13.4.1 Intended Consequences***

One of the key goals of including technology is to create additional opportunities that enhance learning (Puentedura, 2019). Sometimes, when technology is included in a program it creates new opportunities for learning that would have not been otherwise possible. This process is described by Puentedura as *redefinition*. For example, recorded media of a mountain bike session creates new opportunities for students to evaluate their own performance that would otherwise not be possible without technology. On the other hand, when outdoor educators exclude technology, the disconnection from personal devices can increase the students' immersion in the environment and improve engagement with other students (Smith et al., 2016). These are good examples of intended consequences.

### ***13.4.2 Unintended Consequences***

If the pedagogical considerations outlined earlier are not fully explored by the outdoor educator, unintended consequences may occur (Thomas & Munge, 2017). Digital distraction is now a recognised behaviour in education (Curriculum, 2020)

and is characterised by students being fully engaged and immersed in technology in a way that is unrelated and irrelevant to the education task. This can be a greater issue outside of the classroom and an espoused benefit of outdoor education is the chance to experience a completely different pedagogy. Students may resent completing tasks on their tablet when they are in a unique outdoor environment, if they could have completed that task earlier in a traditional classroom environment. It is simply not the best use of the learning environment.

On the other hand, removing a student's personal digital technology like their smart phone may create more negativity, disorganisation and anxiety for student which can negate the overall gains of removing this device. Technology exclusion in outdoor education is often only seen as positive and further research is needed to identify unintended consequences of technology exclusion.

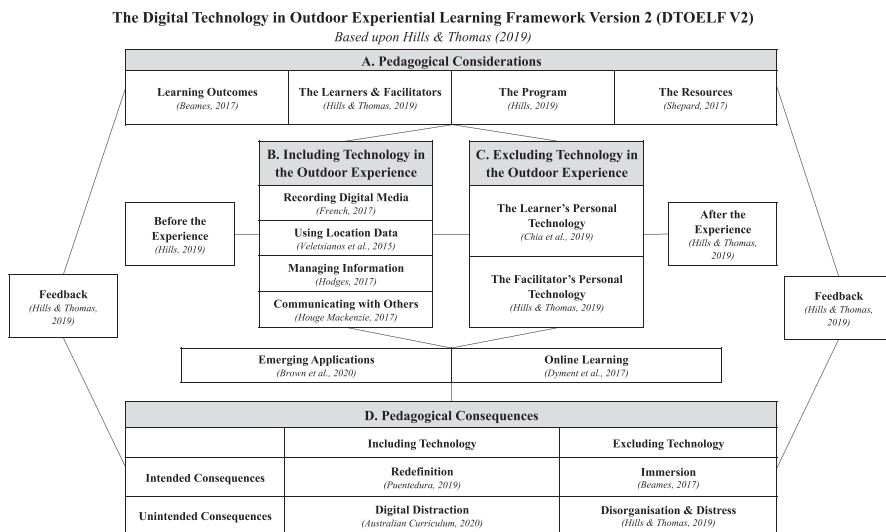
A gross limitation here is that the pedagogical consequences of technology integration in outdoor education are highly subjective to the outdoor educator. What is seen as an 'enhancement' by one outdoor educator, may be seen as a 'distraction' by another. Further research is needed to explore how an outdoor educator knows that their decision to include or exclude technology in outdoor education has been effective. Regardless of the pedagogical consequences, a good outdoor educator will review the results of their decision to include or exclude technology and use this to inform their next decision.

A key limitation of the arguments made for both the inclusion or exclusion of digital technology in outdoor education are that they are almost entirely based on the personal opinions of the authors and not empirically derived evidence. Given the paucity of the evidence, a recently published framework provides a more robust lens for making this decision and is particularly useful for early career outdoor educators. This framework will now be explored.

## 13.5 A Framework for Decision Making

The discussion that follows in this chapter is guided by the components of the Digital Technology in Outdoor Experiential Learning Framework (version 2) as shown in Fig. 13.1, and is based on an earlier version developed by Hills and Thomas (2019).

Working through the framework in Fig. 13.1, we begin at section A by exploring the pedagogical considerations that outdoor educators may consider when deciding to include or exclude technology. Sections B and C address how outdoor educators can include and exclude technology in outdoor education and Section D highlights the potential pedagogical consequences of these decisions. This framework provides a helpful lens to understand the complexities around including and excluding technology and offers a systematic process to make a decision.



**Fig. 13.1** The digital technology in outdoor experiential learning framework version 2 based on Hills and Thomas (2019)

### 13.6 Pedagogical Considerations When Including or Excluding Technology

For the remaining part of the chapter, we will discuss the pedagogical considerations of choosing weather to include or exclude digital technology in Outdoor Education. This framework will be especially helpful for early career outdoor educators as they grapple with complex decisions about the use of technology in their outdoor education experiences by identifying the pedagogical consideration.

A helpful starting point for figuring out if technology is appropriate in OE settings is to reflect on the pedagogical considerations which are the underlying principles behind any teaching and learning decision. The four key considerations that educators should consider are highlighted in the Framework (in Fig. 13.1) and include: the aims and learning outcomes; the characteristics of the students and outdoor educators; the stage of the program; and the resources available. We now discuss how early career educators can consider these four factors in their decision.

#### 13.6.1 Aims and Learning Outcomes

When deciding whether to use technology, it is essential to understand that the programme aims and learning outcomes are the primary considerations underpinning the decision to include or exclude technology. All decisions must be evaluated

according to their impact on student learning (Beames, 2017; Thomas & Munge, 2017). Different types of learning outcomes may be more suited to technology than others. For example, the achievement of skills and knowledge outcomes, for example, analysing a kayaking performance or identifying plant species, may benefit from using a tablet. On the other hand, interpersonal or environmental connection outcomes may be limited by the introduction of technology.

A key limitation here is that sometimes the program learning outcomes may not be formalised, explicit, agreed on by all outdoor educators, or communicated to students. Heated debates on technology use in outdoor education, may simply reflect different ideas on what programs (and the outdoor educators facilitating them) are trying to achieve in the outdoor learning experience.

### ***13.6.2 The Characteristics of the Students and Outdoor Educators***

The student's ability to use technology is another key consideration that educators must contemplate. If students are unable to work the device and have to spend valuable time in the outdoor experience, learning its functions, the technology becomes the focus as opposed to the outdoor environmental experience itself.

The outdoor educators' knowledge of technology has been suggested as a vital predictor of successful technology integration in outdoor learning experiences (Hougham et al., 2018). If an outdoor educator feels confident with technology, then it is more likely that they will include it in their program (Hills & Thomas, 2019). In some situations, the technological confidence and abilities of the students exceeds that of the outdoor educator, and this may create tension during the program. Whatever the device being used, outdoor educators must ensure that they are confident with its applications and limitations before including it in the outdoor learning experience.

### ***13.6.3 The Stage of the Program***

Effective technology inclusion or exclusion in outdoor education may be subject to the stage of learning or part of the program. If technology is applied in the 'experiential' or the 'outdoor experience' phase, then technology may add another human-dominated layer between the student and the environment (Chia et al., 2019). However, if technology is included in the reflection phase, it may be effective for students to recall the outdoor experience and engage in meaningful discussion. When authors discuss technology integration in outdoor learning, sometimes it is unclear if they are referring to the outdoor learning experience specifically, or the

outdoor education program as a whole. With advances in technology integration before and after the outdoor experience, this is an important distinction to make.

### ***13.6.4 The Resources Available***

Finally, the number of devices and the quality of the infrastructure available will have an impact on decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of technology (Shepherd, 2017). A single tablet or GPS device may not be enough to effectively engage a whole group and signal strength may affect the overall functionality of devices and their application. Moreover, the lack of signal strength and disconnection that attracts many to the outdoors in the first place may actually be limiting the potential of the program, if technology integration is part of the learning outcome.

In summary, when considering technology, a good outdoor educator will be objective and examine the learning outcomes, the characteristics of the students and outdoor educators, the stage of the program and the resources available before deciding to include or exclude a digital device. This avoids the aforementioned limitation of including or excluding based upon opinion alone.

## **13.7 Emerging Applications for Future Consideration**

At the time of writing, technology giant Apple are planning the release of ‘Apple Glass’ which is a pair of glasses with an inbuilt display known as augmented reality. Powered by a smartphone and ‘hands free’, augmented reality is likely to be the next ‘disruptor’ as wearable technology continues to expand in popularity (Brown et al., 2020). Unlike the discontinued ‘Google Glass,’ Apple’s product may not feature an outward camera but instead a LIDAR sensor for hand gesture control and a dual display. Apple Glass may enhance outdoor environmental programs by allowing outdoor educators and students to operate ‘hands free’ (like POV cameras) displaying location metrics and environmental information augmented over reality. However, there could be severe safety consequences if it impeded an outdoor educator’s vision of their group or key environmental cues.

Historically, online learning has had little application in outdoor education however with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, online education has been embraced by outdoor education programs. There are two main types of online learning; synchronous, where students learn with outdoor educators at the same time through webcams and asynchronous where students complete pre-recorded videos and resources at different times. We are not suggesting that online learning might, or should, ever replace an outdoor experience, but outdoor educators have reported some successful integration of online learning into outdoor education programs (Dyment et al., 2017) especially in skills- and knowledge-based components. Further development of online learning resources could be valuable to outdoor



educators in the case of a second major pandemic and more research is needed in this area.

## 13.8 Conclusion and Future Directions

The aim of this chapter was to explore the inclusion and exclusion of digital technology in outdoor education. The literature included in this chapter suggests that aside from safety, there are few formalised systems to help outdoor educators make the decisions on whether to include or exclude technology in outdoor learning experiences. We would argue that, by engaging with a structured framework, an outdoor educator's decision to include or exclude technology will be:

- Evidence-based with due consideration of the pedagogical considerations,
- Systematically implemented considering safety and pedagogical implications,
- Critically evaluated for future decision making.

Following these steps may help to ensure that the focus of the program remains the environment and the learning as opposed to the technology itself.

As a new and emerging area, outdoor educational technology requires more empirical research to validate the inclusion and exclusion of technology in outdoor education. There is little research on categorising the intended and unintended consequences of technology integration and there are no published studies on the negative effects of technology exclusion in outdoor education. With the emerging applications identified in this chapter, outdoor educators must be cognisant of developments in technology and proactive to ensure that the threats of new technologies are minimised, and the opportunities are optimised.

### Reflective Questions

1. What are the biggest opportunities and threats of technology in outdoor education in your program?
2. Can you think of an example of effective technology integration in an outdoor education program?
3. Can you articulate exactly how your example in question 2, actually contributed to the learning outcomes?
4. Have you ever excluded technology in the field with your students and regretted it?
5. How do you know if your decision to include or exclude technology was effective and how might you use the framework V2 to support your decisions?

### Recommended Further Reading

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# Chapter 14

## Journeying in Outdoor and Environmental Education



Pete Allison and Tim Stott

### 14.1 Introduction

In this chapter we examine the use of journeys in outdoor and environmental education as a vehicle for learning. As can be seen from the previous sentence the journey metaphor is embedded in our language and our ways of thinking, at least in the Western World. The chapter begins with a brief summary of historical expeditions of significance. We then provide an overview of research on the short- and long-term benefits of expeditions in a range of contexts including mountaineering, canoeing, sailing, hill-walking and cycling. Finally, we conclude with a consideration of the challenges to undertaking journeys, particularly those which may be long and adventurous. This chapter will be of interest to undergraduate students as expeditions and journeys are used in many outdoor and environmental education programmes. Knowing some of the key events in history and the current debates will help both understanding the sector and practice in different contexts.

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## 14.2 History and Perspectives on Journey Metaphors

In many cultures around the world there is a tradition of journeys with a variety of different rationales. One early example comes from the Bedouin in the deserts of the middle east who continue to live nomadic lifestyles following the seasons so they can harvest food. The Bedouin passed on stories of people and places around the campfire at night long before radios and television were available. In Australia 'going walkabout' originates in Aboriginal culture as a rite of passage to transition from youth in to adulthood. In the UK there is a strong history of exploration in the polar regions and beyond. Well known from this tradition are explorers such as Shackleton and Scott and later Watkins and Fiennes in the Polar regions and Hilary and Norgay on Everest. The lists go on but these are just brief examples. It would be remiss not to mention one famous Norwegian zoologist Fridtjof Nansen who was also an explorer, passionate skier and Nobel prize winner. He is also widely considered to be the founding rather of *Friluftsliv* (see Chap. 9). In many respects Nansen was responsible for introducing journeys into the Norwegian psyche and social cultural fabric which continues to this day.

It is possible to go on with examples of explorers from different countries for a long time but the point here is to provide a few illustrative examples so that readers can identify people from their respective countries and socio-cultural traditions. Readers who are interested in the history of expeditions are encouraged to follow references and further reading at the end of the chapter.

After reading this chapter you should be able to identify explorers from your own country and maybe even other countries too. The golden thread running through these individuals and traditions is journeys (or expeditions) and the insight that there are often benefits to them beyond the intended or stated purpose such as mapping or collecting specimens. The metaphor of the outward journey or expedition with the journey that all humans navigate through life is perhaps the most striking metaphor present in outdoor education. Thus, the use of journeys and navigation in outdoor education is foundational and can be seen in many different practices around the world whether it be a short half day walk (journey) or a 6-week expedition by sail, paddle, bike or on foot. It is easy to see the tradition of journeys continuing today building on these historical antecedents in organisations such as Outward Bound International, Sail Training International, numerous gap year organisations around the world and with organisations such as The Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG), UK; The Young Explorers Trust (YET), UK; Wilderness Education Association (WEA), USA; The Explorers Club of New York, USA.

The journey metaphor can also be seen through the use of pedagogical tools – such as teaching map reading. Explicitly this appears as a skill to acquire but is also a metaphor for finding one's way and making decisions in life. Tom Smith (1980) referred to this relationship as the *Wilderness Beyond and the Wilderness Within*. We go to the wilderness beyond to explore the wilderness within us, as part of our personal growth journeys. One interesting aspect to journeys is that they often create an

unpressured environment where conversations can unfold at the pace of different individuals and incorporate reflection, deeper dialogue and lighter discussions at a rhythm that is often reflected in activities throughout days ... cooking meals, pitching tents, walking, canoeing, cycling, sailing and so on. Working with individuals in groups in these contexts requires an inter- and intra-personal awareness of leaders which is demanding and a specific skill set (Allison & Von Wald, 2010).

### **14.3 Journeys Are a Fundamental Component of Outdoor and Environmental Education**

The execution of journeys has traditionally been a fundamental component of Outdoor and Environmental Education in schools, colleges, universities and voluntary organisations. Virtually all higher education (HE) outdoor programmes have some form of physical journey, expedition or fieldwork embedded within them (e.g. See Stott, 2016). demonstrate technical and teaching competence. Many education syllabi require candidates to undertake journeys.

Since the first journeys and expeditions were undertaken for educational purposes in the 1920/30s many aspects of outdoor education have changed. Today, journeys and expeditions can be cheap or expensive depending on people, places and purposes and can be connected with other forms of outdoor education which have become vogue such as place based education, urban outdoor education, low cost and low risk education, but they remain popular and valuable.

### **14.4 Benefits of Journeys – Research**

Examples in the previous section suggest that journeys or expeditions must have some value or give some benefit, otherwise why are they important? Here we discuss research undertaken by key researchers (over the past 5 years) who have been pivotal in revealing the benefits of journeys – evidence to support beneficial outcomes to individuals who undertake journeys and expeditions, of both long and short duration. Researchers have consistently identified benefits across multiple domains including intrapersonal and interpersonal (Allison & Von Wald, 2010; Smith, 1980), health and fitness (Allison et al., 2018), careers/professional (Ramirez et al., 2020), developing an ethic of service (Ramirez et al., 2020), moral (Marshall et al., 2019) and environmental (Stott et al., 2015).

Stott et al. (2015) focussed on post-1990 literature and found 35 key publications which met their inclusion criteria: youth expedition; duration exceeding 14 days; self-propelled; and based overseas or out-of-state. Their thematic analysis on these 35 research papers found that youth expeditions were associated with a range of benefits for participants. Using Greenaway's (1998) 'Four Arrows' model of

personal growth, Stott et al. (2015) identified outcomes associated with overseas youth expedition participation to be: (1) upward personal growth (realising potential) including increased confidence; physical and social resilience; self-reliance and ability to overcome challenges, (2) outward personal growth (learning about & relating to others), (3) inward personal growth (learning about self) and (4) downward personal growth (learning about environment). The processes that were valued in overseas expeditions and which, with some caution, may be linked with some of the aforementioned outcomes included: genuine independence; group isolation and self-sufficiency; person-centred leadership; positive responses to stress and physically demanding activity.

## **14.5 Personal Growth & Development**

Perhaps one of the most oft-cited benefits of journeys relates to the personal growth and development that emerges during and after journeys. Personal growth is often used interchangeably with personal development and refers to a loose collection of benefits sometimes referred to as non-cognitive benefits. These terms have been operationalised using multiple measurement constructs. A recent study by Allison et al. (2018) used four measures of personal development to assess changes in young people aged 15–22 who participated in six of the British Exploring Society's summer expeditions which lasted either 3 or 5 weeks, and took place in either jungle, desert, polar or mountain environments. A survey developed from four questionnaires measured leadership skills, GRIT (a surrogate for passion and perseverance; Duckworth, 2016), coping strategy use, and mental toughness. Participants completed the survey within 1 month prior to leaving on the expedition, within 1 month of returning and 3–4 months later. 58 participants completed all three surveys at pre, post and delayed time points. These responses used for the main analysis found changes both quantitatively and qualitatively with regard to personal development and concluded that for most people the experiences were significant in positively influencing mental toughness, GRIT and leadership to succeed, and ability to work as part of a team.

### ***14.5.1 Short or Long-Term Benefits of Longer Journeys or Expeditions?***

Stott et al. (2015) provided evidence of short-term benefits of expeditions but also highlighted a gap in research regarding the longer-term benefits – approximately 2 years or more. This is ironic given the repeated claim that these are 'life changing' experiences. If that claim is to be believed, then one might expect evidence of

people reporting the long-term influence of taking part in expeditions. Recent studies have started to address this gap.

First, Ramirez et al. (2020) drew upon three retrospective studies (looking back to 40 years or more) that explored the perceived long-lasting influence of expeditions in participant's lives. One study researched the perceptions of former participants of Class Afloat, a sailing voyage of one or two semesters, involving high school students (with 1–27 years of retrospection). The second study researched the long-term outcomes of three canoe and mountaineering high school expeditions organised by the staff and students of a Scottish high school in the 1970s (with 40 years of retrospection). The third study researched the perceived long-lasting influence of a British Exploring Society expedition (with 5–70 years of retrospection). While the settings of each study differed, all identified three common enduring outcomes of youth expeditions: increased confidence; learning about oneself; and learning about others. British Exploring Society expedition participants reported that the expedition (which was based in a wilderness area) increased their environmental awareness and appreciation for nature and the outdoors. Participants of the other two expeditions identified the themes of gratefulness and service – they were appreciative of the opportunity and wanted to give back to others what they had received. The ex-students of the Scottish high school also identified planning and preparation as another important outcome. So, research evidence is now beginning to accumulate to suggest that journeys (here called expeditions) have a number of long-term beneficial outcomes.

Second in their systematic review of research on sail training, Schijf et al. (2017) identified 18 research studies meeting their inclusion criteria and found evidence that participants experienced a positive long-term effect in regard to personal and social domains. However, they also identified methodological weaknesses (over reliance on a limited set of methods) and that there was limited demographic information available impacting generalizability of findings. Finally, they concluded that while the evidence was broadly supportive of general claims regarding the value of Sail Training as a form of youth development, the research was non-cumulative and lacked coherence. Sail Training International is the umbrella organisation coordinating provision around the world and organising the Tall Ships Races annually. Sail Training is a form of outdoor education that involves using traditional sailing vessels for journeys (ranging from day sails in protected waters to year-long voyages across oceans) for the purposes of learning to sail (skill development), curriculum contributions (connections to schools), personal development and cross-cultural learning.

Third, in a retrospective study examining perceptions of programme alumni from a tall ship sailing study school, Marshall et al. (2019) analysed participant reflections to understand how the experience was perceived as catalysing or accelerating personal growth (including self-determination, responsibility, attentional flexibility, discipline, courage, moderate self-awareness, perspective, and realistic optimism) and social growth (including friendship, community, care for the other, empathy, humility, and loyalty). Participants largely identified the impact of the sailing program to be significant in paradigmatic ways, leading to personal and social



growth which extends far beyond the experience itself. Importantly, the perception of significance did not appear to wane over time. Alumni connected habit formation to physical routines/rhythms practiced through ship duties. Reflective pauses from the bustle of activity – both contextual and programmatic – allowed participants to practice reflecting on their own values in light of their experience. The sailing program appears to accelerate the practice of these reflective virtues. Moving from loneliness to community, respondents consistently identified several significant conditions for cultivating friendship and community building: proximity, time, and shared goals. This whole study was a correlated attempt to assess their perceived personal and social growth understood through a neo-Aristotelian lens.

### ***14.5.2 But What Are the Benefits of Shorter Journeys of Duration from Perhaps an Hour to a Day?***

Much of the research cited so far in this chapter examines the impacts of journeys that are extended – multi day, week or even months in duration. But what about shorter journeys? Do they reap the same benefits? In the next section we look at shorter journeys.

Perhaps the most fundamental and frequent means of making journeys is on foot. For most people walking is the most accessible and cheapest way to make a journey as it requires no capital investment in a machine like a bicycle or car – all you need is a pair of shoes. One benefit of walking over other more sedentary means of journeying (e.g. car or public transport) is the physical activity or exercise. However, there is now a growing body of evidence that walking can have benefits for a person's mental health too. Research in the UK from the Sport England Active People Survey estimated that >23 million people (over 14 years of age) took part in recreational walking which was 58% of the population in 2014, whilst in Scotland this was between 79% and 88% of the population. In the US Bowker et al. (2012) projected that there will be a 45–82% increase in the number of days people will go hiking between 2008 and 2060 – so walking is popular and will continue to become more popular in future.

Morocza et al. (2019) conducted research on leaders and guests of a UK walking holiday company. Walking interviews were conducted with 17 volunteer walk leaders and these were complimented with physical activity measurements, location data and the Nature-relatedness scale. Five group interviews were also conducted with a total of 25 guests on three different walking holidays. Primary motivations for hill-walking included pleasure, escape from everyday life pressures, to recharge, being in nature, social inclusion and health. The perceived benefits positively impacted on engagement. Connectedness to nature was linked to environmental knowledge and attitudes which manifested in pro-environmental walking behaviour. The findings have the scope to inform future walking promotion programmes and to encourage long-term engagement by shifting the focus of promotion

messages to intrinsic motivational factors. The results support that hill-walking can be used as a tool for combined health and environmental awareness promotion.

Prince (2020) carried out a systematic review of papers published since 2015 and compiled evidence on the lasting impacts (>12 months) of outdoor residential experiences for young people in the UK. Thematic and comparative analysis showed the lasting impacts to be: self-confidence, independence and communication. Participants also identified confidence, teamwork, life skills, intra-personal skills and the take up of new opportunities/activities as the impacts of use in young people's lives since their residential experience. The intensity and challenge of the outdoor adventure residentials, and the power of groups influenced longer lasting impacts. These findings from large datasets across a range of contexts have implications for funders and policy makers for the provision of outdoor adventure residentials for young people.

## 14.6 Challenges for Journeys?

As is the case for all practices in outdoor and environmental education there are challenges for using journeys. We now turn to an exploration of the key challenges...

### 14.6.1 *Risk: Real and Perceived*

As is the case for all practices in outdoor and environmental education there are challenges for using journeys. One of the biggest barriers might be perception of danger. Many people are anxious about the 'unknown' associated with going outdoors and often this is exacerbated by images communicated in the media. When creating marketing materials or speaking to prospective participants it is important to keep this in mind and adjust messaging accordingly. There are risks in all aspects of outdoor education and risk management is an essential component of journey planning and leadership. Perhaps we should remember that some journeys are deliberately undertaken as 'adventures', and that an adventure is an exciting or unusual experience which may be a bold, usually risky undertaking, with an uncertain outcome. (see Chap. 8)

### 14.6.2 *Time*

A second consideration is that as people's lives seem to get faster and faster there are increasing pressures to fit more in to shorter time periods. For example, Outward Bound course lengths in the 1940s courses were normally 28 days. Today the majority of courses are 5 days long. British Exploring Society expeditions were

traditionally 6-weeks in length, today participants are offered a choice of a 5-week or 3-week expedition. This means that using journeys can be challenging as they often rely on having time for conversations to unfold and operate at a different pace to many other practices which often involve no more than half day ‘episodes’.

### **14.6.3 Cost**

It is common for people to critique outdoor education more generally for being expensive and therefore discriminating against those who, arguably, might benefit most from the experiences. Some argue that cost is the biggest barrier to participation in outdoor education but the evidence to support this is, at best, mixed. One response to this argument is that all young people are equally ‘in need’ or ‘at risk’ but the needs and risks manifest themselves in different ways for individuals which may be influenced by socio-economic status. Notwithstanding these arguments regarding distribution of resources, many sectors of outdoor education have tried to address inequalities by offering programmes with scholarships or bursaries (e.g. Sail Training International, Next Generation programme of The British Exploring Society), making strategic priorities to work with ‘hard to reach’ youth. For example, the Duke of Edinburgh Award in Scotland works in prisons with young people – as part of an impressive spectrum of provision.

### **14.6.4 Environmental Impact**

Another challenge that outdoor educators must grapple with is the tension that arises when groups inevitably have an impact on the environment. All journeys have some type of impact on the environment. Impacts can range from trampling the ground (soil and vegetation), to disturbing wildlife and, for motorised journeys, emitting gases which can contribute to climate change. For further detailed discussion on this, Huddart and Stott (2019) have written a book with 17 chapters on the environmental impacts of outdoor recreation.

Transport produces around one third of the global anthropogenic release of CO<sub>2</sub>. Figure 14.1 is a schematic showing the relative impact of different modes of transport in terms of the CO<sub>2</sub> emission per passenger per km travelled. According to Fig. 14.1, as students of outdoor and environmental education, we should really be trying to walk, cycle and canoe as much as we can, then if we need to go further afield, we should try to use public transport (trains, buses) and only drive, go by ferry/ship and fly when absolutely necessary. Perhaps, if we do travel by air, we should be trying to limit the number and length of flights, and when we get to our destination, it makes sense if we can stay for longer. Hopefully technological advances like solar airplanes will allow long distance travel to become carbon neutral in the future.

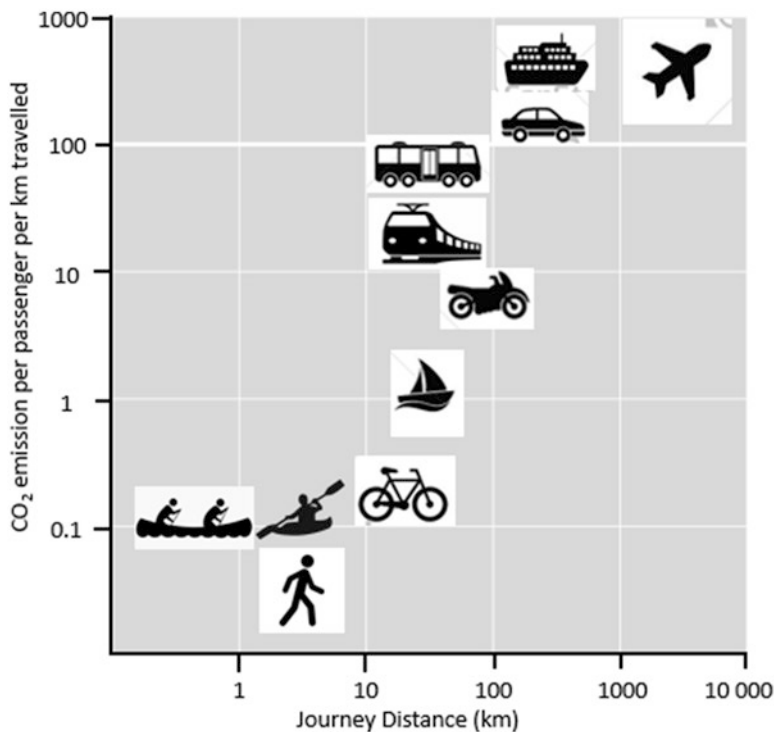


Fig. 14.1 Schematic showing the relative impact of different modes of transport in terms of the CO<sub>2</sub> emission per passenger per km travelled and distance travelled. (© Drawn by T. Stott)

### 14.6.5 Coming Home Can Be Hard

Educators must also consider how people feel and adapt back to normal life after a period away on a journey or residential programme. Allison et al. (2011) coined the term ‘expedition reverse culture shock’ (ERCS) and reported a range of different responses to returning to ‘home communities’ including a sense of isolation, extending lessons from the group, using the group as a compass for the future suggesting that educators using journeys have a responsibility to support participants through the transition post expedition as this is often where value reflections are particularly emphasised.

### 14.6.6 Genuine Learning?

A final challenge to outdoor journeys is convincing decision makers and people in authority of their value. Leaders and managers of schools, colleges, universities and voluntary organisations, who may be challenged to make the best use of their

overstretched financial budgets, might argue that taking pupils/students on journeys doesn't constitute 'genuine' learning. They might believe that they are just fun and don't fit in and around neo-liberal agendas of education with a focus on numeracy, literacy, standardized testing? They are just optional 'extras' to the serious business of schools? We hope that having read this chapter, that you now understand the value, importance and benefits of journeys as an important 'educational tool'. We hope that you would be able to make a robust argument to justify the inclusion of journeys in an education curriculum.

## 14.7 Conclusions

In this chapter we have outlined the use of journeys in outdoor and environmental education as a vehicle for learning. Journeys can have a variety of different rationales which can depend on culture and geographical location. Many school, college, university and voluntary organisation programmes give students the opportunity to undertake journeys or 'expeditions' which may be walking, cycling, canoeing or on horseback.

A growing body of research evidence has been accumulating over the past three decades which points to the short-term (months) and longer-term (40–70 years) benefits of participating in longer (2 weeks to 3 month) expeditions. The benefits include personal growth (upward, outward, inward, downward) and positively influencing mental toughness, GRIT and leadership to succeed and ability to work as part of a team. Over longer terms of 40+ years, gains include increased environmental awareness, an appreciation for nature and the outdoors improved planning and preparation, gratefulness and service, and a desire to transfer these benefits to others. Shorter journeys can still have important benefits. For example, hill-walking has health benefits arising from physical activity and exposure to nature, escape from everyday life pressures, to re-charge, and walking in groups can lead to beneficial feelings of social inclusion.

Finally, there are a number of challenges associated with using journeys as an educational tool. These include: time, cost, risk, environmental impact and expedition reverse culture shock. It is important that those working in this area are aware of these challenges and manage them appropriately.

### Reflective Questions

1. Based on what you've read in this chapter, how might you design a journey to touch on the key benefits articulated in the research?
2. You are working as a teacher or instructor and your manager, who is responsible for the financial budget, says that there are too many risks and it's too costly to take your pupils on the 3-day canoe journey that you had planned. Write down the argument you would make to justify the inclusion of such a journey in your pupils' education curriculum, include details on connections to specific school subjects.

3. Drawing on the key ideas around environmental impact of journeys...think about a typical week in your life. Make a list of all the journeys you might make in that typical week: their purpose, the mode of transport and the distance. Then, for each journey, consider whether you could have made the journey in a less impactful way. If you could, what are the effects of making your journeys with lower environmental impact?
4. With a partner or in a small group split into two groups. One group lists reasons and ways to encourage more independent journeys, the other group lists ways to discourage them. Present to each other, discuss and come up with applications from the discussion.
5. Based on the ideas you have been reading about in this chapter, list as many ways as you can to make journeys more accessible to more people in society regardless of abilities and socio-economic status.

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# Chapter 15

## Outdoor Education and Pedagogical Content Knowledge: More Than Class Five Rapids



Chris North and Janet Dymont

### 15.1 Introductory Case Study

You have recently graduated from university with your outdoor education degree and are excited to have landed your first job at the local high school. You are planning a journey for your students: a five day expedition whitewater canoeing on a river. It's a big task: you are having to align your trip with curriculum outcomes; you are thinking through assessment and how you will know if student learning has been impacted by the journey; you are learning about your students and the diverse needs they have; you are planning all the logistics for the trips; and, you are having to hire a few staff to get the right ratios.

In relation to hiring, as you peruse the resumes, you are incredibly excited to see an application from an internationally renowned extreme whitewater kayaker. Her resume is full of lists of dream rivers across the world that have been paddled – her most recent trip is a first descent of a canyon in Nepal. You quickly hire this individual and proceed in your planning.

The first day of the trip begins and you quite quickly have some concerns about your hiring decision. There's no arguing that she is an incredible paddler – but she definitely is not aware of the complexities of teaching. She seems to lack any sense of teaching progressions, instead preferring to just showcase her own skills and believe somehow they can be copied; she is unaware of student needs, seemingly oblivious that many students are scared, cold, and nervous; she seems to know very little about the river environment, unable to contribute to any broader teaching about indigenous histories of the river, geology of the catchment, or recent debates about a power dam upstream; and come the evening, she retreats to her own tent, unwilling to contribute to other important learning experiences surrounding the journey.

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You crawl into bed – tired, confused, and frustrated. You were so excited about hiring this expert paddler. As you drift off to sleep, you wonder why such an expert paddler seems to miss the mark when it comes to student learning.

This chapter introduces the concept of pedagogical content knowledge – or PCK – and explains why and how PCK helps us understand why the best whitewater paddler on your trip may not be the best outdoor educator. PCK helps us understand that teaching is a mix of both content knowledge (paddling and river contexts in this case) and pedagogical knowledge. PCK helps us see that while the person you hired may definitely ‘know’ certain aspect of the content (in this case, the technical skill of paddling), they may not know how to teach it. They might also lack knowledge about the ways that other aspects might impact the ‘whole’ of an OE experience.

Before digging into PCK, however, we provide some basic background that positions PCK as being an important voice in bigger debates that have been circling in the outdoor education field for some time – related to whether OE can be defined, if it constitutes a discipline, and if there is actually content to be taught.

## 15.2 Background and Context: The Broader Debates

Outdoor education is challenging to define, and much of the OE literature begins with a discussion of the contested nature of outdoor education (see North, 2020). Some authors have gone so far as to state that outdoor education defies definition (Nicol, 2002). Then there are those who argue against attempts at defining OE because ‘Outdoor educators must juggle many meanings, activities as they respond to the environment and needs of the students which puts pressure on curricular structures and expectations of content’ (Straker, 2019, p. 15). Perhaps because OE has been influenced by outdoor adventurers, many of whom see themselves as counter-cultural, OE has developed as an alternative to mainstream schooling. This can be seen in how OE is perceived as different, engaging, and exciting in contrast to everyday schools which are routine, structured and boring (Ingman, 2019). This approach has made many outdoor educators reluctant to engage with other subject areas or define an OE curriculum. The problem is that the lack of curriculum has limited OE and constructed OE as an extra-curricular activity focused on recreation (Boyes, 2000). This in turn has marginalised OE in the allocation of limited school resources and a crowded curriculum.

We argue that in order to take its place as an accepted educational subject, outdoor educators need to make a compelling case that it is worthy of attention and time in schools. This means outdoor educators need to articulate what it is that OE stands for and what students learn through it (Quay, 2016). In other words, that OE is a discipline. Dymont and Potter (2015) and Potter and Dymont (2016) made some important headway here as they took John Loughran’s questions from teacher education and applied them to OE suggesting that “the complexities of OE are easily

overlooked by the casual observer” (2015, p. 191) and that, “it is rarely afforded a status commensurate with the more scientifically based disciplines or sub-disciplines. It is seen as an activity, not an academic endeavor” (2015, pp. 192–193). Responding to such concerns, Dymont and Potter argue that OE is a discipline because it meets criteria including having content (a focus of study), academic programmes, journals, textbooks and curriculum, and a body of research underpinning it. They identify the content of OE as developing:

- technical skills;
- social and interpersonal competencies;
- a connection to nature;
- risk management;
- and an increasing focus on environmental sustainability, place attachment, and social justice (Dymont & Potter, 2015; Potter & Dymont, 2016).

Based on these arguments, OE is a discipline with content. However, in general we consider teaching and learning in OE to be under-theorised in comparison to other disciplines. In order to address this, we need to understand the theories behind OE, we need to dig more deeply into other aspects of educational inquiry and ask questions such as “how might outdoor educators best teach this content?” These are concerns which pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) addresses. We now turn to an introduction of PCK and the important work of Lee Shulman.

### 15.3 Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

Central to this chapter is the work of Lee Shulman (1986, 1987, 2005) who developed the notion of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Shulman’s work in this area was prompted by a number of questions such as: *What kinds of knowledges do teachers use as they reason and make decisions in their teaching? Why is subject matter knowledge, though necessary, not sufficient enough for effective teaching?*

In his seminal paper, Shulman (1986) proposed that PCK was a unique type of knowledge held by experienced teachers that was a mix of subject matter knowledge (what teachers know about what they teach) and pedagogy (what teachers know about teaching). He went on to provide examples of PCK, including: ways of representing ideas (analogies, illustrations, examples and explanations); an understanding of what makes topics easy or hard to learn; knowledge of student conceptions and misconceptions; and knowledge of strategies to help students build new correct conceptions. According to Shulman, PCK separates the subject matter *educator* from the subject matter *expert*; the former understands the subject in a different way from the latter.

Shulman’s work on PCK has been applied to a number of discipline areas including mathematics, science, and English (Ball et al., 2008; Chick & Beswick, 2017). More recently, the field of OE has started to explore the ways in which PCK might

inform our teaching practices (Dymont et al., 2018a). This paper began to articulate the specific knowledges that an outdoor educator might use to teach outdoor education and proposed an OEPCK framework. This table helps us to understand what it is about the pedagogies of OE teachers that differs from other educators' PCK.

## 15.4 Outdoor Education Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (OEPCK)

Dymont et al. (2018a) began with a PCK framework for mathematics and adapted it for OE. The framework (Table 15.1) consists of three main categories of knowledge: 'Clearly PCK' includes those aspects which are most clearly a blend of content and pedagogy; 'Content Knowledge in a Pedagogical Context' includes those aspects drawn most directly from content; and 'Pedagogical Knowledge in a Content Context' includes knowledge which has been drawn most directly from pedagogy. The best way to understand the distinctiveness of these categories is to examine each of these three in the Table below.

### 15.4.1 *How to Use the Table*

For the proposed OEPCK framework (Table 15.1) to be useful, it must be able to be applied to a context. To this end, we present an example of teaching minimum impact practices on a backpacking trip. The OEPCK framework reveals the kinds of knowledges an educator needs and the kinds of pedagogical choices she will need to make. As a starting point, the educator requires a profound understanding of fundamental content. She knows that in this area, there is a certain ecosystem, which, alongside indigenous cultural expectations, and regulations, will determine the most acceptable minimum impact practices. She knows the plants which are most resilient to camping and walking impacts and is able to select a suitable location for a group camp. She also understands that different places will have different ecosystems, land designations and indigenous cultures which will require different practices. Unpacking yet another level, the educator knows that the same appreciation of pristine nature that arose in the Romantic movement and that inspired the establishment of national parks also underpins minimum impact practices such as Leave No Trace. She has intimate curriculum knowledge that helps her know how this content aligns with the curriculum documents that support the schooling system more broadly. In addition, she will have beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, which are based on a deep understanding of experiential education. These beliefs will in turn inform her teaching strategies so that she chooses to split the students into expert groups which will present back different aspects of minimum impact practices (such as disposal of human waste or wildlife interactions). These

**Table 15.1** Framework for pedagogical content knowledge for teaching outdoor education

PCK category	PCK for outdoor educators (OEPCK)	
	Evident when the teacher ...	Example
<i>Clearly PCK</i>		
Beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning	Discusses or uses personal or established philosophies and approaches to teaching the discipline	Discusses the use of “experiential pedagogies” as a key facet of teaching outdoor education; makes use of particular places and their features to convey key outdoor education concepts
Teaching strategies	Discusses or uses general or specific strategies or approaches for teaching an outdoor education concept or skill	Capitalises on unexpected learning opportunities that arise during activities (e.g., flight of unusual bird); uses “solo” experiences to develop students’ confidence in self; uses a set of paint samples to help students become more aware of place by finding colours in the environment that match
Student thinking	Discusses or addresses student ways of thinking about a concept, or recognises typical levels of understanding	Realises that students think that “Leave no trace” is fine as an outdoor ethic, but that they fail to generalise it to other situations; realises that students may privilege technical skills over interpersonal skills; knows when to step in to assist a student who is struggling with a skill or concept
Student thinking – misconceptions	Discusses or addresses student misconceptions about a concept	Recognises that students often think “Mountains are to be ‘conquered’” and will fail to recognise other learnings that come from a “mountain experience” (e.g., teamwork, decision-making); recognises that students on a wilderness expedition may think that “no humans have ever been here” when there is a long history of indigenous occupation
Student affect (in relation to content)	Discusses or addresses students’ affective responses to particular outdoor education topics	Uses an activity, with a high degree of perceived risk (e.g., a cave abseil), to engage students’ interest in learning; recognises that students may have negative emotional reactions to participating in outdoor education experiences in local, low-risk, low-impact or low-adventure environments
Cognitive demand of task	Identifies aspects of an (OE) task that affect its complexity	Recognises the different demands associated with navigating via GPS vs navigating using map and compass; recognises that students may find it difficult to engage with the intellectual aspects of the discipline as they assume it is “fun” and “easy”
Representations of concepts	Describes or demonstrates ways to model or illustrate a concept (can include materials or diagrams)	Uses sand features to demonstrate contour lines

(continued)

**Table 15.1** (continued)

PCK for outdoor educators (OEPCK)		
PCK category	Evident when the teacher ...	Example
Explanations	Explains a topic, concept or procedure	Explains why a J-stroke can correct the direction of forward motion in a canoe
Knowledge of examples	Uses an example that highlights a concept or procedure	Uses a well-known tragedy to illustrate risk-management lessons
Knowledge of resources	Discusses/uses resources available to support teaching	Identifies and uses a hiking club's website to obtain track and route information for hiking
Curriculum knowledge	Discusses how topics fit into the curriculum	Recognises that, in the Australian Curriculum, leadership theories need to be taught and critically analysed in Year 12
Purpose of content knowledge	Discusses reasons for content being included in the curriculum or how it might be used	Knows that leadership skills and qualities have relevance to other areas of life
<i>Content knowledge in a pedagogical context</i>		
(Beliefs about) The nature of content	Expresses an appreciation of the nature of outdoor education that goes beyond the school curriculum	Compares the aesthetic qualities of climbing in a climbing gym versus in a natural rock environment
Profound understanding of fundamental content	Exhibits deep and thorough conceptual understanding of identified aspects of outdoor education and its theories	Understands recent critiques around the role of adventure and risk in outdoor education, and the consequent need for a place-responsive pedagogy; has understanding of indigenous perspectives on the environment and the implications for indigenous activities; demonstrates knowledge of the natural environment in which he/she works
Deconstructing content to key components	Identifies critical outdoor education components within a concept that are fundamental for understanding and applying that concept	Helps students identify the organisation and planning requirements (e.g., equipment requirements, emergency plans, first aid, participant screening) to manage risk on an extended expedition; can identify the sequence of moves that comprise a good paddle stroke
Structure and connections	Makes connections between outdoor education concepts and topics, including interdependence of concepts	Identifies the connections between leadership practices, group dynamics, and strategies for handling risk

(continued)

**Table 15.1** (continued)

PCK for outdoor educators (OEPCK)		
PCK category	Evident when the teacher ...	Example
Procedural knowledge	Displays skills for working in the outdoor environment (conceptual understanding need not be evident)	Can set up a top-rope rock-climbing system; can self-rescue a capsized kayak; can develop a risk-management plan; recognises that when a hiking group is cold, wet, and tired, camp needs to be established quickly, or that it might be better to push on to a hut
Methods of solution	Demonstrates or evaluates a method for solving a problem in an outdoor education context	Recognises that when a student does not understand declination, a mnemonic may help them to remember the procedure, OR they may go back to first principles and review a model of the earth and its magnetic field
<i>Pedagogical knowledge in a content context</i>		
Assessment approaches	Discusses or designs tasks, activities or interactions that assess learning outcomes	Designs a journal writing activity with a targeted focus topic, or facilitates a debriefing session after an activity
Goals for learning	Describes a goal for students' learning	Justifies a team-building activity as developing understanding of leadership principles
Getting and maintaining student focus	Discusses or uses strategies for engaging students	Has clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all students on a high-ropes challenge course
"Classroom" techniques	Discusses or uses generic classroom practices	Talks about grouping students according to ability levels; sets up activities in such a way that students feel safe to take risks with new experiences
Student affect (general)	Describes how student affect influences pedagogical approach	Knows a particular student will show off or give silly answers if asked to demonstrate a skill in front of the whole group

Dyment et al. (2018b)

presentations are threaded through the backpacking trip to highlight applications in particular contexts and to enhance student engagement (getting and maintaining student focus). She will consider when to 'add on' to the information or presentations provided by the students and when it is best to allow them free-reign so students can feel empowered (see for example Thomas, 2010). She will understand the most difficult concepts for students to grasp (student thinking), and misconceptions that might arise (for example, the misconception that biodegradable soaps are harmless in waterways). She will ask students for critical or 'devilish questions', and collate these, so that towards the end of the trip, she can facilitate a discussion of the limitations of minimum impact practices as a global environmental ethic. In this way she bridges between the particular actions in particular places, and a global perspective which looks beyond the often arbitrary boundaries which humans create (structure and connections). During the backpacking trip she is gathering evidence of student learning from a wide range of naturally occurring and structured

assessments as part of her assessment approaches. She adapts teaching strategies for diverse groups (urban, maturity, ethnicity) because of her understanding of human development and learner centred approaches (teaching strategies).

This is one example of how the table can be applied for a given context. For every teaching experience, educators could apply the PCK framework to their practice and knowledge to explore this more fully.

## 15.5 Critiques

Presenting a framework that attempts to identify the knowledges of a particular discipline is potentially problematic. Here we present the two main criticisms that have been leveled at the OEPCK; that the OEPCK framework is a reductionist checklist and that PCK was designed for mainstream education and cannot work for OE.

Any framework that attempts to encompass or describe a complex topic will inevitably fall short. One critique of the OEPCK is that it oversimplifies the nuance and diversity of OE teaching. While we argue that OEPCK serves to make visible the complexities of OE teaching that are often left to the margins or in the ‘too hard basket’, the OEPCK is not a complete and comprehensive summation of OE. We believe a more important question is whether the OEPCK is helpful or not. For example, without an effort to build a body of knowledge of OE, such as the OEPCK, we have little on which to base our claims about the importance of OE. We actively encourage people to look at the gaps and limitations of the OEPCK. See the framework as a starting point from which to more deeply consider what we do and how we do it. The OEPCK will not fulfill its potential if it becomes a checklist. In much the same way as students understand the expected answers in debriefing sessions, engaging with the OEPCK could become a superficial exercise in justifying what we currently do and how we do it. By contrast, the OEPCK is intended to provide a set of filters for viewing actions and decision making to how knowledges are held and used by outdoor educators. It should be seen as a conversation starter, not a conversation stopper. Used in this way, it can highlight how particular knowledge components might contribute to ‘good teaching’ as well as identifying components that a teacher may not have yet acquired, may not understand, or may be delivering ineffectively. It also identifies situations where a knowledge is not only held but is used effectively. When applied in this way, we believe the OEPCK can help develop meta-cognitive understandings and promote self-directed learning. This is addressed further under the benefits section.

Other critics of the OEPCK framework have argued that it is too aligned with mainstream education and that many elements of the framework simply don’t apply in OE. It is true that the source of Shulman’s work and the original PCK table upon which the OEPCK framework was built arose from more established learning areas, like math (Chick & Beswick, 2017). For example, the central importance of the environment to OE is missing from these traditional learning areas. But the OEPCK

was designed by outdoor educators and takes note of many important differences. As we noted in the introduction, if OE is a discipline with subject matter (i.e., curriculum) then a framework (with its roots in education) like the OEPCK brings OE in line with broader educational discourse and forces our hand in being accountable (as other learning areas are) for articulating content, and making visible our teaching and learning practices. The OEPCK framework is useful in identifying the complex relationship between subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and in doing so, highlights the ways in which OE teaching is both different and similar in substantial ways to other content areas.

Critiques of the OEPCK framework are important and we encourage the active examination of the strengths and limitations of the OEPCK in the understandings, practices, and contexts of OE. We also ask that educators do not dismiss it preemptively just because it does not fit with their opinions. Engaging deeply and in a sustained way with the OEPCK framework has yielded many benefits for us and we promote this model because we believe these benefits are applicable to other outdoor educators in diverse contexts.

## 15.6 Benefits of the OEPCK Framework

The OEPCK framework tackles some important aspects of quality teaching and learning in OE. It provides a structured opportunity to explore questions that are often thought of as too tricky to answer, such as, *How do outdoor educators actually teach outdoor education? What knowledge types can and should underpin outdoor education teachers' practices? What are the characteristics of a good OE teacher and what knowledge base contributes to this? What are the types of knowledge OE teachers use that are different from other teachers in math, science, and history?*

It invites educators to reflect on why and how they teach OE in the ways they do. It asks them to think explicitly about the relationship between subject matter (what is being taught) and pedagogy (how it is being taught) and to identify their teaching approaches that are used because they teach OE (as opposed to say, math or science). It helps educators be explicit about decisions they are making – both in the moment and long term. It helps them think widely about student learning – with some elements of the OEPCK framework often being under-emphasised in OE settings (e.g., student thinking).

There are multiple benefits to the development of an OEPCK primarily based on the premise that the OEPCK framework demands that we articulate our work. It has both practical and theoretical implications for our work. Here we describe four key benefits: for us as outdoor educators; for our students; in the preparation of outdoor educators; and for the status of OE.



### ***15.6.1 Benefits for Outdoor Educators***

As discussed in the introduction, there are those who see learning in outdoor settings as beyond that which we can describe or quantify. For example, the spiritual experiences of students who are immersed in outdoor environments. These are intangible and wonderful experiences which may emerge in OE through contemplative experiences such as solos. We believe similar outcomes arise in music, science, or literature as well and which emerge unpredictably depending on the student and a range of other influences. But articulating the purpose of the OE subject on the basis of intangibles is problematic. What such arguments miss are the supportable and purposeful aspects of learning in OE. Skillful outdoor educators are able to use their OEPCK to provide powerful learning experiences for students which are not only exciting and inspiring, but that are supported by a body of knowledge. OEPCK can also help us to understand areas where we are less certain or identify gaps in our knowledge. This is invaluable for identifying professional development and learning goals. The PCK framework provides outdoor educators with a tool to better understand our expertise, areas of weakness, and be more conscious why and how we do what we do. An educator at any stage of their career could use the OEPCK framework to examine their teaching practices, decisions, and actions with a view to understanding their held knowledges and how these influences their choices and decisions.

Early career educators might use the OEPCK framework to reflect on particular people who inspired them and tease out the particular knowledges held by that influential educator. They may also use it to reflect on other teachers whose practices they find to be more troubling. The OEPCK framework might serve to highlight the knowledges that are missing or overrepresented. In offering this potential use, it is important to remember that the OEPCK framework does not make judgments about whether a particular knowledge is good or bad. Rather it identifies its presence or absence. There is another layer required which is examination of whether the knowledge is appropriate for the context. And this is where a critique may be helpful: Is this the *right* teaching strategy for these learners? Unpacking these influences on our practices allows us to become more intentional.

Experienced educators might use the OEPCK to reflect more deeply on their own practices or to prompt discussions with peers. Over the course of years, practices can become ingrained not because they are effective, but simply out of repetition. The OEPCK provides an opportunity to look over our understandings and practices with fresh eyes. Discussing the OEPCK with peers can enrich and provide focus for collaborative reflection. While perhaps particularly valuable for more established outdoor educators, such work is critical at all levels of OE careers.

### ***15.6.2 Benefits for Students***

Being able to articulate why we do what we do is also necessary to improve educational outcomes for our students. One of the key challenges in teacher education is to uncover and examine assumptions about learning and teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Without this work, teaching becomes a set of habits and routines with little other than personal experience to substantiate them. Such assumptions lead teachers to teach to those students who are most engaged, interested, or most like ourselves. This in turn leaves us contributing to educational inequity, where students who already have the most advantages are the ones receiving the most attention and positive reinforcement. The OEPCK offers a way whereby we can gain access to our underlying assumptions and how they frame not just our attitudes to our students but also our own roles in teaching and learning. It asks that we articulate why we do what we do. It also theorises our work. For example there appears little focus on assessment in outdoor learning (Hill et al., 2020), yet without assessment of some kind, how do we know that each of our students is learning? Accessing the broader educational body of knowledge on assessment provides us with engaging and authentic ways of including assessment in our practice so that we can see which pedagogical approaches have the greatest impact on which students. Making the tacit explicit is critical to providing informed decisions about teaching and learning. This will ultimately benefit all students in OE.

### ***15.6.3 Benefits for Those Preparing Outdoor Educators***

The OEPCK framework can also serve to help design curriculum and content of courses to prepare outdoor educators for teaching. It helps map out important elements of preparation including content ideas, general pedagogical elements, and the specific pedagogies that are relevant to the OE subject matter area. The OEPCK is not limited to initial teacher education, but all those involved in the preparation of educators including supervisors at centres and camps to those in more formal educational settings such as polytechnics, community colleges, and universities. Some ways in which the OEPCK can be used is through asking staff to work through the framework and identify areas of curiosity. In this way, common areas of weakness or simply interest could be useful to provide targeted and relevant professional development. Professional learning could be designed around the OEPCK framework to support learning for all outdoor educators.

### ***15.6.4 Benefits for the Status of OE***

Our colleagues' and organisational leaders' understanding of OE probably involves watching the equipment being loaded into a vehicle and a group of students leaving school for an extended time. The hidden nature of OE means that the expertise of educators is often under-recognised. Images of smiling students in spectacular landscapes adorn organisational newsletters and websites but do little to distinguish OE from recreation or tourism. When used well, the OEPCK framework provides a powerful tool for helping us to align our work with educators in other areas. Decades of educational research and literature support high quality teaching practices across the curriculum – these aspects are well represented in the framework. Engaging with contemporary and seminal educational literature means that outdoor educators can use the same language as other educators. In the staff room or at shared professional development, we can talk with other staff, administrators, and leaders about what we do in language that they can understand. OEPCK language can also be a very effective way for us to let the educational community know about our expertise. Sharing our educational commonalities can help bridge the divide between OE and other subjects and raise the status of what we do and our place in the educational landscape.

## **15.7 Conclusion**

The OEPCK framework helps us understand why the person hired to teach on our whitewater paddling trip may be an incredible paddler – but may be lacking in having the knowledges that support good teaching. We invite outdoor educators to carefully study and apply the framework to unpack what it actually looks like to teach outdoor education well. Educators can use it to reflect on their knowledges and identify areas of strength and gaps; use it to examine the knowledges of others who are inspiring and those who fall short; and consider it in light of courses at university to see the areas that are privileged and where there might be silences. Despite a persistent aversion within OE to aligning with mainstream subjects, we believe that the time has come to advance the important and enduring conversations around teacher knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum in OE. This will require looking at the commonalities with educators' body of knowledge. We believe OEPCK offers a powerful means to achieve this.

### **Reflective Questions**

1. You are working at a school and your principal calls you to a meeting, asking you to defend your OE program from a curriculum perspective. How would you articulate the curriculum and content body of knowledge that you are trying to cover?
2. Shulman's key argument was that content knowledge, though necessary, was not sufficient enough for effective teaching. Reflecting on your own experience, do

you agree with this claim? Use examples from your professional experience to explain your answer.

3. As you reflect on the OE PCK framework in light of your own teaching, which categories do you feel the most confident with? Which categories might you need to develop a bit more?
4. What critiques do you have of the OE PCK framework? Are there any knowledges missing from the framework?
5. In what ways is your approach to teaching and learning influenced by an inspiring teacher you had? Can you examine them in relation to the OE PCK framework? Does this framework serve to highlight the potential strengths and weaknesses of this individual?

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**Part III**  
**Outdoor Environmental Education as a**  
**Social, Cultural and Environmental**  
**Endeavour**

# Chapter 16

## Nature Connection



Lizzie Freeman, Frances Harris, and Chris Loynes

‘Nature’ is a problematic term. Castree (2005) identifies four significant epistemic communities that operate around different understandings of what nature is. There are, he claims, many others. When talking about ‘nature’, these communities are not typically aware that they are talking about significantly different ideas. When ‘connection’ tangles with ‘nature’ this only adds to the problems. ‘Nature connection’ implies that nature is elsewhere waiting for a connection to be made. Experience and understanding of nature take place in a cultural context, which impacts on societal and individual conceptions and understandings of nature connection. Particularly in the western world, modern, urban lifestyles have lost touch with nature (Soga & Gaston, 2016). Knowledge of or feelings for landscapes, wildlife and a sense of place shared with other species has markedly declined (Natural England, 2020). Whilst nature as something ‘other’ is, in one sense true, nature can also be understood as inclusive of everything, not ‘other’ than humans, as humans are one of these ‘others’ whether we are in touch with ecological systems and wildlife or not. We are a part of nature not apart from nature. Some of our current problems with our relationships within nature lie with the epistemic community that constructs nature in this othered way. Writings on nature connection are helpful so long as they are read through a lens that understands the connection as the awareness of, and

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practices in, particular qualities of connection, for example certain feelings, actions, understandings, rather than defining humans as outside of nature. It is the perception of connection with nature that is in debate rather than our place in nature as such. This is how we approach this topic.

Since the enlightenment and the industrial revolution, humans in developed modern societies tend to understand themselves as managers of or rulers over nature, erecting a hierarchy of nature with humans at the top of the pyramid rather than a 'flat' ecology of interrelated beings. When discussing the now largely urbanised consumer world, it is claimed that certain qualities of nature connection benefit human health and wellbeing. The importance of nature for wellbeing is international and reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 3) (Chandra & Chand, 2018; Sharma-Brymer & Brymer, 2019). Various authors illustrate how certain benign natural settings provide restoration, escape, perspective, appreciation, confidence, self-efficacy and that 'nature' is a therapeutic environment for certain communities (for example, see Brymer et al., 2019). This perspective largely ignores the essential natural benefits of water, air, food, shelter and all the resources for the modern way of life also provided as ecosystem services (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005) but which could be seen as an aspect of 'connection'. In some traditional societies, people remain more obviously in connection with nature, immediately dependent on it for their water, food and shelter as well as their livelihoods. In both contexts, nature can also be harsh as well as benign, causing earthquake, drought, flood, fire and famine. Even when the wellbeing benefits to humans in a modern society are considered in isolation, they are typically experienced by a privileged few. The benefits are exclusive, leaving many people distanced, unaware or unable to access nature as a place of wellbeing (Barry, 1999).

## 16.1 Definitions of Nature Connection

A range of terms are used for nature connection including connection to nature and connectedness to nature. These terms have been defined in several studies, with perspectives varying from interaction and dependence on nature (Steward, 2017) to awareness of the interrelatedness between an individual and the natural world (Zyslra et al., 2014; Lumber et al., 2017; Ives et al., 2017). Fundamental to this is the perception of an individual's relationship with nature (Restall & Conrad, 2015), ranging from inclusion or interconnectedness with nature versus othering of nature, and the ways that a relationship with nature, or boundaries between humans and nature arise. Nature connection fundamentally refers to feelings for and beliefs about one's place in and relationships with nature.

For those in education, connection to nature may relate to how we learn about the world around us, and for those in environmental education, how we learn in, about, and for nature. Among environmentalists are concerns that experience of the natural world, and a connection to it, are vital to develop an ethos of care, and pro-environmental behaviours. The biophilia hypothesis (Kellert, 1993) suggests we



have an innate need to connect with nature. There is interest in how connection to nature can provide a restorative environment which calms and soothes to support mental health and wellbeing. Further, natural environments can be good for physical health, through promoting recuperation, or the opportunity nature provides for exercise. Planners and architects take an interest in how urban environments can connect to nature through design of buildings and urban spaces to ensure that greenspace and blue space are available, accessible, and inviting. Some of these perspectives focus on material nature as an object to connect with. Others interpret nature as subjective so that the connection is two way, whilst others focus on the relationships between humans and the other than human beings and natural processes that we experience. Connection is achieved through affective engagement (activities involving all senses), cognitive engagement (recognising, identifying, naming) and physical engagement (touching, being in nature, activity, using or making). Nature connection thus refers to knowledge of and about nature, emotional feelings towards nature and evoked by nature, experiences of nature, a sense of dependency on nature, and an ethos of care and pro-environmental behaviour (Martin et al., 2020).

## 16.2 What and Where Is Nature?

Nature has many meanings many of which infer a location. Rather than placing nature elsewhere, conceptualisations of nature connection typically frame nature as everywhere, in wide open spaces, in the air, below our feet, in our gardens, in our homes, on our skin and in our guts and in cracks within buildings. It is a vast array of micro and macroscopic processes, things and beings. As Castree (2014) points out, it is sometimes perceived as including human beings, sometimes not. As well as being material, it is also perceived as a complex set of dynamic processes and relationships that unfold at widely different places in time. Nature is considered as present even when we cannot see, touch or smell it and it can be a friend, a foe, a healer and destroyer. Underlying this paradigm shift is the perception that humans are part of an ecosystem, a system that is essential to all life on earth. It is claimed that understanding the interconnections within this system and acknowledging and valuing that ‘we are nature’ will help secure a positive future for all and realise a holistic wellbeing which includes individual, collective and planetary needs – a one health approach (Brymer et al., 2019).

## 16.3 Why Does It Matter?

The culture and history of the current dominant western world view shapes conceptualisations of natural environments, the personal, social, and economic value associated with them, and subsequently the use of and relationship with this nature (Nash, 1982; Callicot & Nelson, 1998). For many cultures in modern times,

industrialisation underpinned the growing idea of humans as other than nature, a perception of a separation from nature that has accelerated to its current height. As such the relationship has turned from one of reciprocity to one of production and consumption (Brody, 2001). In the nineteenth century, in England and elsewhere, counter movements began. Figureheads such as John Ruskin identified what they considered to be a loss of knowledge of nature that was taking place as machines replaced hand craft. The Craft Movement sought to value and protect this understanding of the human relationship with natural things as well as their transformation into useful objects for society. The Romantic Movement transformed the appreciation of nature from a utilitarian subsistence to a secular religious view. As Ruskin recognised, the shift from a hands-on, rural way of life for many people to an urban, industrial one resulted in a loss of a particular embodied physical and emotional as well as conceptual knowledge of certain ways of engagement with nature, especially farming, quarrying, mining, fishing and forestry. This separation from certain ways of engagement with nature in these modernising societies was associated with a kind and scale of human activity that resulted in increasing levels of environmental harm for all people globally that, until now, have gone largely unnoticed. Those in modern urban societies who have re-engaged with nature as rural landscapes and wildlife habitats in their leisure time have done so through different outdoor activities leading to different sets of embodied and conceptual knowledge. These activities and people are excluded from large tracts of the landscape and so from any meaningful engagement in the decisions about its management. Nevertheless, this knowledge has informed the growing conservation movements of recent years with large and increasingly politically active memberships. Alongside the actions of this environmental lobby, informal and formal education accelerated by social media has developed an increasingly informed citizenship globally about a range of environmental issues creating a constituency that has empowered a growing number of politicians to act.

## **16.4 How to Connect: Meaning Making and Pathways to Nature Connection**

Meaning-making is considered crucial in forming a deep understanding of the environment. A person comes to know and construct their connection to nature by direct (passive and active) and indirect ways of experiencing. Visually perceiving is direct and active and senses of touch, taste and smell are considered passive (Tuan, 1977). Direct experience allows one to know something intimately. Symbolising nature in language and art is indirect. It allows for conceptual knowing and meaning. For meaning-making to take place, interaction, externalisation, communication and clarification, that is both direct and indirect ways of experiencing, are required. People also need to have the freedom, confidence, and sometimes encouragement and support, to make their own personal meaning of nature and their relationship to

it. In doing so, this can lead to a deep and enduring sense of wellbeing (Freeman & Akhurst, 2018; Freeman et al., 2016). It should also be acknowledged that experiencing and understanding nature takes place in a cultural context and changes over time. Conceptions and understandings of nature connection should not be universalised. Cultural variations should be celebrated.

Educational approaches to understanding and connection are successful in many ways but can alienate some people that may feel they do not have the intellect. Because it can objectify that which is studied, science can create some level of separateness between humans and nature. It can perpetuate the myth of nature as other. When an educational nature trail was compared to a 'creativity in nature' competition with children, higher nature connection scores resulted from the creative approach (Bruni et al., 2015). Creative and expressive methods such as writing, poetry, art, and dance are all powerful and very personal ways of connecting, expressing connection and sharing it that in turn can engage others in nature. They also allow for differences in and personalisation of interpretation and meaning. It is through the arts, particularly in the Romantic era, that wider society, beyond scientists, changed the conception of nature.

Recent research from the UK, that followed the normative understanding of nature and connection (Lumber et al., 2017), identified five pathways to nature connection: contact, emotion, compassion, meaning and beauty. In nature, there are indications that it is the active and dynamic components such as wild weather or busy animals that are best at triggering one or more of these pathways (Harvey et al., 2020). Connecting to nature enables a visceral experience through which people experience sensory engagement with nature through touch, smell, sight, sound, and potentially taste. Through time in nature, people recognise, identify and potentially name what they see. Such cognitive connection can go on to involve learning what nature can be used for (not necessarily in a destructive way), or how it can be nurtured. Observation, appreciation, enjoyment, fascination are all aspects of connecting to nature, through which bonding with a specific place, or a type of place (e.g., a specific wood, or trees and woods in general) may develop. Through knowledge and familiarity an emotional attachment may develop, and subsequently an ethos of care, a sense of responsibility. A sense of a relationship between the individual and the natural world may arise. There may be appreciation of beauty, or appreciation of the role of nature in supporting our human existence. Pleasure may occur simply from the opportunities arising for soft fascination, or from movement and the opportunity to exercise. These are optimistic findings that, nevertheless, should be understood in the context of a concept of nature that constructs it as other than human, despite the declared intention of restoring the idea of humans as nature. Nature is set in a moment in time in a particular and fast changing culture. Despite this criticism, and expressed through a different conceptual lens, these insights might have widespread applications, especially in modern urban societies.

## 16.5 Impacts of Connection

Wellbeing as a concept is typically applied to people. Considerable recent research has linked time in what are considered natural settings and activities in the outdoors to benefits to physical and mental wellbeing. Even small amounts of time in highly managed parks, considered to be less ‘natural’, have been shown to be beneficial. Other research indicates that both the quality of time in nature and the quantity of time in nature progressively over the life course are predictors of the adoption of pro-environmental behaviours and, presumably, values. More work needs to be done on exactly what experiences encourage the best outcomes for nature or what these outcomes are exactly. Those who advocate for an engagement or relationship with nature rather than a connection to nature are proposing that the relationship is two way; that nature is both agentic in the relationship and of intrinsic value in and of itself (Plumwood, 2001). As such, an equitable relationship would be one in which the wellbeing, or flourishing, of nature would be of equal concern as the wellbeing of people - One Health.

Eudaimonic wellbeing can result in people feeling that natural environments are relaxing or restorative, or even a refuge from normal daily life. With frequent visits to the same place, or similar types of places, and observation of changes over time, there may be a greater relationship and understanding of environmental issues, either observed in person or learned of in other parts of the world. Natural places may also be the space in which key experiences, whether in terms of learning, emotion, or skills and actions, take place. A ‘leave more trace’ approach has been proposed (Loynes, 2018), that is leaving traces of the right kind, rather than a ‘leave no trace’ one. A ‘more trace’ approach argues that humans need to actively engage in positive and restorative impacts on nature, to turn the tide reversing past harms. The evidence already suggests that nature connection supports personal shifts, in consumption for example, and social changes, in volunteering on environmental projects and engagement in local politics.

There are signs of change at economic and political level as well. Organisations as well as individuals are showing signs of adopting and adapting to the environmental emergency. Many local councils around the world have declared climate emergencies. They are holding people’s assemblies to determine how they can contribute to reducing carbon to net zero. The outdoor clothing company, Patagonia, for example seeks to leave nature restored as a result of its manufacturing rather than depleted; impacts judged a net positive rather than a minimalised negative. As such it would seem vital to encourage nature connections that lead to pro-environmental behaviours targeted at the right impacts to make the biggest differences, both in local landscapes and global economics. Elsewhere, in rural areas, developments are underway to build new land-based economies that seek to offer a place-responsive relationship through economic activity that is resilient and that provides meaningful work sustaining healthy communities and habitats.

## 16.6 Measuring Nature Connectedness

Assessing society's, or individual's, connection to nature is a challenge. England's Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey is a weekly household-based survey running since 2009, (with a subset of data on children's engagement with nature since 2013). It focusses on measuring time spent in a natural environment, but also captures information on other activities which engage people with nature (e.g., gardening) and pro-environmental behaviours (e.g., recycling). It confirms that owning a dog encourages people to get into nature on a daily basis, and that time spent in nature corresponds to better self-reported health. But it also highlights how many people are not getting much time in nature each day, and this depends on age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and car ownership (as people tend to access greenspaces by car, rather than visit local greenspaces). For young people, many visits are to urban greenspaces, accompanied by an adult. It shows the role schools can play in introducing children to nature and the outdoors (Natural England, 2020).

However, connection to nature is more than time spent in nature, and MENE data suggested that people visit natural environments to engage in a range of activities (exercise, socialising) which do not necessarily relate to connecting with nature. There are many measurement scales (Bragg et al., 2013) including the Connectedness to Nature Scale, Nature Relatedness Scale, Inclusion of Nature with Self, Environmental Identity Scale, Emotional Affinity to Nature, Connection to Nature Index and the most recently developed Nature Connection Index which is shorter and suitable for both adults and children. Their names alone indicate the different approaches to measuring connection to nature. Most have been developed for use by adults, but some have been adapted for use with children. Other less direct ways to measure could include evidence of pro-environmental behaviours, choices of subjects for study, careers, and visitor numbers to openly accessible landscapes.

## 16.7 Nature Connectedness and Society

Industrial practices are also changing providing societies globally with the chance to rethink economics, work, and rural and urban landscapes. The concepts of sustainable prosperity (Jackson, 2017) and doughnut economics (Raworth, 2017), models of a possible sustainable and flourishing society, are spreading, highlighting a shift away from gross domestic product as the sole measure of prosperity, and replacing it with holistic wellbeing. The necessity to choose technologies that reduce impact, lifestyles that consume less and land management that both mitigates and adapts to the anthropogenic consequences of human activity, biodiversity loss, floods, droughts, fires, etc., are rising up the political agenda in many nations (Sharma-Brymer & Brymer, 2019). The concept of nature connection has arisen within this context and can be understood as an indicator of a desire for change and

a quest for actions to bring this about. As indicated above, the term ‘nature connection’ can imply that humans are in some ways already disconnected. In our view it is not that humans are unplugged from nature. Far from it, the damage to the environment and its consequences for many species, including humans, are increasing. The ‘connection’ is, on balance, a harmful one that is getting worse. In this situation, it appears humans have forgotten that we are nature. Neither are humans active agents whilst nature is a passive resource. Both are active, interrelated and increasingly re-interpreted by those living within the dominant world view as having intrinsic value and so an ethical standing.

## 16.8 Nature Connectedness and Higher Education

Nature connection can contribute to two significant areas in higher education (HE): a growing concern that all students, whatever their chosen subject of study, should receive education relating to sustainable development; and concerns regarding student wellbeing. Outdoor and environmental education seem well placed to encourage nature connection amongst more young people and, through them, their families and the families of the next generation. In higher education institutions, outdoor learning appears more limited to certain subjects, however there is a growing interest in all students receiving some education on ‘sustainability’, and what this can mean across all disciplines and in lifestyles. Movements to make higher education institutions more sustainable include tracing how sustainability issues are taught in courses across universities. Some argue that education for sustainable development should be embedded across all courses in higher education institutions (e.g., education for sustainable development (ESD); Sterling et al., 2013). This includes an understanding and appreciation of relationship with, and impact on, the natural world, as well as how humans can adapt and mitigate such impacts in the future. Our connection to nature is inherent in these debates. Practice worldwide has begun to shift from a focus on an anthropocentric personal development curriculum to a place responsiveness approach that pays attention to other than humans and natural processes.

As noted earlier in this chapter, nature connection can also be of significance when we consider wellbeing. Student wellbeing at HE institutions is of growing concern. There is awareness of a mental health crisis in young people (Bewick & Stallman, 2018), some of which is addressed while children are of school age, but some of which develop further as children leave home and transition to adulthood, often via their experiences in the HE sector. An increasing number of students arrive at HE institutions with existing medical conditions relating to mental health and wellbeing, and some go on to develop issues. Reports of mental illness or distress among university students are high (Bewick & Stallman, 2018), which doubled during Covid-19 lockdown in March/April 2020 in the UK (Kwong et al., 2020) and being a university student is a risk factor for young people (Bu et al., 2020). Institutions are increasing their pastoral care, and support for student wellbeing

through enhanced medical, particularly counselling, services. A holistic approach, which includes exercise, social support, and time in nature, is increasingly recommended (Universities UK, 2018).

## 16.9 Nature Connectedness and Schools

Many pedagogical developments covered more fully throughout this book have emerged. In some ways, schools, despite the challenges of curricular, testing and classrooms, are an ideal institution as they reach all young people of a generation. Some teachers report an enthusiasm for the potential of nature to enrich classroom-based work and provide other benefits such as wellbeing, an expectation increasingly falling at their door. However, many teachers come from a generation who have lost any familiarity with or valuing of time outdoors. A major intervention by higher education to develop new and existing teachers is called for.

In England, the government has recognised this calling for progressive outdoor experiences for all young people of the current generation. Practice is more common in primary schools, with outdoor free play often compulsory in early years and lower primary classes. As children grow, opportunities for outdoor learning diverge, with some focussing on science and geography, others focussing on personal experiences, and building of confidence, resilience and self-esteem.

Several countries, including Singapore, Taiwan, Scotland and Denmark have established outdoor learning, education for sustainability and environmental education as core curriculum throughout the system. Singapore has established a curriculum of outdoor learning with progressive experiences embedded throughout the primary and early secondary years. In other countries with indigenous communities, traditional world views and knowledge are returning to the curricula of schools. In some places, such as New Zealand, this increasingly informs the content and processes of teaching and learning in all schools.

In other ways, schools becoming the primary agents for experiences in nature can also be seen as a remedial approach. We would argue that it is the family and the community that should be encouraging time and activity outdoors as part of our cultural heritage and to contribute to our wellbeing and happiness. Strategies that encourage schools to engage with families and the community are called for. In time this could allow schools to share the responsibility offering experiences in nature that are best suited to the purposes of education in the knowledge that communities will be playing their part. If this is to be possible then access to nature in all communities rural and urban is a priority.



## 16.10 Summary

Outdoor Education and Environmental Education are inextricably linked with nature, as activities involve learning in, for and about nature. While nature connection is not necessarily the main aim of outdoor or environmental education, it is to be hoped that a by-product of the activities will include a growing sense of what nature is, and appreciation for nature. Connection can be achieved in many ways, through sensory, cognitive, and psychological processes. This chapter has described the many ways in which nature connection can bring benefits to people as they participate in a broad variety of activities, with each connecting in different ways depending on individual and cultural life stories, personalities and preferences.

### Reflective Questions

1. How would you describe your nature connection?
2. What differences does nature connectedness make to your quality of life?
3. What strategies for connecting people with nature have you experienced, or have you heard of?
4. Does spending time in nature affect your pro-environmental and conservation behaviours?
5. What do you think are the challenges in society that nature connection could help us to address?

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## Chapter 17

# Reading Landscapes: Engaging with Places



Alistair Stewart, Scott Jukes, Jonas Mikaelis, and Anthony Mangelsdorf

### 17.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we unpack the idea of reading the landscape as an approach to outdoor environmental education (OEE). Reading seems simple enough – involving a form of literacy – but the idea of reading becomes more complicated when we start to think of landscapes as unique, dynamic and specific texts. Like the pages of a book, landscapes come alive when we actively engage with the process of reading, considering their unique features, inhabitants and histories. The term landscape can refer to the shape of the land, often viewed from a distance, with an aesthetic quality. Landscape can also refer to ‘organised land’ (Antrop, 2019, p. 1) (re)created by people in a number of ways such as physically, cognitively and/or artistically. Contemporary research in OEE has started to consider landscape as something to be participated with, rather than gazed upon from afar (Mcphie & Clarke, 2018; Stewart, 2008).

Material landscapes are more-than homogenous postcards, and there are many more ‘scapes’ than ones of the land: for example, seascapes (Brown & Humberstone, 2015) and riverscapes (Stewart, 2018). For simplicity, we will use the term landscape, knowing there are other scapes and that in OEE we “take particular groups to

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specific places” (Brookes, 2002, p. 408). Particular landscapes are not featureless empty sites, although a lack of attention may render them so, leaving them as blank spaces to conduct somewhat empty activities (in other words, we may unwittingly colonise them). Following Brookes (2002), we see that OEE is performed in “particular geographic, social and cultural contexts” (p. 206), and for distinctive curriculum, we would benefit by attending to local particularities.

Landscapes are material, having unique expressive features, and in that way are storied, requiring ecological and cultural literacies to read them. We argue these literacies are a combination of skills, knowledge and understanding informed by areas such as the natural-cultural history, flora and fauna, and are learned through embodied experience (Mikaels & Asfeldt, 2017). Many/most landscapes consist of interactions between human and more-than-human. In our contemplation of landscape(s) we might apply any number of conceptual lenses, such as, cultural (Indigenous, (post)colonial), ecological (western scientific), artistic, and/or safety; our worldviews play a significant part in shaping what, how and why we might attend to some aspects and not others. Our activities, mode of travel and material equipment help reveal aspects of a place while rendering us ignorant of others (Brookes, 1998). In this chapter we discuss several ideas that educators might employ in reading landscapes, and four different examples from our practice; three from Australia and one from Sweden.

## 17.2 Thinking with Landscapes

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to thinking and reading a landscape. Like other complex terms, the term landscape is not without its problems, having been used in different ways, with varying definitions in different cultures and disciplines (see Antrop, 2019). Landscape is not a value free term, and its use in OEE contexts is attended by socio-cultural hegemony; as educators we make choices about what concepts to think with and which histories or stories we tell or omit (Stewart, 2008).

Reading a landscape, or parts within, is similarly fraught and can be thought of in a range of ways. Reading a landscape in Australia or Sweden, for us, is grounded by efforts to challenge both the intellectual and physical legacies of (neo)colonialism. Colonisation was not one act in time and space but rather an ongoing project that not only subjugated and dispossessed Indigenous people but rendered the more than human world an undifferentiated backdrop, a homogenous nature, for (colonial) human use and progress (Adams & Mulligan, 2003). The ideologies of (neo) colonialism are not restricted to countries linked to the British commonwealth; globalisation is an extension of the same project. As Plumwood (2003) observed, one of the intellectual legacies of colonisation is its production of oppressive relationships that are blind spots in both the coloniser and the colonised (for discussion of colonisation and OEE see Stewart, 2020).

One of the conceptual legacies of Western thought is that humans are somehow separate from the world around them. We contend that humans are not outside of

nature. Instead, we recognise our physical engagements with the world produce embodied ways of knowing. That is, thinking/knowing is a process that occurs with/in/through our bodies, with our physical surroundings (Jukes, 2020). How we think and engage with landscapes is influenced by our embodied activities and experiences in those locations (Spinney, 2006). As Spinney (2006) argued, embodied participation is more than viewing the landscape, it involves the landscape through activity. Reading a landscape is not just a visual task but a bodily prospect. An activity embodies particular knowledge and produces different understandings. In other words, an activity provides possibilities for meaning-making through the movements, postures and modes of attentiveness it allows. Activities might include modes of travel (e.g. walking), yet we encourage the reader to also consider activities beyond the conventional adventurous activities in OEE, to other performances in/through landscapes (e.g. journaling or even the travel to a site of activity). We used the following questions as provocations to think with: how do activities provide ways of kinaesthetically participating with the landscape; how does the landscape shape the activity and embodied learning; how does an activity mediate a correspondence with the landscape, and; can we add a conceptual lens to an activity to enhance our reading of the landscape?

In this chapter, drawing upon philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, we adopt a rhizomatic approach in our OEE context (see Stewart, 2020, for detailed discussions on rhizomatic approaches to OEE). Simply, the concept of rhizome involves making connections between and across conventional boundaries, whilst also challenging dominant modes of thought. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to unpack this concept, however we think it is important to note this concept underpins the writing of this chapter.

### **17.3 Reading More-Than-Human Stories in the Landscape – By Scott Jukes**

Each year, I walk for 18-days with small groups of undergraduate OEE students through the Kosciuszko National Park (KNP), Australia. Part of our aim on these journeys is to develop understandings of the landscape, through stories of the alpine, montane and river environments. To do this, I enact a pedagogical approach of reading more-than-human stories in the features of the landscape (Jukes & Reeves, 2019). For this approach, rather than focus on purely human stories or histories, we pay attention to entangled stories that connect through the landscape. Importantly, more-than-human stories are not cut off from human action or involvement, but they do de-centre humans. This practice of engaging with more-than-human stories is a decolonising project, as it acknowledges that places belong to more than just humans and express agency (Jukes et al., 2019). Using the term more-than-human emphasises this step away from human centrality and exclusivity (which are part of the acts of colonisation).

Features in landscapes have stories to tell. Noticing and engaging with material features provides an entryway into reading the more-than-human stories of the landscape. In this manner, ‘reading’ is a metaphor that also involves listening to the expressive power of a landscape’s features, which can provide pathways into particular stories. This listening and reading creates a dialogical relationship with the more-than-human world (Plumwood, 2003). For my practice in KNP, the duration of the journey allows for a sustained engagement with the landscape, where different stories relating to ecology and history crisscross, flow and connect (rhizomatically), building layers of understanding. When we encounter different features of the landscape, they prompt material-discursive learning possibilities, where we may begin *thinking with the landscape* through our embodied encounters (Jukes, 2020).

A specific (and inevitable) landscape encounter in KNP involves horses and/or their impacts (for example, see Fig. 17.1). These horses were introduced by European settlers in the nineteenth century and form an aspect of colonial heritage that is celebrated by some Australians. In contrast to the world view of heritage perspectives, scientific research insists that hard-hoofed ungulates are invasive, causing intense cumulative damage to catchments and endemic species in the alps (Jukes, 2020). However, settler history and scientific findings are not the only aspects worth exploring.

The aim, through our encounters, is to pay attention to webs of relationships. In a horse encounter, this involves discussions on the related cultural narratives, historical relationships, ecological implications, political debates, ethical dilemmas



**Fig. 17.1** Altered vegetation, pugging and erosion of the streambank, caused by introduced horses, headwaters of the Ingeegoodbee River, KNP. (Source: Graeme L. Worboys)



(such as extinction, human management and culling) and ultimately the worldviews and life worlds of the variously implicated human and non-human stakeholders (for further discussion, see Jukes, 2020). The task for educators is to encourage students to attentively read the landscape, making connections between various stories and features. As the journey unfolds, more-than-human stories develop that consider multiple perspectives and worlds.

The aim and significance of more-than-human stories is that they don't privilege human worlds or an anthropocentric gaze, whilst not ignoring human involvement either. Through this, engaging with more-than-human stories avoids some colonising perspectives and human-nature separations/dichotomies. Simply put, the intention is to explore the complex worlds of a particular landscape, as a respectful learning endeavour.

## 17.4 Learning to Read the Land: Online Teaching in Higher Education – By Jonas Mikael

As Covid-19 hit the world early in 2020, most of our everyday routines took a rapid change. Most universities in Sweden, my home country, responded to the pandemic by switching to online learning. In this example, I share my experiences working with four colleagues to rethink and develop a structure for a course delivered online.

Part of my role at the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences, Stockholm, includes responsibility for a first-year outdoor education (OE) course (subject) structured around two journeys; a three-day hike and a three-day sea kayak journey in the Stockholm archipelago. Both journeys are within 1 h of Stockholm and easily accessed by public transport. One aim for this course is that students develop an understanding of the forest and the sea and the environmental challenges they are facing locally and globally. The students also develop their ability to analyse and plan outdoor learning in relation to the four-overarching historical, environmental, ethical and international perspectives in the Swedish national curriculum. These four overarching perspectives were introduced with the intention that they should be addressed in all subjects, including Physical Education and Health in which OE (in Sweden referred to as *friluftsliv*) is embedded.

Through a *historical perspective*, the students can develop an understanding of the present and a state of readiness for the future and dynamic thinking, to respond to the challenges of a changing world. Through an *environmental perspective*, the students are given opportunities to take active responsibility for the environment they are part of, by developing a personal connection and stance towards global environmental issues. An *ethical perspective* is of importance for many of the issues addressed in education. Permeating all school activities, it should provide the foundation for promoting students' abilities to take a personal standpoint. An *international perspective* enables the ability to see local conditions in an international context and for creating solidarity and close connections across cultures.

Despite the emphasis on these four overarching perspectives in the national curriculum, the extent to which they have been addressed in OE practice in Swedish schooling and higher education has proven to be rather limited (Mikaels, 2018). Therefore, we sought to engage students in these perspectives to meet the needs of our changing world. We also think that when students imagine the curriculum more like a rhizome, that is, in terms of its connectivities and relationalities, the four overarching perspectives in the curriculum become available and allow for the creation of new directions of teaching and learning in OE.

When questioning the focus of the course we realised we needed to provide students with a more structured theoretical framework. Therefore, we introduced theories and concepts otherwise presented to the students later in their program. Following Stewart (2020), place-responsive pedagogy is about reading the landscape by paying attention to its natural and cultural history. It is about being curious about the places we visit or live with/in, observing how different phenomena interrelate, documenting observations, reflecting on observations in relation to those made by others and sharing insights. Place-responsive pedagogy challenges the anthropocentric gaze of looking at nature as “other”. Rather, it offers rhizomatic ways of knowing, being, thinking, and doing within assemblages of human-nature relations.

Baker’s (2005) landfullness is one example of a place-responsive pedagogy that involves being curious of the places we visit, live or dwell in. Landfullness offers a rhizomatic way of integrating environmental education in the form of natural and cultural history into various outdoor activities. Actively reading and contemplating the land, serves as a catalyst for moving between the four levels of the landfull framework: *being deeply aware*; *interpreting land history*; *sensing place in the present*; and, *connecting to home* (Baker, 2005). For each level, there is a set of questions, such as, where am I; how has this land changed over time; how is this place unique; how can this place link to other landscapes?

The assignment we gave our students was to independently plan and carry out two one-day hikes. The theme for the first hike was *forest* and the theme for the second hike was *sea*. For each theme, the students had to include specific literature from the reading list in their planning. For safety reasons, the students were under no circumstances allowed to do any kayaking on their own. Each hike included three phases; a preparation phase, an implementation phase, and an evaluation phase. We met the students online in zoom seminars at each of the three phases. Firstly, we wanted the students to choose a location for each of their one-day hikes. It could be close to either where they live or somewhere further away, as long as it was possible to get there by public transport. Secondly, study and gather as much knowledge as possible about what makes the place unique. Thirdly, explore and engage in/with the land by paying attention to its natural and cultural history through sensual and conscious presence.

Through reframing a course for online, what became apparent to me was the need to reconsider the taken-for-granted assumption that the environment plays an integral role in OE simply because it is the setting (evoked by Baker, 2005). As educators, we agree with Baker (2005) and recommend questioning the



philosophical and educational underpinnings of OE practices. This includes asking ourselves whether we want our students to become actively engaged in and with the landscape rather than simply passing through. When a theoretical framework, such as place-responsive pedagogy is offered to the students at the outset, they have a shared vocabulary when analysing and discussing the integration of their learning activities. Moreover, integrating the four levels of landfullness (Baker, 2005) enabled the students to discover ways in which they connect to the land.

## 17.5 Team Teaching with Alpine Landscapes – By Anthony Mangelsdorf

One strategy for reading landscapes is to acknowledge that landscapes are always already part of the teaching team, rather than a passive medium to be *read* anthropocentrically by humans. In this example, I will share my attempts to work with the alpine landscape as a co-teacher, through a practice of reading more-than-human tracks in the snowpack. I am encouraged in this practice by Jickling et al. (2018) *wild pedagogies*, that prompt educators to consider ways of enabling landscapes to be co-teachers.

For Jickling et al. (2018), enabling the landscape to be the co-teacher requires human educators and their students to open themselves to wild landscapes, allowing these wild landscapes to *teach*. In acknowledging the relational agency of wild landscapes, the hierarchical idea of the human as the sole teacher is destabilised, with the wild landscape becoming the (co)educator. Such a practice requires humility and relinquishing of human control. The educator becomes both a learner and (co) educator, guiding attention to particular features, where the landscape shifts from backdrop, or something to be interpreted, to active contributor of the teaching and learning; “such attention involves carefully listening to available voices and will at times involve actively needing to de-centre the taken-for-granted human voice and re-centring more-than-human voices” (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 162).

However, to be able to *work with* the landscape as an active co-teacher and be comfortable enough to be able to bring forth whatever *suggestions* the landscape makes, the human educator needs to dedicate significant time to being in and with particular landscapes, to gradually de-centre ingrained hierarchical notions about the role of the educator (Jickling et al., 2018). This commitment will need to occur over multiple seasons and for extended periods to develop deep and intimate place-specific experience(s) and knowledge. A level of comfort in particular landscapes is required in order to release some of the control and let the learning experience take a different course. The human educator cannot simply arrive at a particular landscape and rely on the place to do all the pedagogical work. The human educator must keep in mind that this team-teaching work is informed and shaped by an intertwining of multiple threads including the worldview and understandings of the

human educator with the more-than-human landscape, season, weather and inhabitants.

An example of this team-teaching approach is the (seemingly) simple act of following more-than-human tracks in the snowpack. I employ this approach while cross-country skiing with tertiary OEE students in the Bogong High Plains (Australia), after fresh snowfall. I encourage students to seek out the more-than-human tracks in the ungroomed snowpack and to attend to one particular track by following its path. This practice has been shaped and informed by Brookes (1998), who suggests “this is not a matter of occasionally noting a set of tracks crossing the trail then continuing with skills practice ... so much as making watchfulness a more or less continual practice, and allowing evidence of wildlife to shape the experience” (p. 8) (Fig. 17.2).

The act of following tracks (see Fig. 17.2) draws the attention of students to the specific movements of particular more-than-human alpine dwellers at particular times and in particular landscapes. In my teaching location, some of these more-than-human alpine dwellers include the (introduced) Red Fox and Brown Hare, and to a lesser extent, the (native) Southern Bush Rat and the (introduced) Sambar Deer. The way that these tracks appear when fresh, and when aged or distorted by the

**Fig. 17.2** Following Red Fox tracks, Bogong High Plains, Alpine National Park. (Source: Anthony Mangelsdorf)



forces exerted by the sun, rain, or wind helps determine the direction and speed of travel of the creature(s). Following and interpreting tracks opens up their stories. For example, the patterns of predator tracking prey, including the chronology and spatiality of these intersecting tracks, even evidence of successful hunts. This teaching team can also show how these tracks speak of movement, directionality and pressure; of immutable weight to surface-area ratio at the time that the track is imprinted; that such tracks are unstable and ephemeral, being exposed to the erosive power of the wind and sun upon the substrate. The team can consider the materiality of the track itself, the way that tracks are formed *in* (rather than *on*) a soft, malleable substrate (such as snow or mud) by the weight-bearing feet of a creature, and therefore how tracks can be thought of as being *of* the surface and *of* the air (Ingold, 2015). The material affect of regular track-noticing may be to divert the human(s) from trampling more-than-human tracks, perhaps through pre-conscious micro adjustments to where the skis are placed on the snowpack, which may engender a subtle but respectful acknowledgement of the more-than-human co-teacher.

Even with such co-operation amongst the teaching team, this approach of working with the more-than-human (alpine) landscape as co-teacher is still risky and requires a degree of humility on the part of the (human) educator (Jickling et al., 2018). There are no guarantees with this type of learning experience; it could not be known whether or where the more-than-human tracks would appear and while fresh snowfall might be forecast, such predictions are not infallible. The track-following experience is enabled not only by the combination of the fresh snowfall (or a sufficiently soft snowpack), and the movement of alpine-dwelling species upon this fresh snow shortly afterwards; but also by the intimate knowledge of the alpine landscape by the human educator; and finally by the humility of the human educator to acknowledge that the more-than-human alpine landscape is always already part of the teaching team.

## 17.6 Preventing Death and Serious Injury from Falling Trees and Branches<sup>1</sup>: Safety as Reading a Landscape – By Alistair Stewart

Death and serious injury from falling trees and branches are an ongoing safety consideration in most terrestrial environments of Australia (Brookes, 2007). Brookes argued that the knowledge required to read trees is comparable to “judging a river rapid, interpreting weather observations, or assessing a surf beach” (p. 55). Considering tree safety can be linked to other natural and cultural histories when reading landscapes.

In the locations I take students in south-eastern Australia there are numerous species of trees, mainly eucalypts, that drop branches. River red gum, Australia’s most

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<sup>1</sup>This phrase is borrowed from Brookes (2007).

widespread eucalypt, are colloquially referred to as widow makers for their habit of dropping large limbs and whole trees (see Fig. 17.3). Red gums can be found in a wide range of environments and positions in the landscape and despite their name are not always located near a watercourse.

Many things might be read in the landscape of Fig. 17.3, linked together in a rhizomatic manner (Stewart, 2020). The red gum in the centre foreground is many hundreds of years old and surrounded by numerous fallen limbs; a safety consideration. The open spacing between trees is a cultural artefact, the product of land management practices of Indigenous people, the Jardwadjali (for extended discussion see Pascoe, 2014). In a western ecological sense this landscape is referred to as open grassy woodland. On the fallen limbs to the right of the large tree can be seen the signs of chainsaw cuts, likely for firewood; red gum is prized as firewood for the intense heat it produces with minimal soot and ash. Behind and to the right of the fallen limbs is a stand of regrowth, likely less than 100 hundred years old. It is common for red gums to regenerate in dense stands with many individuals dying over time leaving only a few surviving trees. Less obvious in the photo is the important role fallen limbs plays in providing habitat for invertebrates, reptiles, frogs and birds (Stewart, 2020).

In the experience that Fig. 17.3 comes from reading the landscape is not merely a pedagogical strategy, but rather the foundational concept and set of skills that are



**Fig. 17.3** River red gums, Wartook State Forest, western Victoria, Australia. (Source: Alistair Stewart)

developed throughout a 3-year OE university degree. The physical act of walking, attending to safety considerations, and local natural and cultural history, are the educational reason for the particular onto-epistemology of the experience, not an add on or novelty activity.

## 17.7 Concluding Comments

Throughout this chapter we have offered some examples of how we envisage reading landscapes. Our aim has been to provide brief introductions on our theoretical perspectives, whilst describing how we enact these ideas in particular landscapes with our students. Our viewpoints are partial, and we acknowledge that the worldviews and theories we think with shape what we read in a landscape. As such, we also highlight that we don't have identical (or even commensurate) ways of reading landscapes – as we noted at the outset, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, a key consideration is to attempt decolonising and deanthropocentrising our approaches to OEE through the way we read the features of a landscape. These include challenging human centrality and control in our approaches to pedagogy, deploying conceptual frameworks to assist us, whilst attending to our teaching locations with care and respect.

There are also notable limitations in our approaches; reading a landscape requires time, experience, knowledge and practice in particular places. Still, this may not preclude 'mis-readings' and create omissions or silences (Stewart, 2008). Furthermore, we have only offered some ways of decolonising our readings of landscapes (e.g. we have not been able to mention naming practices that can reinforce colonial mindsets or fully acknowledge Indigenous ways of relating to land (Plumwood, 2003)). Nonetheless, this chapter is an entry into the idea of reading landscapes through our worldviews, theoretical perspectives and brief examples. We encourage others to pay attention to the locations they work in and acknowledge the worldviews, theories and assumptions that shape the way landscapes are read.

### Reflective Questions

1. What are the philosophical and educational theories underpinning your OEE practices? In what ways are you enabling the students to become actively engaged in the landscape?
2. What cultural assumptions might you be applying to a reading of the landscape; how do these assist in revealing some aspects while potentially obscuring others?
3. How might you build a teaching team with (a) particular landscape(s)?
4. How might you need to re-consider some areas of your thinking and/or practice to make this a successful partnership?
5. How might you link safety consideration to aspects of natural and cultural history in the process of reading a landscape?

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# Chapter 18

## Embracing Country as Teacher in Outdoor and Environmental Education



Karulkiyalu Country, Paul Gordon, and David Spillman

### 18.1 Introduction

In the Preface of their important exploration of place-responsive pedagogy, Wattchow and Brown (2011, p. 9) set out by quoting American farmer, philosopher, and poet Wendell Berry who once said, “If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are.” Here Berry is offering universal human knowledge, that one could argue qualifies as intergenerational wisdom. It is certainly consistent with the Lore from Karulkiyalu Country and lessons many of us have learnt from Damu (grandfather) Paul Gordon, senior custodian for that Lore. I have often heard Damu Paul say “All we are is a story. A good story is one of connection and obligation. When we leave this Earth all we leave behind is our story.” While it’s important to know where we are, it’s more important to know how we’re connected and obligated to that place. This is a deeper, more enduring knowing that reciprocally connects self to Country through relationship and identity.

This chapter offers an introductory discussion of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, passed intergenerationally on Karulkiyalu Country<sup>1</sup> for tens of thousands of years. As such it represents the knowledge and wisdom of one tribal group of Indigenous Australians. The lore for other tribes and clans will vary, though all hold Country as sacred and central to all existence. We will explore the broad intention of the Lore from Karulkiyalu Country, to connect with and come to know and care for the places we live, Country, Mother Earth, *Gunni Thakun* in Ngemba. The chapter begins with a brief overview of central concepts, Country, lore and stories. This is followed by a description of the 6Ls, Damu Paul Gordon’s reinterpretation for a contemporary world, of an ancient teaching and learning process

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from Karulkiyalu Country. Finally, two research projects that aimed to enact Country as teacher in higher-education contexts, and in different ways, will be compared and interrogated.

Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are perhaps more important now than ever before. The evidence of social and ecological decline and demise across the globe is unequivocal. Dominant western schooling approaches have been heavily critiqued as critical agents for global capitalism, the “engine of questionable progress” (Greenwood, 2009, p. 1). These approaches have worked to sever our connectedness to the Earth, and disturbed the balance between rational, emotional, intuitive, spiritual and embodied ways of knowing, being and doing, elevating human rationality, and indeed human worth, above all else. We agree with Greenwood (2009) who points out, teaching and learning processes that reconnect and rebalance must necessarily involve conversation with, and guidance from local Indigenous knowledge-holders. Walking alongside Bawaka Country et al. (2016), McKnight (2015, 2016) and Milroy and Milroy (2008) we aim to disrupt western cultural thinking that places human-centered, rational understanding as more legitimate than the ‘forever-knowledge’ of Indigenous elders and their Earth-kin.

## 18.2 Country, Lore and Stories

For Indigenous Australians, Country incorporates everything that dwells within, upon and above ground: including rocks, plants, waterways, animals, fire, weather, seasons, sun, moon, and stars, our ‘Earth-kin’ in recognition of their uniqueness and diversity, and our connectedness and one-ness. The choice of the term ‘Earth-kin’ is predicated on Plumwood’s (2003) use of the term ‘Earth-others’ along with our preference for the word ‘kin’ representing connectedness, rather than ‘others’, more indicative of separateness. Country also includes we humans. All these entities that make up Country are alive with spirit; they are all sentient. Each local Indigenous group in Australia was, and is, responsible for their Country, a landscape “large enough to support a group of people and small enough to be intimately known in every detail” (Rose, 2011, p. 17). It is estimated that in 1788 when the British stepped onto the Australian shore now known as Sydney, there were up to 600 different language groups across Australia, all composed of various clan, tribal or family groups, each responsible for their Country. Everything, including humans, belongs to Country. *Karulkiyalu Country*, whom we identify as the primary author of this paper, is composed of *karul* meaning ‘stone’ and *kiyalu*, ‘belonging to,’ in the language known as Ngemba. Thus, Karulkiyalu are the people who identify themselves as ‘belonging to stone’ Country, one of several Ngemba speaking clans. In this way, the phrase ‘custodian for Country’ is more meaningful than the more conventionally western phrase, ‘traditional owner.’ Here human identity and wellness is completely conferred through connection and obligation to Country requiring deep ecological, spiritual and practical knowledge accumulated over and passed on for many thousands of years.

For Indigenous Australians, Country holds Lore which is a multi-species, multi-entity kinship system that one is born into (Rose, 2011). All entities on Country are a story of how they came to be, their purpose, and how they're connected and obligated to various Earth-kin. Hence, everything on Country is fully constituted, "vital and sapient" with its own lore, and regularly renewed through kin relationships (Bawaka Country et al., 2016, p. 456). That is, all species and entities on Country have and live their own lore. Thus, the Lore for Country is the accumulation of all (lore) stories on Country held together through a network of interconnections and obligations. The ancestral storylines detailing how Country was originally created and how it must be regularly renewed are Lore. These creation storylines that often travel vast distances across the landscape, and the multi-species, multi-entity kinship system that traverse boundaries, connect up neighbouring Countries into a vast relational network (Rose, 2011). In addition, every story has a song and dance and therefore a ceremony (Callaghan & Gordon, 2014). Personal enactment of one's lore comes through one's own story of connectedness and obligation to various Earth-kin on the Country one belongs to. The writing of this story begins before birth and continues throughout life, growing and deepening one's knowledge of connectedness and obligation to care for and renew Country. Here, human identity and wellbeing is entirely conferred through knowing, connecting with and caring for the Country one belongs to (Callaghan & Gordon, 2014).

The importance of stories to Aboriginal people and culture has been highlighted by Milroy and Milroy (2008) who explain:

For Aboriginal people the land is full of stories, and we are born from our Mother, the land, into these stories. The old people tell us stories that nurture and sustain us through life into old age so that we can tell children the stories that will sustain them. The great life-story cycle has been the way for millennia. It is the birthright of all Aboriginal children to be born into the *right* story. Indeed, it is the birthright and greatest gift we can give all children. The *right* story connects us intimately to our country giving us our place and our identity. The *right* story embeds us deeply in nature, connecting us to the living spirit. (p. 24)

This view of the right story, as explained by Milroy and Milroy (2008), is what connects and obligates us to Earth-kin and the place we live. It grows and deepens over time as we learn from our human and Earth-kin teachers on Country. We in outdoor and environmental education are well placed to help all students and children become their right story. This means we also have to become our right story too.

### 18.3 The 6 Ls – Country as Teacher

If respect for Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning is to permeate teacher education and teaching in schools, the pedagogy of respectful reciprocal relationships with Country needs to be a priority. (McKnight, 2016, p. 12)

To help us initiate and engage in 'respectful reciprocal relationships with Country', Damu Paul Gordon has offered us the 6 Ls – Lore, Love, Look, Listen, Learn, Lead – as a strong example of cultural continuity. The 6Ls are a

reinterpretation of the Old people's knowledge and wisdom for a contemporary society (Callaghan & Gordon, 2014). This is a cyclical learning process leading to an ever-deepening connection to, knowledge of, and love for one's place, and an ever-increasing desire and ability to care for her.

*Lore* has been briefly described above. It is the body of knowledge for Country, composed of all the lore and stories for Earth-kin that make up the Country we live on. For example, lore includes bush tucker stories, like the story telling how the blooming of the Gidgee flower marks the time to search for Emu eggs or stories about the lifecycles of particular species, or why a particular species has particular characteristics, or how a particular geological formation was created by ancestral beings. In our contemporary society, other stories may be important too for knowing our place, such as scientific stories – for example, lifecycle and food web stories of local species, and local water stories, about quality and flow. Stories about human history may also be valuable for learning about the place. All of these stories are important, as all work to deepen our knowledge and *Love* for the place. This affective growing of a feeling of love is essential. It becomes the motivation for us to expend energy to continue learning about Country and how to look after particular Earth-kin on Country. An important learning skill for Indigenous people is to be attentive on Country, sometimes still, sometimes purposefully active, but always to *Look* and *Listen*, enhancing perceptive capabilities to notice and observe Earth-kin. Such capabilities help us to *Learn* more about our place. This 'noticing' can happen with our senses, our bodies, our intuition, our spirit. When we develop the ability to attentively look and listen in this way, we can *Learn* how Earth-kin live their lore. This learning can happen actively and is a mutual process. Bawaka Country et al. (2016, p. 467) relate an episode where a young girl, Nanukala, has ants on her arm, some biting her, She is crying. Her grandmother brushes them off, telling her it's okay, and commenting that 'It's important for her to know the ants and the ants to know her.' Nanukala and the ants are learning and participating in the co-becoming of each-other's stories and lore. Such learning works to deepen our knowledge of the lore for our place, and subsequently our love, which in turn inspires us to continue looking and listening. It is a cyclical process. All the while our capacity to *lead* by acting to care for Country is enhanced.

Whilst stories told by humans, whether they be age-old Aboriginal stories for Earth-kin and Country, or scientific and historical stories, may all contribute to knowledge of Country, the majority of this body of knowledge (lore) comes directly from our Earth-kin. McKnight (2016) points out that stories learnt in the classroom including Indigenous stories can only ever offer the introductory layer of the body of knowledge being accessed or focused on (McKnight, 2016). The 6Ls is therefore largely, though not entirely a process to embrace Earth-kin as teacher. As Bawaka Country et al. (2016) put it, such approaches offer a way to "center relationality, decenter the human, and attend to the vibrant agency of more-than-human beings" (p. 457). In their rich description, 'co-becoming' happened through digging in the sand in search for *ganguri* (yams) when *gukguk* (pigeon) calls. This kind of looking and listening is an embodied engagement through attentive perception and

purposeful doing on Country. Nanukala and the ants came to know each other in a similar way.

The ants and Nanukala come to know each other through their actions. Indeed, Nanukala's skin is taken into the ant. The ant's secretions come into her arm. It is through everyday life that humans, animals, the seasons, everything interact and come to know, to be and to understand each other (Bawaka Country et al., p. 457).

Collecting bush food, medicine, or materials for weaving a basket or net, making a spear, boomerang or building a house, making fire, burning Country to regenerate a particular species, walking to ceremony or because of seasonal change and the subsequent need to move camp, and hunting are all examples of purposeful action where attentive perception was and can also be practiced. In addition to attentive perception, Dadirri (Ungunmerr, 2017), an Aboriginal process enables people to develop and attain inner stillness to connect in other-than-rational ways (Ungunmerr, 2017). As our ability to engage in attentive perception grows, "knowing, being and doing exist reciprocally. It is in doing that knowing and being emerge; it is by knowing and being that one does" (Bawaka Country et al., 2016, p. 465).

Embracing Country as teacher in the ways briefly outlined above requires a significant rebalancing of teaching and learning approaches – away from those that prioritise human-centred, rational knowledge, towards more locally-oriented, eco-centric approaches that utilize and rebalance all our ways of knowing, being and doing and that focus on restoring ecological (including human) balance and wellbeing.

## **18.4 Enacting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing in Outdoor and Environmental Education**

While the 'self-others-nature' triad has remained one of the enduring metaphors in the field of outdoor education (Wattchow & Brown, 2011), the taken-for-granted cultural assumptions of theorists, policy writers, curriculum developers, management and leadership, and outdoor practitioners determine how this is enacted (Spillman, 2017). In this regard the heavy focus on personal and social development in outdoor education practice over the past several decades, has been attributed to western anthropocentrism, also a powerful vestige of colonization in Australia (Plumwood, 2003; Spillman, 2017). In teaching and learning practice, this often works to "reduce(s) the land to a passive and neutral surface for the inscription of human projects" (Plumwood, 2003, p. 99), or positions it "as a barrier, an obstacle, something to be overcome, reinforcing the focus on human agency and achievement" (Spillman, 2017, p. 16), prioritising individualism and competition at worst and co-operation and teamwork at best, but always reifying human over Country.

The dominant Western worldview is built upon a hierarchy of dualities that confer power differentials and work to separate and disconnect. This hierarchy of superior/inferior binaries – men/women, human/nature, individual/collective, rational/

feeling, European/Aboriginal, work to “manoeuvre Mother Earth as subordinate to Western male culture, logic and reasoning” (McKnight, 2015, p. 278). Further, “these male relations of power organize what counts as knowledge to specify what is of value in culture to mistreat, and what to honour” (McKnight, 2015, p. 278). If we are to embrace Country as teacher to activate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, for the benefit of entire ecological communities, then for most people living in the west, the initial step must be one of cultural self-reflexivity, also referred to as epistemological reflexivity (Harmin et al., 2017). This involves a critical, yet gentle and non-judgmental self-analysis of the ways we have been colonised by dominant Western ideology into thinking of, feeling, seeing ourselves as individuals, separate from and dominant over Mother Earth, and living and behaving in ways that reinforce this position. Country as teacher through non-rational, non-verbal teaching and learning processes can offer experiences that enable such self-realisation, the first step towards decolonizing self. Further, repeated experience of connecting with and learning from Earth-kin as teacher can move us beyond this realisation to a ‘reculturation,’ a new awareness of an old tie, through growing and deepening connectedness of “self as Country and Country as self” (McKnight, 2016, p. 14).

McKnight (2016) provides a practical example of how Country as teacher can be enacted. He engaged six education faculty academics from a regional Australian university in a dynamic experience of ‘Mingadhuga Mingayung,’ as a decolonising/reculturing process. This is a Yuin<sup>1</sup> pedagogy for reinstating respectful reciprocal relationships with Country, embodying ancient stories of Country held by senior Yuin lawman Uncle Max Harrison (McKnight, 2015). Using the storying/theoretical approach of Mingadhuga Mingayung to facilitate Country as teacher, participants were guided to open body, mind and spirit, enabling Country to gently speak back through connection, challenge and reflection. Here Country was able to reflect back participant’s relationships to Western binary thinking. This gentle decolonising process disrupted participant’s habits of rational thinking and verbalising. Post-experience, several participant’s indicated difficulty in understanding and describing what was happening to them. “I don’t know it’s hard to describe,” was a typical comment (McKnight, 2016, p. 18). Yet there was also a sense reported by several participants, of something deeper happening; “it’s growing and it’s deeper than it was before” (p.18), with one participant declaring, “it’s under the skin, it is only just there but it’s under the skin” (p. 17). Decolonising and reculturing processes bleed into each other in different ways and rates for different participants through Country. While one participant described the experience as ‘putting a toe in the water,’ nevertheless the age-old human spiritual experience of self as relationship to Mother Earth, suppressed only momentarily through Western enlightenment and industrialisation, was awakened for at least one participant, “For me, it’s deep, that deep

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<sup>1</sup>Yuin Country reaches from the Snowy River in the South to Wollongong in the north, to the Southern Tablelands in the west and the coastline to the east.

feeling that I know I have regained that connection. I have come back from wherever I have been” (p. 19).

In another study Harmin et al. (2017) investigated student’s experiences of the pedagogical process of ‘epistemological stretching,’ for the purpose of “decolonizing relations between humans and the more-than-human” (p. 1489). The authors worked collaboratively to explore and analyze the experiences of eight students from University of Saskatchewan who undertook a graduate level course called *Multiple Ways of Knowing in Environmental Decision-Making*. During the course, students were required to access a place and entity (Earth-kin) they felt drawn to, spending time there on several occasions each week, recording their “empirical and intuitive observations” in several different forms (p. 1491). Harmin et al. (2017) report the difficult, troublesome and messy nature of student’s transformational experiences and learning. As with McKnight’s (2016) work, these experiences caused a degree of confusion, uncertainty and discomfort, often in this case through tensions created between student’s sense of identity as university graduates and the necessary “engagement with a more diverse set of epistemologies” in the course (p. 1493). Despite (or because of) the struggles, Harmin et al. reported that transformative learning did occur. Through post-course interviews, they identified four areas of transformation due to epistemological stretching. There was a patterned shift in relationality with Earth-kin away from an anthropocentric positioning to a greater acknowledgement and experience of reciprocity and of recognition of “a greater consciousness, agency and ‘aliveness,’ or animacy in the more-than-human world” (p. 1493). All students commented on their emerging awareness of epistemic power dynamics – the ways knowledge and power couple to form a hierarchy, with scientific and academic knowledge systems at the top. This led to a strong pattern in “reframing of their understandings of Indigenous knowledges” (p. 1495). The researchers also indicate a pattern in student reports of a growing clarity in student’s epistemological standpoint and worldview, providing evidence of the same kind of cultural self-reflexivity and decolonisation outlined by McKnight (2016). Students “began to interact with Indigenous knowledge holders in more conscientious and effective ways” (p. 1495) with all non-Indigenous students committed to engage Indigenous knowledges in ways that elevate rather than subordinate.

Summarising the findings of McKnight (2016) and Harmin et al. (2017) it is clear participants in both studies were ‘well educated’ through the academy. Yet, they variously acknowledged experiences that engaged embodied, intuitive, and/or spiritual ways of knowing, uncertainty associated with moments of cultural self-reflexivity, and unexplainable experiences of reciprocal encounters with a variety of Earth-kin. While, McKnight’s (2016) study involved a cultural experience of two field trips to important Yuin sites, beginning with sacred stories of these places, Harmin et al. (2017) focused on a semester long course dealing with environmental decision-making. In both studies transformative learning was primarily facilitated through participant’s direct experience with Earth-kin. These transformative experiences can be seen as both decolonising and reculturing processes.

McKnight’s (2016) study intended to “place the academics into an Aboriginal education system to experience an interconnecting physical, mental and spiritual

approach to learning” (p. 14). It certainly began with stories from the *Lore* for Yuin Country. Whilst McKnight (2016) does not explicitly interrogate the affective impact of these encounters, apart from feelings of uncertainty and confusion, this impact is nevertheless apparent. McKnight’s participants talk of deeper “personal engagement,” an “out of body experience,” a “new lease on things,” of “being amazed,” of “enjoying the wonderful things that are happening,” and “being more respectful” (p. 18). This is the kind of initial emotional impact that *Love* represents in the 6Ls: an affective engagement that inspires people and makes them want more. And then the *Looking, Listening and Learning* from Country and Earth-kin. Harmin et al.’s (2017) study, over a more extensive timeframe, did not begin with *Lore* stories of the place. There is a paragraph description of the course in the publication. From it we assume that the beginnings might have constituted a more historically and academically-orientated focus on decolonisation processes. Yet over time, all participants embraced a variety of ways of knowing, being and doing that engaged Country as teacher – *Looking, Listening and Learning* from Country and Earth-kin. By the end of the course all non-Indigenous participants expressed a desire to further engage with Indigenous knowledge-holders.

Viewing these two studies through the lens of the 6Ls, it seems clear to us that McKnight’s (2016) study nearly completed one cycle of the 6Ls. It is unclear in what ways if at all participants were able and willing to *Lead* as a result of their experiences and learning. Harmin et al.’s (2017) study certainly significantly embraced the *Looking, Listening and Learning* stages of the process. Neither paper discussed how participants intended to or were able to act to care for these places or the Earth-kin there. This is not a weakness in either study, as it is possible that participants did not have enough specific knowledge of these places to be able to act to care in any significant manner. Acquiring such knowledge would require significantly more time looking, listening and learning on Country, deepening knowledge of and love for these places. This would be strongly facilitated by the involvement of local Indigenous knowledge-holders. It is possible that McKnight’s (2016) study reported similar impacts as Harmin et al.’s (2017) longer study because of the involvement of the local Indigenous knowledge-holders.

## 18.5 Conclusion

Following the *Lore* from Karulkiyalu Country, the intention of this writing is to inspire readers to commit time and energy to more deeply connect with and come to know, love and care for the places they live. Here the 6 Ls offers a straightforward teaching and learning process that has been enacted for thousands of years. In this paper we have offered a brief introductory, conceptual exploration of Country as teacher (‘the finger pointing’ at Country). The deeper body of knowledge (knowing Country) can only come through direct experience with Country as teacher. The two case studies have been briefly interrogated to offer concrete examples of how the 6Ls might be enacted in higher education settings.



### Reflective Questions

1. How can we use the 6Ls to rebalance our teaching and learning away from a prioritization of anthropocentric (human-centered), teaching and learning towards ecocentric (Country-centered) teaching and learning approaches?
2. How do we initiate, develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with local Indigenous knowledge-holders?
3. How can we prioritise time for ourselves and our students to connect with and *look, listen* and *learn* from Country?
4. How do we refocus student learning onto their stories of connectedness and obligation to Country?
5. How prepared am I/are we for decolonization and reculturation experiences? How might we prepare students for such experiences?

### Recommended Further Reading

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**Acknowledgments** The knowledge and perspectives offered in this chapter sit in the Lore of Karulkiyalu Country. That is, Karulkiyalu Country is our primary knowledge-holder. As an Aboriginal man in that Lore, I express my love and gratitude to Karulkiyalu Country for caring for, and teaching us, and recommit my obligation to care for her. Damu Paul Gordon is the senior custodian for the Lore of Karulkiyalu Country. I express my love and gratitude to him for lovingly and patiently teaching and guiding me, and recommit my obligation to continue to learn from, and care for him. It is culturally appropriate, indeed necessary, for me to recognise Karulkiyalu Country and Damu Paul Gordon as the primary knowledge-holders for our Lore and thus to acknowledge them as primary authors of this chapter.

David Spillman

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# Chapter 19

## Postcolonial Possibilities for Outdoor Environmental Education



Kathryn Riley

### 19.1 Starting from the Sand

As an Australian, dwelling with the multispecies of transitional plants and animals of the Bass Strait coastal biome I had always lived and played alongside the water's edge. Today, writing from the prairies of Canada, a sense of 'home' resounds whenever there is sand beneath my feet. Standing along the sandy banks of the South Saskatchewan River, I am taken back to the tumbling whitewash crashing onto sun-drenched rocks strewn with Neptune's Necklace and bottle green moss. Taken back to childhood times of golden noses clad with luminous pink zinc, yellow fuzzy tennis balls passed between hands in games of beach cricket, and fly-away frisbees dancing along the zigzag shores. Facing north to the scrubby heathland, I would often see Eastern Grey Kangaroos grazing at dusk amongst coastal Banksia woodland. To the south looking out across jagged horizons, I would see fisherpeople perched on the shores patiently waiting to catch a feed of salmon, and surfers peering out over the shore-breakers looking for the best line of entry to indulge their recreational delights. And, in the sand dunes, lived Hooded Plovers, Australian Salt Grass, and Kidney Weed, amongst other endemic and introduced flora and fauna varieties of this region. Even the Saskatchewan's seagull's squawk resonated a symbolic reference to childhood sandcastles and red buckets and spades, mingled with beach tents emblamed with the Union Jack, Southern Cross, and navy washed fabrics.

Through lifelong attachments to this coastal biome, there is a growing helplessness when I reflect on the susceptibility of this fragile coastal ecosystem to human-induced destruction, degradation, and fragmentation; susceptibility that is part of

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the broader global narrative illuminating the far-reaching and catastrophic effects of socio-ecological instability, threats, and injustices. For example, only metres from the shoreline, a nearby sewerage plant was purging eastern Melbourne's effluent into the ocean. In 2000, the local community responded to this issue through the inception of the *Clean Ocean Foundation*, rallying against Melbourne Water and the Eastern Treatment Plant and imploring the political and economic priorities of local and state governments to amend processes of greywater treatment. As a beach recreator, I actively lobbied against effluent discharge, proudly sporting the '*Clean Ocean Foundation*' bumper-sticker on my car. Moreover, evidence that the breeding patterns of Hooded Plovers in this region were compromised through direct and indirect human activities, including predation by introduced or natural predators, disturbance, nest crushing, was becoming starkly obvious through social rhetoric.

Paradoxically, while I participated in environmental activism in response to practices of Melbourne Water and the Eastern Treatment Plant, through my recreation pursuits, I was also implicated in the ecological disarray of Hooded Plover habitats. As humans draw affinities with the environment through experiential encounters of recreation, fragile ecosystems become more susceptible to human-induced destruction, degradation, and fragmentation. In this sense, the idea that people want to protect what they love means that these environments will continue to be influenced by human activity, in that as we value 'nature', we spend time with 'nature', which then inhibits the original value of 'nature' through human-induced impacts. Highlighting the entangled relationship between environmental destruction, degradation, and fragmentation and human activities in 'nature', illuminates the diverse, and often conflicting, aspects of our lives.

Bringing into question these diverse and conflicting aspects of our lives within teaching and learning practices of outdoor environmental education (OEE), this chapter is situated in the 'environmental' turn of outdoor education. Yet, as Wattchow and Brown (2011) claimed, through an environmental focus in outdoor education pedagogy, traditional teaching and learning practices relating to adventure and challenge in the outdoors are not necessarily commensurate with the theoretical explorations of environmental ethics in the field. Therefore, in this chapter, I consider Wattchow and Brown's (2011) call for 'place-responsiveness', in addition to Mannion et al. (2013) and Stewart's (2020) 'place-responsive pedagogy' in OEE, to offer a conceptual (re)storying of human/nonhuman relationships. This is to produce, what Mannion et al. (2013) called "viable and valuable environmental educational experiences" (p. 793) in response to global socio-ecological instability, threats, and injustices. I do not intend to provide alternative approaches to teaching and learning in OEE; rather, thinking/doing with/through posthumanist and new materialist perspectives, I seek to push broader ontological boundaries in dismantling the idea of humans are separate and discrete from broader ecologies of the world, to understand categories of things (e.g., human/nonhuman) as relationally entangled (ontology being the form and nature of reality and how reality is understood).

Acknowledging the inextricable interdependence and interconnection of humans and nonhumans, posthumanism and new materialism expands beyond a purely

discursive gaze focused upon social dynamics to also take up materiality. This discursive/material focus means that an individual's subjectivity is informed by social influences *and* material influences, bringing attention to materiality of affect 'pulling' bodies into action. In other words, subjectivities are influenced by the social conditions in which the body exists, but also the complex relationships between matter inside and outside of bodies, affecting how the body moves with and through the world. Affect will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter; however, I note here that affect is the pre-conscious capacity for the body to act and be acted upon (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). This has important implications for OEE, because acknowledging that an individual is more than its social construction, in that the body is also materially affecting, and being affected, within its entangled network relations, then there becomes an inherent and intrinsic responsibility and accountability for the types and kinds of relationships that are generated and sustained through these affective stirrings. This discursive/material focus has been taken up by scholars in the OEE field; for example, Jukes and Reeves (2019) commented that, "Studying a place's histories and ecologies is part of (Wattchow & Brown's, 2011), place-responsiveness...[yet] also requires attentiveness to the various more-than-human and material elements of places" (p. 2). Gough (2016), in his cartography exploring materialism in OEE research, also wrote,

posthuman/place relations are not about individual subjects autonomously forming and developing relations with the world but, rather, about realising that these relations always already exist, and might be as much influenced by the behaviour of other material's in the places we inhabit as they are by our intentional or unintentional actions. (p. 59)

Turning to a discursive/material focus in this chapter, I adopt the concept of the ecotone. As an ecologically embedded site in the margins and borders of place, ecotones offer a useful way to explore the dynamic, continual, ongoing, and reiterative co-constitution of things in relationship, helping me to understand myself in affective relationships with nonhuman worlds of the Bass Strait coastal biome. Through thought experiments with ecotones, I enact an opening to new and different ideas, gathering and generating new seeds/stories for future reseeding and new expressions of human/nonhuman relationships (Adsit-Morris, 2017; Jukes & Reeves, 2019). In this chapter, therefore, such gathering and generating led me to understand entangled webs of relations through postcolonial ethics, given the capacity for postcolonial ethics to acknowledge knotted human/nonhuman pasts, presents, and futures of colonial legacies (Taylor et al., 2013). It is my hope that stories presented in this chapter do not remain static and closed within these pages; rather, through affective stirrings, that they are expanded upon in the (re)configuring of new worlds, continually opening the field of OEE to new expressions of human/nonhuman relationships.

## 19.2 The Bass Strait Ecotone

Ecotones are the ecological location where the tensions between diverse ways of being come into effect (Krall, 1994). Acting as a transitional zone between two or more biological communities, ecotones are not just the blending of two separate ecosystems, but they contain species from each community in addition to species unique to any given ecotone. In this way, ecotones are highly productive biological edges and places of meeting, experiencing dynamic interchange between ecosystems and experiencing a multitude of tensions between these diverse worlds. As biotic communities in the ecotone experience change more abruptly than centrally located ecosystems, they reflect what is called the ‘edge effect’. Haraway (2007) called this the ‘contact zone’, further taken up by Somerville (2007) to mean, the “concept of emergent relational spaces between self and Other” (p. 234). In all of these terms, the relational, in-between, creative, and transitional fields between the parts are seen as connective, rather than as separate and discrete, in that subjects overlap through mutual affecting and becoming.

### 19.2.1 A Note on Mutual Affecting

By affecting, I am referring to the classical Spinozian meanings of affect, which relates to the body’s capacity to affect something and to be simultaneously affected through transforming in togetherness (Massumi, 2015). Affect is not to be confused with subjective feelings and emotions of an individual, but as bodies become ‘marked’ through preconscious affective intensities, they are pulled into action to take up new pathways of many virtual possibilities (Massumi, 2015). As Seigworth and Gregg (2010) wrote, “Affect, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us towards movement, toward thought and extension” (p. 1). As I am affected by the Bass Strait ecotone, I simultaneously affect it, meaning that through mutual affecting, I know myself *through* my relationship with the Bass Strait ecotone. That is, I am not a separate and discrete entity *in* the world, but something that is webbed in relations, co-constituting and co-creating *with* the world through intersections of biological, ethical, spiritual, socio-cultural, political, and ecological forces. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (p. 257)

Through the idea of mutual affecting, I depart from classical humanist ideas of subjectivity coinciding with conscious, individualised, autonomous, and self-determined agency, in which people act to produce a specified effect *on* the social

world (e.g., social constructivist theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Rogoff), to take up ideas of relationality that sees me in constant negotiation *with* the world.

The idea of relationality, in cultivating a more robust environmental ethic in OEE that attends to socio-ecological instability, threats, and injustices, is important for two reasons. First, seeing myself as an individual with independent autonomy, and not something as relationally entangled with the world, works to support human exceptionalism. Human exceptionalism is the belief that humans are categorically or essentially different from those deemed as ‘Other’; ‘Other’ including other humans, plants, animals, energies, and technologies. This view of myself as an individual with independent autonomy also supports human supremacism, which reflects human biases in traditional Western attitudes to nonhuman worlds (Western attitudes typically attuned to exploitation, domination, and objectification of ‘Other’). Second, with the capacity to reflexively challenge my position within social arrangements, I am perpetuating and maintaining human/nonhuman binaries. This means that I am outside of, and detached from, the very structures of society that I am intending to critique (Grossberg, 2010). In situating myself within relationality, however, I am akin to the ecotone, which is not discrete, bordered, and self-contained, but interwoven through a continuous (re)making with ‘Other(s)’. Grossberg (2010) described this as “living belonging with community”, rather than “living identity in community”. Of course, as human I am constituted differently to this coastal biome. However, understanding that distinctions and differences matter within human/nonhuman relationships, I do not accept dominant narratives of human superiority while simultaneously devaluing nonhumans or privileging nonhumans at the expense of the human, but in acknowledging complex entanglements, I am prompted to think beyond my immediate human concerns.

### ***19.2.2 A Note on Mutual Becoming***

For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), ‘becoming’ involved the questioning of cultural hierarchies, power, and the ‘The Majority subject’ (Mikaels, 2018) through the detachment from the dominant state of representation. This is not set within a social resurgence that upholds categories (e.g., human/nonhuman); this merely generates ‘multiplicities of same’ in maintaining a sense of ‘Otherness’ (Braidotti, 2013). Rather, reacting and responding to tensions between subjectivities, as they pull together and push apart, generates ‘multiplicities of difference’ in that subjectivities are always in a state of transformative becoming through dynamic, ongoing, continual, and reiterative unfoldings with the world. Moving between the relational space through multiplicities of subjectivities, I am therefore in a constant state of ‘becoming’. In this way, I do not seek to reconcile discordant and dissonant natures between things, but acknowledge their differences without resisting, negating, or transcending the present moment awareness of these subjectivities.

This is analogous with Braidotti’s (2009), affirmative politics, as “a process of engendering empowering modes of becoming” (p. 45). It is affirmative, because

through my relational undertakings, I can mobilise, actualise and deploy cognitive, affective and collective forces of actual material relations, giving rise to the conditions of possibility to transmute values. Moreover, as I am always in a state of transformative ‘becoming’, normative versions pertaining to an ‘environmental activist’ and an ‘outdoor recreator’ fall away because I am disengaging and detaching from these socially-assigned categories. However, because each moment is imbued with material forces, my body is still ‘marked’ with affective intensities, bringing to light my inherent and intrinsic responsibility and accountability for acting in affirmative ways with broader ecologies of the world—irrespective of the category discursively assigned to me. For Haraway (2007), this was termed ‘becoming-with’, and later taken up as a ‘becoming worldly’ practice (2016). Through this reconfiguring of human/nonhuman relationships, we cannot partition ourselves, as autonomous individuals, away from global socio-ecological instability, threats, and injustices. Rather, as humans and nonhumans are all mutually entangled within co-implicated and shared futures (Taylor et al., 2013), in acknowledging the entangled narratives contributing to, and affecting, how I understood myself with the Bass ecotone, I take up postcolonial ethics.

### 19.3 Postcolonial Ethics in the Bass Strait Ecotone

Understanding myself in relationship with the Bass Strait ecotone is influenced by many narratives, including narratives from Western and First Nations’ cultural and spiritual ontologies. Returning to my sand stories from the opening part of this chapter, I wrote about beach tents emblomed with the Union Jack, Southern Cross, and navy washed fabrics. I did not know this as a child, as an adolescent, or even as a young adult, but now reflecting back to images of the bold Australian flag standing guard along vast aqua foam shorelines, my White Australian ‘beach’ identity was imbued with pervasive settler colonial narratives. And it did not stop here. As a pre-service outdoor education teacher from 2004 to 2007, the only memory that remains affording me an opportunity to look differently at myself and at the beachscape in which I was dwelling, was a brief encounter with the Dreamtime story of Loo-errn, the Aboriginal spirit and protector of his people in Country of south-east Victoria. During an outdoor expedition, I remember sitting on the beach at Norman Bay in Wilson’s Promontory watching a wave of grey fog roll along Tidal River to meet us at the estuary. With cameras ready to capture the aesthetics of what looked like a brewing storm, someone yelled, “We’d better get back to camp, Loo-errn is looking very angry!”. I now acknowledge, however, that the story of Loo-errn in this moment acted as a source of lighthearted entertainment, rather than as an opportunity to explore First Nations’ cultural and spiritual ontologies of Country. With scant opportunities to question myself as a White Australian, and what this might mean for how I understood Country, the memories of this experience more vividly reflected our efforts to debrief recreational activities that we’d participated in that day, again returning me to the purpose of this paper in bringing a more robust



environmental ethic aligned with traditional practices of adventure and challenge activities in OEE.

Given that narratives are derived from certain discursive positions of power, some narratives will inevitably have a more meaningful sense of validity within specific socio-cultural contexts. This was described above when I discussed the power hierarchies between Settler/Indigenous stories as in/excluded in my outdoor education undergraduate degree. To challenge the discursive positions of power in narratives, therefore, postcolonial ethics work to deterritorialise habits of thought within 'normalising' social and cultural structures, in leaving the dominant territory that keep us confined to old thinking patterns, in order to make new connections. Deterritorialisation, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), "is the movement by which 'one' leaves the territory ... carried off by other types of assemblages" (pp. 508–509) to form new assemblages. An example of deterritorialising is to enact certain types of teaching practices in OEE that break away from imposed order and create new worlds comprising different types and forms of teaching practices. However, it is important to keep in mind that these new ideals might be later rejected/challenged/disrupted through a dynamic, ongoing, continual, and reiterative unfolding of new lines of flight (affects) working to further territorialise/de-territorialise/re-territorialise new worlds.

Through postcolonial ethics, we are not individuals in the sense of oneness, but as we form broader assemblages of relations within the wider cosmos, we emerge as hybrid beings, in that "all the actors [humans and nonhumans] become who they are in the dance of relating ... redone through the patterns they enact" (Haraway, 2007, p. 25). This understanding affords the opportunity to acknowledge our relations with 'Other(s)' in a productively heterogenous manner, meaning that we are responsible and accountable for cultivating and sustaining affirmative relationships within shared futures on a finite planet. It is important to note that hybridity in this sense is not a mixture of two pure forms, in what Whatmore (2002) called 'one plus one' logic with the separation of extremes down the middle. Whatmore suggested that this divide inevitably silences and denies the middle space, reifying categories and their hierarchical positions based upon power differentials. For example, given dominant structures of human exceptionalism and supremacism fuelling the idea that to be human is to be more than nonhuman, this means that my 'humanness' works to supersede the 'nonhumanness' of critters dwelling within the Bass Strait ecotone, swiftly returning us to binary structures set in hierarchies.

In attempting to (re)configure these binary structures of dualistic categories, therefore, the hybridity that I take up through postcolonial ethics is a valorising of the ecotone border culture of the in-between spaces. In this context, there is no hierarchical social arrangements, but as I am entangled within a messy, complex, and dynamic assemblage of zigzagging relations, there are only intersections of becoming-withs. That is, as two categories (e.g., human/nonhuman) become relationally entangled, they do not blur into each other diluting the other to become a hybrid form of two different things, in which power relations will inevitably structure dualistic and hierarchical configurations. Rather, hybridity is understood through bodies transforming through a 'togetherness relationship'. Conceiving



hybridity in this way, an ecological understanding of self, acts in favour of the collective and not in favour of a narrow set of self-interests, returning to Grossberg's (2010) "living belonging with community."

## 19.4 (Re)Making Ourselves in/with/for Outdoor Environmental Education

If knowing, being, thinking, and doing in OEE is derived from understanding self with the world, rather than as something extrinsically derived through grand narratives and social/cultural/political/economic influences regarding 'best practice', the OEE field is provided with the opportunities to produce "a more adequate cartography of our real-life conditions" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 104). Bringing the question back to the nature of the 'human' in its different constitutions, is understanding that we are not humans because we claim to be distinct from "the nonhuman, the inhuman, the subhuman, the more-than-human, those who do not matter" (Barad, 2017, p. 86), but our humanness is derived from our responsibility and accountability to act *with* the world. Actively aware of personal responsibilities and accountabilities to live and die well together, given that *all* our lives are inextricably bound to socio-ecological instability, threats, and injustices, often without consent, is acknowledging that all humans and nonhumans are vulnerable, because we all share the same planetary threats of cross-species extinction, environmental destruction, degradation, and fragmentation.

Importantly, the postcolonial ethics taken up in this chapter do not suggest that we are past colonialism, given the historically situated, culturally located, and socially mediated discursive structures of colonialism subjugating and oppressing those on the borders and margins. Rather, set within the grounded, lived, embodied, and embedded accounts of the individual in relationship with broader ecologies of the world, because worldmaking is a co-constituted, yet differentiated, entanglement of both/and, they work to challenge either/or hierarchies. Postcolonial ethics taken up in this chapter also do not insist that we enact a negative bonding through grief, sadness, guilt, fear, and hopelessness for the losses of past/present/future on Earth (Braidotti, 2009), or that we enact a transcendental form of escapism from the realities of socio-ecological crises. Alternatively, they illuminate mutual and co-constituted unfoldings into new patternings of knowing, being, thinking and doing. In this way, they offer a myriad of opportunities for teachers and learners in OEE to (re)make ourselves time and time again within the micro-politics of the present moment.

### Reflective Questions

1. Reflect on a time that you have encountered nonhuman worlds through an outdoor recreation pursuit. Looking in on this place from a sense of separateness and detachment, how might you demonstrate this separation and detachment in a drawing of yourself *in* nature.

2. Reflecting on another time that you have encountered nonhuman worlds through an outdoor recreation pursuit. Looking at this place through a lens of relationality, how might you demonstrate human/nonhuman entanglements in a drawing of yourself *with* nature?
3. Reflecting on other times that you have encountered nonhuman worlds, can you recall any moments that were imbued with an ‘affective pull’ stirring you into action to enact change in response to socio-ecological instability, threats, and injustices?
4. If the encounter of being affected, and in turn affecting, is not an emotional or felt experience that can be captured through language, but a preconscious pull to action, how do we know when the body has been affected through its relationship with ‘Other(s)’?
5. Considering the idea that we have never been apart from ‘Other(s)’, but that we are always in a constant state of becoming-with ‘Other(s)’ through entangled, yet differentiated, existences, how this might inform your professional teaching philosophies and practices in OEE?

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# Chapter 20

## Embracing Local Community Through Post-activity Outdoor Education



Allen Hill

### 20.1 Introduction

For six weeks in early 2020, my family and I were confined to our home and immediate local area in Aotearoa New Zealand due to Covid-19. On our frequent family walks we experienced our local community in a new way. We had small close-to-home adventures by walking streets that we had never been on before and we saw more of our neighbours as we exchanged greetings from across the street. During this time, I was also acutely aware of my middle class white privilege and the relative comfort with which I enjoyed lockdown. There were many who lost their jobs, who were living in crowded conditions, who were struggling to put food on the table, and who continued to live with the inequalities and injustices of colonisation.

Re-engaging with my local community reminded me of the rich learning opportunities present in local places. Outdoor and environmental education has a history of such learning experiences although some forms of traditional adventure-based outdoor education have tended to shun the local for the allure of ‘wilderness,’ the ‘backcountry,’ or the ‘pristine’. As I have discussed in earlier writing (Hill, 2013; Hill & Brown, 2014), such valorisation of far-away places might result in missing transformative learning opportunities that exist more locally. Inspired by Orr (2004), who critiqued the purpose of education, I argued for a ‘love of the local’ without providing a substantive conceptualisation of what such an idea might look like in theory or practice. This chapter is an opportunity to re-engage with the concept of the local more fully.

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In attempting to conceptualise local community in relationship to outdoor and environmental education, a series of questions have emerged for me. For example; How have adventure activities influenced the way that outdoor educators and students might experience local community? How might conceptualising local community as people and place, embracing indigenous perspectives and relationships, provide fruitful opportunities for outdoor and environmental education? How might a focus on local community offer opportunities to engage with processes of decolonisation? As this chapter unfolds, I will explore these questions and seek to provide some insights as to how local community can enrich learning.

## 20.2 Conceptualising Local Community

Of relevance to this chapter are the meanings ascribed to local, and local community. Local or locality has its roots in the Latin *locus*, which according to Relph (2019), is more or less synonymous with place. Relph cautions that although the use of the term ‘local’ is often convenient and appealing, it can evade a precise geographical definition. He suggests that local “can be applied to a neighbourhood, a town, or city,” (p. 2) but not to something that is nation-wide or international. Given Relph’s likening of locus to place, the people, practices and stories that inhabit the local are also of utmost importance. As reminded by Wattlechow and Brown (2011) “place is suggestive of both the imaginative and physical reality of a location and its people, and how the two interact and change each other” (p. xxi). In this sense, place, and therefore the local, become imbued with meaning through the interactions that people have with it. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) extend these ideas through incorporating indigenous perspectives to conceptualise “place as lived space” (p. 32). In doing so they suggest that place shapes individuals and communities as people shape and re-shape places through embodied and emplaced movements.

Local community can also be difficult to conceptualise. A taken-for-granted understanding of local community might point to a defined group of interacting people living in a certain place. Such an understanding is contingent on such groups of people operating in ways that demonstrate some form of interconnection and relationship. At face value this might make sense. Yet, all too often our sense of community can be challenged. On March 15, 2019, my city was rocked by a terrorist attack which saw a lone gunman kill and injure almost 100 Muslim men, women and children in their place of worship. The thought that something like that could happen in our place was devastating. It is also a reminder of how “sense of place can turn sour or be poisoned when it becomes parochial and exclusionary” (Relph, 2009, p. 26). Yet at a moment when such an act threatened the fabric of our community, the response by people all over Aotearoa New Zealand was to come together and show huge support for the Muslim community. Led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, and her simple yet powerful words “they are us”, our broader community was strengthened through our grief. In early 2020, as the global Covid-19 pandemic was unfolding, Ardern again drew on a strong sense of community in Aotearoa New

Zealand through appealing to a “team of five million” to take action to eliminate the virus, an ambitious goal that has been largely realised. These are powerful symbols of community solidarity, yet they have occurred within a country with a troubling history of colonisation where the effects of past injustices are still very present today. The lived experience of local community for people in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly Māori, takes on very different meaning depending on the impacts of those histories.

So what does this mean for a book chapter that aims to encourage outdoor educators to embrace local community in the context of a colonised nation? How we conceptualise the notions of *the local* and *community* become particularly important. Whilst acknowledging there are multiple ways of seeing local community, this chapter is based on a vision of the local as place and people, both the ecological and the socio-cultural. In doing so it is important to recognise how concepts of local community are always situated within the cultural narratives, social norms, and histories of particular places.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a nation where the process of decolonisation is still a work in progress. Although Māori still suffer the very real effects of colonisation, the place of our indigenous culture, Te ao Māori, has growing influence on our society and institutions. In the Māori world, conversations or *korero* would often begin with *mihimihi* or *pepeha*

.a form of introduction which tells the story of how we are connected to places and people. This expression of connection is an important part of my identity as a Pākehā New Zealander and I think it is appropriate to situate this chapter accordingly.

Korihi te manu  
*The bird sings*

Tākiri mai i te ata  
*The morning has dawned*

Ka ao ka ao ka awatea  
*The day has broken*

Tihei mauri ora  
*My life force is alive!*

Ko Ranginui e tu iho nei  
*I acknowledge the sky father who is above*

Ko Papatūānuku e takoto nei  
*And the earth mother who lies beneath*

Ka rere taku manu i te tahi o Tararua  
*My bird flies down from the summit of the Tararua Range*

Ka rere iho taku manu mā te awa o Manawatū  
*My bird descends via the water way of the Manawatū river*

Tau ana taku manu ki te whenua o Rangitāne o Manawatū.  
*My bird lands in the area of Rangitāne o Manawatū.*

Te iwi whakaruruhau, te mana whenua.  
*It is sheltered by the mana whenua.*

Nō Cornwall, Ireland, and England ōku tipuna  
*My ancestors are from Cornwall, Ireland, and England.*

Ko Papaioea te papakainga  
*My original family home is Palmerston North*

Kei Ōtautahi tōku kainga ināianeī  
*My current home is Christchurch*

Ko Dr Allen Hill taku ingoa  
*My name is Dr Allen Hill*

Being Pākehā is not the same as being Māori. I cannot claim the indigenous identity of Māori as tangata whenua (people of the land), the founding settlers of Aotearoa some 800–900 years ago. My ancestors are from the Celtic regions of Cornwall and Northern Ireland and were settlers who participated in the colonising processes of Aotearoa New Zealand. For me, being Pākehā is not the same as being European. Through recognising and embracing Tikanga and Te Reo Māori (Māori culture and language) I embrace a Pākehā identity allied to Māori (Thomas, 2020). For me, being Pākehā involves a culturally responsive relationship with Te Ao Māori through a spirit of respect, humility, and reciprocity. Such an identity acknowledges my white privilege and colonial ancestry, but also seeks to participate in the project of decolonisation and better appreciate how Māori worldview and knowledge can enrich my life. This positioning is important for understanding how local community is being conceptualised in this chapter. In acknowledging the central position of people and place in local community, I believe it is crucial to start with the cultural connections that comes from indigenous peoples, in my case Te Ao Māori. As this chapter progress, I will reveal how these processes influence the educational potential of local community in outdoor and environmental education.

### 20.3 Decolonisation, Local Community, and Post-activity Outdoor Education

I have been critical in past writing of outdoor education practices that may have ignored the local to take students to distant or alluring places to undertake adventurous activities. Whilst there are legitimate reasons for such trips, for example, expanding students horizons or developing higher skill levels, I worry that an emphasis on traditional adventure activities which can only occur in specific places, diminishes opportunities to engage with their own local communities. There is also potential for a focus on activities to perpetuate colonial influences on educational thinking and practices. This can occur through an uncritical adoption of activities

imported from other contexts and/or through the way activities can be facilitated in ways that ignore place and accompanying cultures, histories and stories.

In seeking to engage more fully with local community and contribute to a process of decolonisation, I believe post-activity outdoor education (PAOE) could be a useful concept. The idea of PAOE had its genesis in two key-note addresses I delivered in 2018; first, to the Australian National Outdoor Education Conference (ANOEC) in Hobart, and second, to the Physical Education New Zealand (PENZ) national conference in Dunedin. This chapter extends those thoughts to position local community more centrally within outdoor and environmental education discourse and deconstruct the primary role that adventure activities have held in traditional outdoor education.

The last 25 years have seen critique, re-visioning, and re-theorising of outdoor education which has extended thinking and practice beyond personal and interpersonal development through adventurous activities. As discussed by Hill and Brown (2014), the philosophies of people such as Kurt Hahn were inevitably bound by certain socio-historical conditions and what was considered appropriate by many in mid-twentieth century wartime Britain may have less relevance in contemporary times. Thus, scholars have critically examined of the notion of character building (Brookes, 2003a, b) and the role of risk in outdoor education (Brown & Fraser, 2009; Cure et al., 2018). There have been calls to pay much greater attention to issues of power, gender, and culture (see for example, Gray & Mitten, 2018; Kennedy & Russell, 2020) and there is a growing body of literature urging outdoor educators to better consider how humans relate to the more-than-human world and to sustainability.

Adventure pursuit activities have dominated thinking and practice in outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand for several decades. Recent qualification development at post-secondary certificate and diploma level has focused mostly on traditional activities such as kayaking, rock climbing, bushwalking, and mountain biking. Although the centrality of activities has been critiqued by scholars (Brown & Fraser, 2009; Payne & Wattachow, 2008), they seem rooted in current practice. If we were to ask members of the general public or classroom teachers in schools to describe what outdoor education is, they would probably refer to activities like camping, bushwalking, kayaking, abseiling or climbing. Such dominant perceptions can be problematic in a number of ways. First, it can limit the perceived learning benefits to physical, technical and interpersonal skill development (often associated with physical education), thereby potentially marginalising the diverse and rich ecological, cultural, and social learning opportunities that can come from a focus on place rather than the activity. Second, it can limit the types of place where learning occurs to only those that are suitable for the activity. Third, activities that require technical expertise and equipment can result in inequitable access to learning opportunities. Finally, an uncritical use of imported activities, equipment and techniques can fail to recognise and address the colonising effects of education in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Traditional outdoor education discourse and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand has resulted in a relative silence of indigenous voices and worldviews – Te Ao Māori. As has been the case in other colonised countries, processes of colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand have worked to oppress and diminish indigenous knowledge and practices. Ross (2020) describe the effects of colonisation as “brutal” and argues that “most New Zealanders are unaware, ignorant or dismissive of how and why colonisation happened and continues to happen” (p. 22). I suggest that in outdoor education, influences of colonisation have been subtle and have manifest in a tendency to look to historical figures and activities imported from colonising countries rather than embracing Māori knowledge, customs, and practices. My experience of outdoor education conferences and forums over the last 20 years has seen a lack of meaningful engagement with Māori. Despite the undeniable value of outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand (Hill et al., 2020), it has, like other aspects of our education system, been a contributor to colonisation. In many ways, the concept of *post-activity outdoor education* offers opportunities to (re)engage with Te Ao Māori more meaningfully and embrace the project of decolonisation. After all, Māori have lived in and learned through the places we call the outdoors for over 800 years, and that rich history, knowledge, and practice needs to be weaved into our outdoor education programmes.

Many readers will be familiar with the prefix ‘post’. It has been placed in front of a multitude of terms for several decades, particularly in academia. For example, post-modern, post-structural, and more recently the emergence post-humanism. It is also used in post-colonial theories of which processes of decolonisation are a part. It is beyond to scope of this chapter to discuss the postmodern turn and all these movements in detail. Rather I aim to provide a reference point for my use of the term *post-activity outdoor education*. Drawing from the work of St. Pierre (2011), my use of the term ‘post’ can be thought of both chronologically and deconstructively.

Let us return to the concept of postmodernism to explore those ideas more fully. Simply put, the post in postmodern refers to that which comes after. Postmodernism, therefore, might be seen as a critical questioning of the ideas and values of modernism. In considering what comes after the modern, postmodernism allows for new ways of viewing the world and knowledge to unfold. In a similar way the pertinent turn towards post-humanism enables critique of humanist or anthropocentric ways of thinking and being. Post-humanism reconsiders human subjectivity, ethics, norms and values, through lenses which account for the more-than-human world, something that is so pressing given the many complex ecological issues facing the world we live in. Likewise post-colonialism looks to critique and deconstruct colonial thinking and practice, exposing the inherent injustices of those processes, whilst looking to what comes after colonialism through working for and towards just, equitable, inclusive, and restorative social structures and interactions.

So in using the term *post-activity outdoor education*, I am seeking a critical reconsideration of the central role that certain activities have played in traditional outdoor education thinking and practice. The focus, therefore, shifts from the activities themselves to what is *beyond* the activities. This process is one which involves

a careful reappraisal of both the language we use to talk about outdoor education and the practices that might define our field. This call extends conversations from the early 2000s related to critical outdoor education (Martin, 1999) and the role of adventure activities (Thomas, 2005). Cognisant of the need to avoid creating unhelpful dichotomies where all traditional adventure activities are seen as bad and all local activities are good, we need to carefully consider the way that we might engage with or in local communities. *Post-activity outdoor education* prioritises and celebrates the central role that people and place, along with accompanying histories, cultures, and stories can take in the learning process.

Place-responsive approaches to outdoor education are not something new. Many scholars internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand have advocated for a more deliberate engagement with place in educational contexts. I am one of these advocates. Amongst the calls for place-responsiveness have come critiques of some approaches to adventurous activities which can diminish or dismiss the importance of place at best, or treat place as an empty canvas upon which to paint our human exploits, at worst (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Alternative approaches have also been advocated by Thomas (2005) which focus on careful facilitation and the use of teachable moments to help outdoor educators resolve apparent tensions between adventure activities and the learning offered by local places. I don't wish to dwell on these critiques here. Rather I suggest that a *post-activity outdoor education* holds centrally to the notion of local community rather than activity. In doing so, the language used to talk about outdoor education and our practices shifts from a focus on certain activities to a focus on people and places. This doesn't necessarily mean the exclusion of carefully facilitated adventure activities which are used sympathetically and critically to explore places.

This shift has multiple implications. One is that a focus on local communities opens up new possibilities for learning which may not be present with a focus on activities. Let me provide a quick practical example from a human geography course I teach in the Bachelor of Sustainability and Outdoor Education at Ara Institute of Canterbury in Ōtautahi / Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. Ōtautahi/ Christchurch is nestled at the foot of Te Pātaka o Rākahautū, commonly known as Banks Peninsular. We facilitate a three-day field trip in the local community where there are no traditional pursuit activities, rather students facilitate peer learning on the rich cultural, historical, and geographical aspects of this place. Students explored the peninsular using both western scientific explanations as well as Māori narratives of geological formation. They talk about settlers to the area, both Māori and Pākehā. They critically examine land use and problems; they reflect on their place in the world and impact upon it. And perhaps most importantly they are more cognisant and respectful of the local people, places and communities that constitute Te Pātaka o Rākahautū.

An implication of people and place becoming the centre of outdoor education is that it forces us to pay greater respect to places, to the rich cultural histories and stories of places and to local hapū or rūnanga (local people) who hold mana whenua (responsibility) over local areas. Some readers may be familiar with work of Māori movie director Taika Waititi (writer and director of *Jojo Rabbit* among many

others). Waititi has been a central figure in campaigns against racism in Aotearoa New Zealand and in a 2018 interview with UK magazine *Dazed*, he labelled New Zealand “racist as fuck” because of ongoing inability or unwillingness of some people to pronounce Māori place names correctly. I have empathy for Waititi’s position and view the correct pronunciation of names as about respect for people and places. There are also implications beyond how we pronounce place names. Māori had names for all parts of Aotearoa New Zealand which told important stories of people’s interactions with those places. The process of colonisation devalued and, in many cases, ignored the significance of Māori place names (Thomas, 2020). Outdoor educators ‘use’ of many places throughout Aotearoa New Zealand has failed to engage meaningfully with Māori places names and stories, often through ignorance.

I am guilty of such ignorance. Early in my career, over 20 years ago, I ran rock climbing trips for secondary students which focused completely on technical skills and safety systems. There was no consideration of the place whatsoever, no history, no ecology or geography, no culture, and certainly no consideration of local Māori who held responsibility for that area. For me in that time, the activity was everything and the people and place were completely ignored – in fact, we just colonised the place, using it as a gymnasium or playground for our exploits. In contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, this type of outdoor education is not only outdated, it is also inappropriate and damaging to the important project of decolonisation in our country.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi sets the foundations of a bi-cultural nation and mediates the relationship between the government and Māori. Within this context, Māori scholar, Ripeka Mercier (2020) suggest decolonisation is in part underpinned by a commitment to making “cohabitation” work under the principles of the Treaty (p. 41). She goes on to provide an explanation of decolonisation that is worth quoting in full here,

Decolonisation involves rethinking and then action. Educational theorist Graham Hingangaroa Smith puts it as conscientisation, resistance and transformation. The thinking begins with a recognition of colonisation in all its forms and guises... Decolonisation involves critical self-reflection and outward observation; it seeks to embody pre-colonial, Indigenous and non-colonial paradigms; it unearths and addresses embedded colonial thinking. Decolonisation, then, takes individual and collaborative action to root out the weeds of colonisation and provide a space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being – and more besides. All together, these actions can lead to radical personal and societal change. (p. 42–43)

Processes of decolonisation have rightly been led by Indigenous people, however, Ripeka Mercier (2020) points out that decolonisation is also a project for non-Indigenous allies. As Pākehā environmental studies scholar, Thomas (2020) advocates, it the responsibility of Pākehā to “take our cue from Māori in the work of decolonisation – that means Māori set the agenda and are leaders in discussions about decolonisation” (p. 108). She points out that this work needs to be accompanied with care, humility, and respect.

So what does decolonisation mean for *post-activity outdoor education* and local community. How might mostly Pākehā educators carefully embrace Māori worldview, knowledge and practices through learning experiences that are both place and culturally responsive? This requires a careful and concerted effort. It will invariably involve extra work getting to know places more intimately, connecting with people who are embedded in place, and learning language appropriate for place. Central to this process is building genuine and reciprocal relationship with local Māori – mana whenua. Cultural misappropriation, ignorance or tokenism are real risks that must be carefully avoided. Thomas (2020) provides a careful reminder for Pākehā who wish to partner with Māori, “good intentions aren’t enough unless they are backed with respect and care, and an understanding of the broader structures and systems that perpetuate colonialism” (p. 125).

An example of such partnership has been in the redevelopment of our Bachelor of Sustainability and Outdoor Education (BSOE) degree at Ara Institute of Canterbury. Guided by our Kaiārahi Director of Māori Development, Te Marino Lenihan (Ngai Tahu), Humanities Head of Department, Hemi Hoskins (Ngā Puhi), and Head of Te Puna Wanaka (Māori Language and Indigenous Studies), Heperi Harris (Ngāti Mutunga) – we have embarked on an ambitious journey to embed Te Ao Māori (worldview) and Kaupapa and Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and practices) more fully into our programmes. This is reflected in two graduate outcomes which state that graduates will *demonstrate cultural responsiveness to work appropriately in culturally rich contexts underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and apply Kaupapa and Mātauranga Māori, and place-responsive principles to enrich outdoor experiences in diverse contexts.*

Enacting a revised BSOE has resulted in development of new courses and redevelopment of old ones to better weave Kaupapa and Mātauranga Māori into the content and pedagogy. We are also building relationships and partnerships with rūnanga (local Māori) who hold mana whenua over local places. Examples included partnering with Ngāi Tūahuriri on a cultural learning and habitat restoration projects at Kaiapoi Pā, the traditional fortified village of the local people. We have appointed a Māori tutor to help us in the process and Pākehā academic staff are actively engaged in learning Te Reo and Tikanga Māori. As we move forward in this project we want to better embrace Māori stories and knowledge of all of the places where we engage students in learning using appropriate Tikanga and Te Reo.

This is very much a work in progress and we have much to do. Part of this work includes critically reflecting on the activities we engage in with students. By considering what learning opportunities can be afforded in local communities, our starting point should be wisdom that reaches back more fully than imported activities such as kayaking, rock climbing, ropes courses, or navigating by map and compass. These types of traditional activities are colonial products – they are imbued with cultural meaning that privileges European or North American thinking and practice. Rather, in an Aotearoa New Zealand context we need to further consider how waka ama (canoe), or rākau, or taiaha, or navigating by the stars, or following old trails might become the staple of outdoor education.

## 20.4 Concluding Thoughts

In the introduction to this chapter I asked a series of questions related to the ways that outdoor and environmental education might engage more fully with the people and places of local community and contribute to a process of decolonisation. Through the sections that followed I have proposed a range of ideas that might assist us in our journey to embracing local community. Most notably I suggest we need a critical reappraisal of the very activities that have for so long been at the centre of traditional outdoor education practice. This could include four key considerations which I outline in the reflective questions below. In a place like Aotearoa New Zealand this inevitably involves some unlearning of taken-for-granted thinking and practice, as so much of what has come before is imbued with colonial meaning and practice. Of course, this process is not easy. I return to the words of Thomas (2020) who so eloquently describes the struggle of this ongoing project,

The mahi [work] of decolonisation, and figuring out how we fit together in this place, will require a long-term commitment. It's a commitment we need to make to Māori – but also to each other – to listen, think and then act to create a fairer, more just society. At its base, decolonisation means Pākehā giving up some power... This is going to mean discomfort for us non-Māori. (p.132)

Embracing local community, wherever that may be, has the potential to enrich outdoor and environmental education and so much more. It offers opportunity for educators and students to critically reflect on their place in the world; the relationships, histories, cultures, stories, and power structures that make up those places. This might mean discomfort, but it opens pathways for dialogue and action that lead to a more just, restorative, and regenerative world.

### Reflective Questions

1. How can we think critically about the activities used (both the historical roots of the activities and the way they are facilitated) in PAOE?
2. How can we promote this critical thinking with students?
3. How can we meaningfully position people and place, the stories, histories and practices, firmly at the centre of local learning experiences?
4. How can we learn from indigenous peoples and other allied educators to reconceptualise outdoor and environmental education activities as decolonising?

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# Chapter 21

## Social Capital: A Common Purpose



Tony Keeble

### 21.1 Introduction

As a young teacher, I spent weeks, months and years in nature with students delivering outdoor education curriculum. During my formative years as a teacher, I had firsthand experience seeing the development of school cultures in several schools where I worked. When I contemplate what I know now, I ask myself whether or not OE can develop social capital indicators? The idea that OE positively effects the communities we live in adds depth to arguments for the formation of OE as a stand-alone curriculum subject in mainstream education. This chapter aims to introduce and explore the concept of social capital and to outline the nexus it shares with outdoor education. The chapter finishes by providing a case-study of outdoor education curriculum called Future Maker in Victoria, Australia, that research has shown develops positive social capital indicators.

### 21.2 Social Capital: A Brief Introduction

Since the 1980s, there has been a steady growth in the literature looking at social capital; for example, see Beames and Atencio (2008). Halpern (2005), in his book titled *Social Capital*, claimed that the first recorded use of the term appears to have been in Hanifan's (1920) work *The Community Centre*. Hanifan (1920) described social capital as "good will, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse amongst the individuals who make up a social unit" (p. 78). Apart from Hanifan's early work,

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Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995) were amongst the first scholars to develop the theoretical concept of social capital. According to Putnam (2000), “The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value” (p. 19). However, the concept and definition of social capital continue to mean different things to different scholars and researchers.

Bourdieu (1986) asserts that social capital is “the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (p. 248). Social capital for Bourdieu is linked to the size of the network and the volume of past accumulated capital that includes economic and physical capital.

Coleman (1988) described social capital as “neither the individual nor the group, but rather the relationships between people and within communities” (p. 98). Coleman, unlike Bourdieu, used and recognised social structures. Coleman saw social capital as essentially residing in the social structure of relationships amongst people. Furthermore, Coleman saw social capital as a bonding mechanism between people that adds to the integration of social structure for the common good, thus utilising the notion of human capital as a component of social capital.

Putnam (1993) stressed that social capital refers to “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 35). Putnam (1993) elaborated on this definition, stating, “Working together is easier in a community blessed with substantial stock of human capital” (p. 35). In his later writing, Putnam (1995) asserted that “voluntary associations that enable horizontal linking of people produce trust, the norm that causes interpersonal bonding” (p. 45). This development in Putnam’s concept enriches Coleman’s (1988) theory that trust is required to form bonding and bridging.

Several researchers (Durlauf, 1999; Fine, 2002; Haynes, 2009) have identified weaknesses within the concept of social capital and its application. Durlauf (1999), for example, argued that social capital theory development and research needs to agree on a definition of social capital. A universal definition of social capital is fraught with danger as disagreement remains concerning the intent of social capital as a concept (Fine, 2002; Haynes, 2009). However, for this chapter, social capital refers to the “social structures and the actions that people take to make their communities more livable” (Keeble, 2021, p. 8). It should be noted that social capital is not a panacea to a multiplicity of social changes or challenges (Haynes, 2009). According to Haynes, the concept of social capital, while influential in many disciplines throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, has not been adequately tackled within the academic literature. Haynes’s cautionary criticisms of a social capital theory are worthy of consideration. In the provocatively titled article, “They F\*\*k You Up Those Social Capitalists,” Fine (2002) suggested that social capital theory has ignored questions of “power, conflict, the elite and the systematic imperatives of contemporary capitalism” (p. 796). Fine, like Durlauf (1999), highlighted that the definition of social capital is elusive. Fine (2002) also pointed out that social capital is considered the saviour of everything from individuals to societies, the sick, the poor, the criminal, the corrupt, the dysfunctional and functional family, schooling, community life, work, democracy, collective action, transitional societies,



intangible assets and any aspect of social, cultural and economic performance. As a result of social capital being seen as the saviour of everything, Fine argued that rational choice methodology has “been obliterated in the ready reception granted to social capital” (p. 798).

While it is true that the definition and concept of social capital have critics, advances in the use of social capital continue. For example, Wilson (1997) used previous research (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995) on social capital to develop her view of social capital as a learning agenda for the twenty-first century. To further the development and understanding of social capital, Wilson described the complexity of establishing the validity of social capital as a social construct by asking three questions. First, she asked, “How do you know what level of social capital you are starting with and when have you successfully created more?” (p. 745). Here, Wilson is referring to the fact that many answers to this question have relied on approaches where researchers and agencies have used more “tangible products ... like ... size of organisations assisted, number of meetings held, etc.” (p. 754). Second, Wilson argued that the most unsettling question unanswered by researchers of social capital is “How do you create it?” (p. 754). She reflected that this question had not been explicitly answered because “building community, or social capital, is not a technical problem requiring expert solutions, nor is it a problem of resources” (p. 754). Wilson is arguing that, unlike Bourdieu’s (1986) and Coleman’s (1988) notions of physical capital (machinery and equipment) or financial and human capital, social capital is *free* and requires no resources: “no machines, no bricks and mortar, no paid labour” (Wilson, 1997, p. 746).

The notion that social capital is free is not fully embraced by the economic world we live in. As a result, the idea that something as valuable as social capital – which is so important in the development of communities but is free and freely given – is generally not explored. For example, while it might seem that social capital is free, it does require effort – maintaining relationships takes commitment, time, energy and effort. Wilson’s third rhetorical question relates to the way social capital is taught in our educational institutions. Wilson (1997) asserted that if “these values, roles and skills are not the ones being taught ... how must colleges and universities respond ... in order for their graduates to have relevance when developing social capital?” (p. 746). Wilson’s research on social capital suggests ways that social capital can develop communities so that they can thrive in the twenty-first century. Table 21.1 outlines that for communities to thrive, they require social capital indicators such as communication, relationships, group processing, networking, and leadership (Wilson, 1997).

Wilson’s (1997) research can improve our understanding of social capital by identifying relevant social capital indicators. Like Putnam (1995), she used the notion that communities, not individuals, hold social capital. Furthermore, like Putnam (1995), she acknowledged that individuals need to possess certain indicators and must increase those indicators for social capital to increase in communities. The understanding of who or what has social capital has led researchers to view social capital as either a framework that a community holds or a framework that individuals hold. However, individuals need to have social capital indicators for a

**Table 21.1** Indicators of social capital (Wilson, 1997)

Indicator	Description
Communication	Especially active listening
Relationships	Such as building mutual respect, understanding, trust, empathy
Group processing	Such as conflict resolution and group facilitation
Networking	Creating linkages within and outside the community
Leadership	Building a shared vision, empowering others, cooperative

community to change its social capital indicators. You cannot have one without the other (Keeble, 2021).

The five indicators of social capital outlined by Wilson (1997), would appear to be congruent with the typical aims and objectives favoured by many outdoor education programs. There is no doubt that if you have taught outdoor education long enough, you have facilitated conversations and learnings that endeavour to improve communication, relationships, group processing, networking and leadership.

### 21.3 Outdoor Education and Social Capital

During a child's schooling, outdoor education is often encountered as an extracurricular experience. However, research has shown that it has long-lasting effects on student outcomes. Hattie (2012) examined 138 aspects of teaching that could affect student outcomes. Some of the research looked at intervention tools for their effect size on student outcomes, and outdoor education was one of these interventions. In concluding, Hattie (2012) asserted,

Perhaps the most exciting outcome is that this [outdoor education] is one of the few areas in education where the follow up effects were positive and were in addition to the effects at the end of the program. It is rare to find such increasing after effects from an education intervention as too many have diminishing returns. (p. 156)

Substantial evidence supporting Hattie's assertion can be seen in the *Learning Away* (Kendall & Rodger, 2015) research from the United Kingdom. Learning Away aimed to support schools across the United Kingdom in significantly enhancing young people's learning, achievement, and wellbeing by using innovative outdoor residential experiences as an integral part of the curriculum. The Learning Away approach had teachers develop the curriculum to be delivered outdoors. Teachers then taught the curriculum at outdoor residential schools and conducted assessment relevant to students' educational context back at their schools. In essence, the delivery of the outdoor residential curriculum became an extension of the day-to-day work in schools, unlike the ad hoc approach of schools visiting outdoor providers of adventurous outdoor activities, arguably with little or no systematic connection to students' curriculum or context. A total of 60 schools (primary, secondary, and

special) were involved in delivering Learning Away (Kendall & Rodger, 2015). This research was conducted over a period of 5 years and included over 11,000 students. The data showed that there was a significant improvement in student relationships (85%), student resilience (87%), student cohesion (82%), leadership skills (65%). It is perceptible to see how these outcomes of outdoor education could be linked with the five social capital indicators, as presented in Table 21.1 by Wilson (1997). Furthermore, Hattie's (2012) research, overall, indicated that outdoor education had an effect size of 0.52. Hattie (2008) explains effect size as a common understanding of the many outcome variables, especially when research is looking at the complexities of educational outcomes. It is clear, therefore, that outdoor education affects student outcomes. What is not clear, however, is the effect outdoor education has on the five indicators of social capital introduced in Table 21.1: communication, relationships, group processing, networking, and leadership.

Pike and Beames (2013) argued that outdoor education is a social construct. Considering this, it is understandable that Beames and Atencio (2008) claimed that outdoor education could influence social capital outcomes. While the use of outdoor education programs to develop leadership, concepts of self, problem-solving skills, locus of control, interpersonal skills, and environmental awareness is not new, what is new is the link between students partaking in outdoor education curriculum and improvement in their social capital indicators. Neill (2008) asserted that there had been hundreds of empirical pre–post studies conducted to better understand outdoor education outcomes. Hattie et al. (1997) research identified six main outcomes, Lugg and Martin's (2001) work identified twelve categories of outcomes, while Neill's (2008) formative work identified eleven categories of outdoor education outcomes. In my research (Keeble, 2021), I synthesised these 27 outdoor educational outcomes into nine common outcomes: communication, trust and encouragement, respect for others, conflict resolution, cooperative teamwork, community engagement, community action, followship and leadership ability. I then proposed connections between these nine outcomes for outdoor education and the five indicators of social capital presented in Table 21.1. Figure 21.1 presents the nexus: a common purpose.

The social capital indicator *communication* aligns with the outdoor education outcome of *communication*. The social capital indicator *relationships* aligns with *trust and encouragement* and *respect for others*. For any relationship to flourish, trust and encouragement are needed to develop respect for each other. Without these two aspects, it is difficult to imagine the development of positive relationships. The social capital indicator *group processing* aligns with the outdoor education outcomes *conflict resolution* and *cooperative teamwork*. The social capital indicator *group processing* refers to groups and individuals having the ability to resolve conflict and to work in teams to solve problems. Without this ability, conflict may arise, which has the potential to diminish and destroy positive social capital in groups. The social capital indicator *networking* aligns with the outdoor education outcomes *community engagement* and *community action*. The word *networking* has varied meanings; however, in the social capital context for this chapter, *networking* means the ability of someone to engage with their group, community, and what actions the



**Fig. 21.1** The nexus between social capital indicators and outdoor education outcomes (Keeble, 2021, p. 50)

group accomplishes collectively. Finally, the social capital indicator *leadership* aligns with the outdoor education outcomes *followship ability* and *leadership ability*. Leadership, like the terms social capital and outdoor education, mean different things to different people. For this chapter, followship ability is about the ability of individuals in a group to follow directions from the person who is assuming leadership. It also refers to the leadership ability of the people in the group: how well they can show leadership when it is required?

Figure 21.1 demonstrates, at least theoretically, there is a nexus between social capital indicators and the outcomes of outdoor education. What Fig. 21.1 does not show is the type of outdoor education curriculum that can produce student growth in these nine outdoor education outcomes and hence growth in social capital indicators. I will now provide a case-study based on my own PhD research, that explored the impact of a custom-designed outdoor education curriculum on social capital indicators.

## 21.4 Case Study: Future Maker

The Future Maker curriculum is delivered by trained teachers at Outdoor School, a government school in Victoria, Australia. For full disclosure, and at the time of writing this chapter, I was the principal at Outdoor School.

In 2012, the staff at Outdoor School started redesigning the outdoor education curriculum using a curriculum design approach, critical and inclusive pedagogy, assessment, reporting and feedback loops. The design process took more than 3 years of rigorous construction, and in 2015 the first pilot for the Future Maker was trialled. Unlike many outdoor education curricula that are developed with an activity and geographic focus, the Future Maker was developed to fit into the Victorian Curriculum F-10 (for 5–16 year olds) (VCAA, 2015).

The Future Maker curriculum included six core capabilities: personal, social, critical and creative thinking, outdoor experience, nature and culture, and future thinking. Other than the capability of outdoor experience, which was developed through local curriculum design, the other five capabilities came straight out of the Victorian Curriculum F-10 (VCAA, 2015). The personal and social capabilities included self-awareness and self-management, social awareness and social management. In my research (Keeble, 2021) into the role outdoor education plays in developing social capital, I linked these four strands with the nine outcomes of outdoor education and the five indicators of social capital. This linkage can be seen in Table 21.2.

The survey tool used to assess the student growth in the nine areas of outdoor education is known as the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ). The LEQ is a self-reporting continuum instrument that generates an effect size between pre and post results and is designed to measure individual effectiveness in a variety of key generic life skills (Neill, 2008). Hattie (2008) used effect size in his work on achievement in education and defined effect size as a “scale that has been among the marvellous advances in the analysis of research studies over the past century” (p. 7).

In 2017, Outdoor School started using the LEQ to assess the Future Maker curriculum and student growth. Students filled out the LEQ on day one and day twelve of the program. They also filled out the LEQ 6 months after the program. A full representation of the data can be found in my research (Keeble, 2021). Table 21.3 shows the effect size of the Future Maker program on the five social capital indicators for the 351 students surveyed.

The data in Table 21.3 highlight that students who participated in the Future Maker curriculum developed social capital indicators as a result of participating in outdoor education, and that the effect was strong. The t1 to t3 medium effect size of 0.96 is a significant effect size when according to Hattie (2012), any educational program over 0.40 represents more than a year’s growth. Therefore, an effect size of 0.96 equates to more than 2 year’s growth in the five social capital indicators as a

**Table 21.2** Social capital indicators, outdoor education outcomes, future maker outcomes

Social capital indicators	Outdoor education outcomes	Future maker capabilities
Communication	Communication	Personal capability Self-awareness and self-management
Relationships	Trust and encouragement Respect for others	Personal capability Self-awareness and self-management
Group processing	Conflict resolution Cooperative teamwork	Social capability Social awareness and social management
Networking	Community engagement Community action	Social capability Social awareness and social management
Future maker	Followship Leadership	Social capability Social awareness and social management

**Table 21.3** Future maker: overall effect size

Social capital indicator	Overall medium effect size t1 to t2	Overall medium effect size t1 to t3
Communication	0.37	0.85
Relationships	0.48	0.92
Group processing	0.44	1.09
Networking	0.46	1.06
Leadership	0.47	0.89
Total medium effect size	t1 to t2 = 0.44	t1 to t3 = 0.96

*Note.* Effect size scale: 0.2 = small effect size; 0.4 = moderate effect size; 0.6 = strong effect size; 1.0 = very strong effect size. t1 = time one, t2 = time two, t3 = time three

result of the Future Maker curriculum. These results indicate that outdoor education, when developed using rigorous curriculum processes, has an effect size that will influence student social capital indicators. The results also show that students continued to improve their social capital indicators 6 month after the initial program; the importance of this and other findings can be found in Keeble (2021). While there will be other areas in education that may improve and develop social capital indicators, my findings suggest that there is sufficient evidence that suggests outdoor education improves social capital indicators for students, which in turn has great potential to improve the communities we live in. Furthermore, the effect size results of the Future Maker program, along with the findings of other large scale research projects like Learning Away, provides an evidenced-based foundation for the nexus between outdoor education and social capital.

## 21.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a brief historical narrative of the theoretical development of social capital. The literature suggests that social capital means different things to different people and that the notion of social capital has its detractors. However, the literature also suggests that indicators of social capital presented are commonly included in the aims of many outdoor education curricula worldwide. Teaching students the skills of communication, relationships, group processing, networking and leadership would be considered important student outcomes in many educational precincts. The fact that outcomes of outdoor education and indicators of social capital are intertwined, denotes there is indeed a common purpose and framework – a nexus between the two; a common purpose. People, in general, want to live in a community that is rich in positive social capital. They want communities that care for the environment and care for each other. Both these goals would be commitments that many outdoor educators strive to develop in each group and with every student they teach.

Based on my research findings (Keeble, 2021) described in this chapter, and 30 years' experience as an educator, I am confident now, more than I have ever been,

that outdoor education sits firmly within a social framework. Outdoor education can be viewed as a social phenomenon that helps to develop and create socially aware humans that care for each other and the world around them. While this may seem idealistic in nature, it remains vital that teachers and students alike dream and work towards a better world together.

### Reflective Questions

1. Reflect on your schooling. Do you remember a time when a teacher/lecturer explicitly taught you outcomes that aligned with the five social capital indicators in this chapter? Which one of these experiences had the most significant effect on you? Reflect and describe the experience in detail. Why did it effect you?
2. Explore the five social capital outcomes presented in this chapter, do you agree with the suggested social capital indicators in this chapter? What other social capital indicators do you think could be included?
3. Other than the suggested readings below, can you find further research and evidence that OE does improve social capital indicators?
4. Other than the Future Maker curriculum, find an example of an OE program that states it delivers and develops social capital outcomes, based on the five social capital outcomes in this chapter. Do you think, once you have examined the program, that there is a rhetoric-reality gap between the stated outcomes of the OE program and what actually happens? Explain your answer in detail?
5. Design in detail, your own 5-day OE curriculum that includes the five social capital indicators presented in this chapter.

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# **Part IV**

## **Advocacy**

# Chapter 22

## Diversity and Inclusion in OEE



TA Loeffler

### 22.1 Introduction

Formerly rare, more undergraduate programs in outdoor environmental education (OEE) are adding inclusive outdoor theory and practice to their program of study. OEE, through both individual and organizational change, needs to transform to become truly diverse and inclusive (DI) of all peoples. This transformation entails embracing new people, practices, pedagogies, places, and policies to remain relevant and impactful. This revisioning process requires well-considered and deliberate leadership to precipitate a sea change in OEE environments where such shifts are often slow and heavily resisted. If OEE students receive instruction in programmatic contexts where inclusive practice is both discussed and modelled, then they will be better prepared to welcome and support all participants in their programs.

Welcome. I want to begin by introducing and positioning myself. I identify as agender, lesbian, middle class, White, and settler-Canadian. I live in and with a straight-sized, middle-aged, ageing, and physically literate body that allows me to do (almost) anything I wish. Seeing myself as an outdoor adventurer and explorer is also part of my current identity, and I participate in several remote expeditions per year. I teach and do research in OEE and gender studies at a provincial university in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. I respectfully acknowledge that I live, teach, and write in the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk and at the same time, I recognize the diverse histories and cultures of the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit of this province.

My parents encouraged a “free-range” childhood in which returning home wet and muddy was celebrated. Attending summer camps and a YWCA youth

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leadership program seeded my outdoor career. My technical skill development began during secondary school outdoor pursuits club outings to the Rocky Mountains. At that time, I became an apprentice outdoor leader and progressed to paid employment soon after that. I received further outdoor education training at Outward Bound, The National Outdoor Leadership School, Project Adventure, Woodswomen, and Wilderness Inquiry, among others. I earned Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. degrees in outdoor and experiential education.

In preparing to write this chapter, I reviewed my career-long field activity journal. As a student in various outdoor leadership and professional certification programs, I accumulated 500 field training days. Additionally, I spent over 1000 days in field leadership with students and over 1000 days on remote wilderness expeditions. When I summed all of the columns in my logbook, the total was 2634 field days, equivalent to 7.2 years.

When I reflected on the totality of those days, I concluded that I spent the vast majority of them with people who likely identify as White, male, cisgender, straight, middle or owning class, straight-sized, fit, and able. I revisited my spreadsheet and learned that my time in women-positive (formerly referred to as "single-gender") outdoor settings totalled approximately one-quarter (700) of my field days (412 in leadership, 15 in training, and 272 on remote expeditions). My passion for gender studies and social justice flourished in those women-friendly spaces. Throughout my career, there were only rare instances of providing outdoor experiences for racialized, economically marginalized, or otherwise vulnerable participants. Except for one summer with Wilderness Inquiry, a program that offers inclusive outdoor experiences for persons with and without disabilities, none of my training nor employment has focused on facilitating outdoor experiences for persons living with a disability.

Six years ago, I suggested to my program supervisor that we purchase an outdoor access device called a TrailRider® (a rugged terrain-capable wheeled chair) to enable students with mobility disabilities to participate in our university's outdoor education program. My dean agreed. That moment proved to be a potent impetus for change in my professional praxis as an outdoor educator. As I learned to use the TrailRider® and many other accessibility tools, I realized that inclusion is much more than access and that diversity is much more than counting.

## 22.2 Designing Our Way Forward

When heading out into unfamiliar terrain, a map provides necessary information for efficient navigation. Universal Design (UD) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), woven together, provide direction for a route to greater DI in OEE. UD was initially conceptualized by Ronald Mace, a polio survivor and wheelchair user in 1989, to propel the idea that good design benefits everyone by making built environments accessible to all. UD is a process that facilitates access and participation

(both physical and social) by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012).

UD began as a framework for increasing the accessibility of the built environment for persons with disabilities but has since, been adopted by fields such as education and wellness. Recognizing that merely getting students with diverse physical and cognitive needs into the classroom, gymnasium, or out on a trail did not ensure equal access to learning, educators at the Center for Applied Special Technology created a framework called Universal Design for Learning (UDL). They adapted the principles of UD to the design of learning environments with the ultimate goal of reducing barriers so that all learners could engage in learning that is meaningful, challenging, and accessible to them (Wilson, 2017). Scholars in the field of Disability Studies in Education argue that learning environments be changed rather than learners (Wilson, 2017).

Steinfeld and Maisel (2012) furthered the evolution of UD and UDL through the creation of the “Goals of UD.” These eight goals reflect their belief that the broad and diverse range of human ability and experience is ordinary and not special and that conventional (i.e., non-universal) design overlooks, excludes, and stigmatizes many people. Wilson (2017) suggested that many educators “fail to recognize that the space of the regular classroom, far from neutral, is constructed for a nondisabled, neurotypical, white, male, middle-class “norm” that neither reflects nor accommodates the wide range of diverse learners within it, regardless of whether these learners have been diagnosed with a disability” (n.p.). Many OEE learning settings are similarly designed and constructed without a conscious examination of programmatic assumptions, histories, spaces, and legacies of exclusion. Through their commitment to deliberate and conscious design, UD and UDL provide both an invitation and a map for designing OEE environments that are truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive where everyone can feel welcome and that they belong (Warren et al., 2014).

### 22.3 Examining Our Design Assumptions

Over three decades ago, Karen Warren (1985) called for a feminist examination of the many assumptions shaping women’s experiences in OEE. With her *Myth of Accessibility*, Warren suggested that we question the assumption that OEE programs were accessible to all women. Her call is still valid today, as is using her framework of myths more broadly to focus our conscious re-examination as we now query the multiple ways that OEE learning environments remain inaccessible and exclusive.

We need to ask if all students can access our programs and equipment including those who are racialized, live with disability, those who are under-resourced and/or those who live in/with bodies whose size or type do not conform with current outdoor stereotypes (Russell et al., 2013; Warren et al., 2014). We must look closely at the fees for our programs, where and when we hold our programs, and at both our

overt and hidden curriculums because all of these design decisions shapes who can access and be successful in our programs and who cannot (Warren et al., 2019).

OEE programs, staff, and students do not exist in a social vacuum. We must understand that the societal, cultural, and economic constraints or privileges assigned to a person's identities and living situation (e.g. in addition to those mentioned above: gender or non-binary, orientation, religious or spiritual practice, age, family composition, family immigration or citizenship status, Indigenoussness, or mental health status) often intersect, and thus attenuate their influence in constraining or facilitating participation in OEE (Maina-Okori et al., 2018). Additionally, these (and other) identities and the socially constructed expectations they confer, shape a potential student's knowledge of OEE programs, their desire to participate, their ability to participate, and their sense of belonging (if they manage to arrive). The need for a much deeper understanding of this intersectionality and its influence on DI in OEE has been highlighted by many (Kennedy & Russell, 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren et al., 2014).

With the *Myth of Square One*, Warren (1985) challenges the assumption that all students begin OEE programs from the same place or "*Square One*," sharing a similar lack of skill and precursory knowledge. For example, students arriving from urban areas may never have seen the night sky or traversed uneven terrain. Participants, who reside in hot climates, may not know how to dress to keep themselves comfortable in cold conditions or how to walk on icy slopes. Some may come to a program with less experience using tools than their counterparts, thus potentially hindering their learning of technical skills.

Along with potentially vast differences in outdoor skill and exposure, students also bring their personal, family, and community histories with them. They, or someone they know, may have suffered trauma from racialized, family or gendered violence, armed conflict, or forced migration through outdoor or wilderness spaces. Without trauma-informed outdoor leadership, support, and instruction, these students could be re-traumatized from the outset or by unexamined coercive, manipulative, or oppressive OEE practices (Mitten, 1994). If we design courses based on the *Myth of Square One* rather than purposefully designing with each student's needs in mind, then we privilege some and leave others behind. We must remember that although our students often start our programs simultaneously, they do not start from the same place but rather, from their unique terrain (Newbery, 2003).

In North America, long histories of Indigenous and Black outdoor presence and land use/occupation were largely erased through colonization and White owning/middle-class dominance of the environmental and conservation movements (Finney, 2014; Tuck et al., 2014) leaving some to conclude that racialized peoples do not participate in outdoor activities. Some OEE authors suggest that the invisibility and/or erasure of role models impacts where students begin from as well (Grue, 2016; Warren et al., 2014). Students who have been historically marginalized in mainstream OEE may not have had access to authentic role models who engage in outdoor activity. If they have, they may dismiss the role model's outdoor participation as extraordinary rather than ordinary. Warren (1985) calls this dynamic the *Myth of the Superwoman*:

The effect of the superwoman on wilderness course participants is unintentionally detrimental. Participants, both men and women, struggle with the dissonance created by the conflict between their indoctrination that implies a woman doesn't belong in the wilderness and the reality of the woman outdoor leader guiding them. The existence of the superwoman gives them a way out of this nagging conflict. Due to her exemplary outdoor achievements, the superwoman is the exception to other women. She's extraordinary, unique, not normal. (p. 13)

The representation of outdoor participants with disabilities as “supercrips” or as objects of “inspiration porn” has similar effects. Outdoor inspiration porn often employs the likeness of a person whose impairment is easily signalled visually and demonstrates significant physical prowess and achievement (e.g., rolling a wheelchair up a rocky trail on Kilimanjaro). These types of objectifying and patronizing portrayals often use visible impairment as short-hand visual code along with captions such as, “The only disability in life is a bad attitude” to goad those currently living without such impairment to overcome daily obstacles (Grue, 2016; Newbery, 2003). Grue (2016) summed the danger of supercrip-representative inspiration porn in this way, “Because of its focus on visible impairment and physical prowess, inspiration porn represents disability as a problem located in individual bodies, to be overcome through individual efforts...[which in turn] obscures structural and systemic causes of disability” (p. 840). Additionally, by employing extraordinary achievement to empower beginning participants, we may unintentionally set up a participation expectation that is beyond the reach of most, and the risk of tokenism is high.

In closing this section, it is imperative to recognize the decades-long calls for examination and programmatic design to impel the OEE field forward towards fully DI practice. In the *Myth of the Heroic Quest*, Warren (1985) suggested that we query the foundational metaphors and journey conceptualizations that persist in OEE. Likewise, Allen-Craig et al. (2020) recommend scrutinizing different OEE cultures through the lens of their historical, geographical, and narrative contexts. Russell et al. (2008) argued that queer pedagogy could prove invaluable to this fundamental examination of OEE. More recently, Kennedy and Russell (2020) consider it “past time for focused examination of hegemonic masculinity in the field as one strategy for addressing gender inequity” (p. 1) and others stress the importance of centering the voices of women and all marginalized populations (Gray et al., 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2019). Warren et al. (2019) found the continued presence of hidden curricular design elements that stand in the way of such examination as well as the creating of inclusive, equitable and diverse opportunities in OEE.

## 22.4 Designing OEE for DI

As we have seen above, there are many barriers to DI in OEE. It is tempting to continue to focus our discussion with those, but instead, I use Steinfeld and Maisel (2012) “Goals of UD” as a scaffold to highlight design considerations and practices that show promise to facilitate greater DI in OEE.

### 22.4.1 *Body Fit and Comfort*

Newbery (2003) asks, through a discussion of canoe portaging, “What sort of bodies and identities are being produced in this pedagogical space?” (p. 205). The dominant discourse in OEE often favours strong, fit, and “able” bodies through program design that requires physical strength and prowess paired with remote travel through harsh, rugged landscapes. As a result, othered bodies are either absent, silenced, or unwelcomed. People living in/with such marginalized bodies are labelled as soft, fat, weak, needing assistance, or disabled (Newbery, 2003; Russell et al., 2013). There is still little attention or regard paid in OEE to body and size diversity, and thus OEE is complicit in perpetuating the dominant obesity discourses (Russell et al., 2013).

Outdoor and environmental educators must continue to dismantle dominant discourses of rugged physicality and individualism within OEE by recognizing that strength, ability, moving pace, and contributions come in many forms. Wilderness Inquiry has successfully modelled this in its programming by pairing participant strengths on its expeditions to accomplish camping and travel tasks. If we are to design OEE programs so that all bodies are welcome and comfortable, we must insist that our facilities, course areas, vehicles, and instructional methods are universally designed. Ideally, we have adaptive outdoor equipment available or if this is not possible, we know how to source it quickly in our community.

Similarly, we must ensure that we have outdoor equipment available in sizes that fit and serve all participants well (and ideally, do not visually signal someone’s difference, e.g., sized harnesses for most and only universal harnesses for larger people, with sizes marked on the front of PFD’s). Ideally, we bring more attention to our program messaging about food, weight loss, and body image while also training staff to interrupt fat oppression in their pedagogy and praxis. More attention ought to be brought to cultural and religious practices surrounding food and eating during OEE programs such as an awareness of foods that cannot be eaten or mixed during meal preparation as well as fasting months such as Ramadan and Alá.

Gray et al. (2020) found that, with effective inclusive leadership, OEE can offer a less-gendered space that holds potentiality for reduced self-surveillance and freer gender expression that can empower trans and questioning participants. It is imperative, however, that we examine our OEE practices to eliminate heteronormativity, binary gender normativity, and other oppressions that arise at the intersection of

gender, orientation, and bodies (Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2008; Warren et al., 2014). For example, we must query how we do many common OEE practices: participant introductions, pronoun checks, assigning participants to tents or dorms, the sizing and colours of our equipment, the pace at which we move, and the information we collect during health screening. The design of these practices has excellent potential to create welcoming educative spaces or to instantly marginalize many students.

### **22.4.2 Awareness and Understanding**

Warren et al. (2014) posed this question: “What will it take before OEE programs become genuinely accessible to all who want to participate?” (p. 98). Building awareness and understanding of the need for universal design in OEE is foundational in answering this question. Attention to and modelling of DI practices and cultural competence in post-secondary OEE programs is also crucial. Additionally, OEE program accreditation standards that include criteria related to social justice, accessibility, adaptive outdoor instruction, and UDL can propel the field forward.

Along with these imperatives, it is important to examine communications as a fundamental part of embracing DI in OEE. Participants need to easily navigate our websites, forms, facilities, and policies. We can make this possible through the use of UD elements such as large text options, captioned videos, sign language interpretation, visual and textural wayfinding. We must bring awareness to the language we use in the OEE field and be willing to retrain our usage away from common (and often unexamined) forms of expression that are exclusionary, hurtful, and oppressive such as the pervasive use of the terms “hard” and “soft” skills (Warren et al., 2014). As well, when working with participants with disabilities, it is vital to language check with them as there are both individual and regional differences in what people prefer. In North America, many people with disabilities favour person-first language (e.g., a person with a disability) while others in Europe prefer the term *disabled person*. Finally, it is imperative that communications imagery be inclusive, authentic, and representative of the students we wish to serve.

### **22.4.3 Cultural Appropriateness and Social Integration**

If OEE is to welcome all people with dignity and respect, it is essential to progress our cultural assumptions and core philosophies (Rogers & Rose, 2019; Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren et al., 2014). This process begins when those with power and privilege become willing to share them. This gradual and profound change requires shifting away from discourses of self-reliant challenge and conquest towards processes of decolonization and shedding the Eurocentric cloak that pervades much of our practice (Tuck et al., 2014). A catalyst for this introspection is often recognizing



that the land and water on which we live, teach, and travel was most often stolen or otherwise misappropriated. Through authentic land and water acknowledgements and travel with Indigenous peoples on or through their land and waters, the reconciliation journey frequently begins (Root, 2010). We must purge OEE programs of Indigenous cultural appropriation since much OEE programming has borrowed Indigenous ways of knowing and culture without consent or acknowledgment (Root, 2010). OEE practitioners need to become familiar with the cultural origins and implications of many of our practices, such as “Leave No Trace,” “Challenge by Choice,” or gathering in circles (Mitten, 1994; Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren, 1998).

White practitioners must recognize that White privilege is always an undercurrent in OEE, even when no racialized participants are present (Rose & Paisley, 2012) and that those who learn and work in non-DI OEE settings are fatigued from decades of advocating for such change and being asked to represent their entire marginalized group (Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2019). These collective dynamics of isolation and tokenism are exhausting, laden with oppression, and make remaining in such a space difficult. Therefore, we must consider a full spectrum of OEE programming whereby students have the option of participating in fully integrated settings and also have the opportunity for learning with and within a group of their peers if that helps them reach their goals (Finney, 2014; Warren et al., 2014). With this focus on individual students’ needs firmly in mind, we focus on the final two goals of UD.

#### **22.4.4 Personalization and Wellness**

UDL impels us to plan for inclusion from the start by transforming the learning environment rather than the learner (Wilson, 2017). As Warren (1998) charged, we must stop viewing our “learning communities as homogenous groups of students with similar needs” (p. 22). Further, Warren advises that we give up both “one size fits all” and “rote” OEE methods since they are grounded in the belief that “generic methods work for everyone” (p. 22). Similarly, Rogers and Rose (2019) stressed the “importance of meeting students where they are and prioritizing their goals, rather than focusing on the leader’s goals” (p. 44). UD essentializes the personalization of curriculum through significant opportunities for individual choice and preference that go well beyond our traditional mainstream practice of “challenge by choice” (Mitten, 1994). Truly adopting this UD goal means ensuring that individuals have options throughout their OEE experience rather than solely in the middle of a rock face or ropes course. Mechanistic, unexamined practice can be the “foe of inclusive programming” if we fail to put students’ needs first (Warren, p. 22).

Ideally, OEE programs contribute to our students’ health and wellness as well as prevent injury on all levels. There is unrelenting evidence of the harms inflicted on people’s physical, mental, and economic health by exclusion, marginalization, and oppression and historically mainstream OEE has been complacent (Gray et al.,

2020; Mitten, 1994). We must examine and change our practices to ensure that we are not adding to these damages.

## 22.5 Conclusion

We must recognize that advancing DI is a process of both individual and organizational change. This process calls for those of us with power and privilege to step up, step in, and lead organizational re-design and change. Through the lens of UD and UDL, we must continually work to build and maintain inclusive practice and facilities. There will be many obstacles, mistakes, and challenges along this journey but there is a compelling need for OEE to undertake it. I invite you to join me in designing OEE learning spaces that welcome, value, and enable participation by all.

### Reflective Questions

1. What makes you feel welcome, included, respected, and valued in an OEE setting?
2. What are some of the barriers you have faced in OEE programs or your career progression that are not experienced by your peers?
3. How is inclusive OEE practice modelled and demonstrated in your OEE program? Or not?
4. How and why is pace of movement (e.g. paddling or hiking speed) a diversity and inclusion design concern in OEE?
5. Bring an OEE setting to mind, what are five barriers to inclusive OEE practice in that setting and what are five ways in which those barriers could be overcome?

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## Chapter 23

# Is Outdoor and Environmental Education ‘Making a Difference’? Gender and Binary Heteronormative Cisgenderism



lisahunter

### 23.1 Acknowledgements, Positioning, Awareness

Who are you? What cultural contexts shape you? What intersections of categories such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, geography, sexuality, religion, class have influenced who you are? I write from Boonwurrung/Bunurong Country.<sup>1</sup> The lands of these traditional custodians were stolen, their sovereignty never ceded. They were the first outdoor and environmental educators, researchers and environmentalists, before patriarchal Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic (pWEIRD) colonisation.<sup>2</sup> I honour them and want to come out of historical ignorance and act to benefit First Nations Peoples’ lives. We will never undo my ancestor’s violences towards them, but are responsible for change: to ensure healing, respect, recognition, reconciliation and self-determination.

I was born near this Country, as a non-Indigenous person carrying ‘white’ privilege for most of my life, hidden from my awareness as I grew up. Awareness of a different privilege awakened early in me, because I did not have it, but before I had the language of gender/male privilege in a patriarchal society. Being positioned in society as a second-class citizen, designated female at birth, impacted my life

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<sup>1</sup>Country colonised and named as part of Victoria, Australia

<sup>2</sup>The acronym WEIRD was introduced by Henrich, Heine & Noranzayan (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2–3), 61–83 to capture a Western-scientific dominant group I suggest characterises the OEE field. I have including ‘p’ to make explicit the otherwise hidden gender bias of partriarchal, or male-dominated, societies also characteristic in WEIRD.

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heavily, including accessibility to and participation in Outdoor and Environmental Education (OEE). Perhaps the same has happened to you? Certain identity categories or subject positions work to position people at the margins or with privilege. One might take on an identity in order to locate themselves within a group/society. How have you been shaped by this thing called gender?

Entering/contributing to the OEE profession, you can make an important difference for those you work with according to how you understand, embody, position others and even teach various subject positions, or identities, as gender, through realising inclusion, celebrating and acknowledging diversity, and actualising equity of opportunity. My realisation or awakening around gender allowed me to better understand racism, informing my current practices towards healing colonial violence and racism, through education, and with focus also on other categories such as sex, gender, sexuality, ability, and religion. While race, colonisation and erasure of First Nations Peoples are seen as current issues in many countries adopting OEE, many believe gender issues have been solved, surprised by claims of gender inequality and normalisation, citing greater inclusion of women and gender-inclusive practices. But has OEE achieved women's liberation? Which women? What about the men? Which men? What about women designated male at birth, gender non-binary identities, feminine men, gender-fluid identities, people who are gender non-conforming or non-identifying? And why is the pWEIRD elephant still in the room, the unconscious bias of 'binary heteronormative cisgenderism'? This chapter introduces key concepts associated with gender, illustrating changes in understandings about gender over time, discussing implications and ongoing issues for OEE, and finishing with suggestions for your/our actions. It invites you to queer OEE, for greater inclusion, equity and diversity as you navigate your position and how you position your colleagues/students/clients, all participants shaping the OEE field.

I, like many, was socialised and positioned within a sex/gender binary, starting with enquiries about my birth 'Is it a girl or a boy?' I was assigned female at birth and assumed and positioned as 'girl'. This was/is reinforced through many official documents, like a birth certificate, immunization certificate, Kindergarten enrolment forms, camp applications and continue nearly 60 years later in employment and passport documents.

Documents/institutions still ask you to 'circle gender: male or female'. Very recently you might see a third box 'other' and/or 'prefer not to say', although still uncommon on official documents. Significant assumptions, documents and institutions are still grappling with and reinscribing an arguably out-dated sex-binary, incorrectly dressed up as a gender binary. What many societies socialise us to imagine, speak, and act upon is that everyone is either a boy or girl, or probably more accurately, male or female, as girl/boy and woman/man are categories of gender. In many First Nations and non-Western cultures, and more recently in pWEIRD societies, there is increasing evidence of concepts, identities, practices, social positions and roles beyond pWEIRD gender.

## 23.2 Concepts, Practices and Privilege

Gender is still globally one of the biggest determinants of inequity and exclusion with a recognisable lag in OEE’s response to gender diversity, equality and inclusion (established below). There are conceptual tools and experiential evidence to aid inclusion, diversity and equity, not yet commonplace in OEE. This is where an outdoor educator can make a difference, developing a better understanding of gender concepts (see Table 23.1) being a great start.

Moreton-Robinson draws on Indigenous and feminist work to note ‘marginality has been the creative space for developing the conceptual tools required to expose the social situatedness of knowledge production and the different realities that are produced and experienced’ (2011, p.143). Speaking of the social construction of Aboriginality she notes:

**Table 23.1** Brief explanation of gender-related concepts

Sex: assigned as one of 46 variations at birth including male and female.	Gender: socially constructed set of identities (e.g. woman) and ways of being (e.g. feminine), including fluid, gender non-binary, agenda and transgender.	Sexuality: your identity in relation to another’s with respect to relationships and sex
SGS: sex, gender, sexuality – separate concepts but often conflated and/or misused	Cisgender: where one’s binary sex-assigned at birth matches binary gender (e.g. masculine male)	Gender non-binary (GNB): not identifying one’s gender as masculine or feminine
Identity: how you see yourself	Attraction: who you are attracted to.	Positionality/positioning: how someone is located in a social field
Sexism: discrimination on the basis of sex	Misogyny: assumption women are not equal to men or bias against and antipathy towards females	Patriarchy: system where male dominates and is valued more than female
Feminism: working towards equity for females	Masculinity: ways of behaving male, often stereotyped	Hegemonic masculinity: dominant form of behaving male
Femininity: gendered ways of behaving ‘girl’ or ‘women’ –often stereotyped	Emphasized femininity: dominant ways of behaving female	Gender fluid: sometimes masculine, sometimes feminine, sometimes other things
Intersex: a set of sex variations outside normalized binary of ‘male’ and ‘female’	Trans/transitioning: changing from one normalised gender to another	M2F/F2M: male transitioning to female/ female transitioning to male
Heteronormativity: normalising relationships/intercourse as male-female only	Intersectionality: identity markers that come together as a person, including race, age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, sex, religion, etc.	other terms you know?

Patriarchal whiteness operates possessively as a raced and gendered epistemological a priori within knowledge production as universals, dominant norms, values and beliefs. Patriarchal whiteness is thus epistemologically and ontologically privileged but invisible within its socio-discursive regime capillarising through Australian disciplinary knowledges and modern colonial practices. (p. 143)

Bracketing gender from other markers does not reflect lived experience, but allows us to tackle one marginality or inequity at a time. Understanding intersectionality and accumulated oppression adds to understanding that there are even violences in separating into social categories to marginalise people, such as in racism. White, middle-to-elite class feminists, for example, were first in a position to challenge the white pWEIRD ethics, ways of being and ways of knowing but this excluded First Nations women. These somewhat invisible practices of defining how we learn to know, be, value and act in our world,<sup>3</sup> through educational systems, are founded on a hierarchy of privilege. To understand practice and privilege we can turn to theory including the feminist challenge in OEE.

The sex (female-male) and related gender (feminine-masculine, girl-boy, woman-man) binary is normalised, or made normal, often presented as natural, or naturalised through certain practices such as gender-policing and essentialising gender. But such categories and practices are made up, socially constructed, and arguably problematic when aiming to be inclusive. Butler (e.g., 2004) is known for her extensive and sophisticated analysis of gender as a category and a performance, and its relationship to sex and sexuality. The normalised gender binary and conflating sex with gender have significant effects on how OEE can be exclusionary. There are also many who want to stay with old mind-sets, consciously and unconsciously, denying the convenience, exclusion, violences and social constructedness of these categories. These mind-sets often deny the existence of people who challenge these categories or who are positioned as deviant or outside these categories. This positioning not only denies their existence, but also denies their rights, and take no responsibility to include them in something as important as education, OEE, in the outdoors or in society more broadly. They and the associated issues often remain hidden, ignored, erased, oppressed and marginalised by normative practices.

As a means of understanding practice, Bourdieu (1990) provided conceptual tools that articulated the interaction between structures that shape a society and their interface with individuals. He studied how people/bodies could be positioned within what he called fields, social virtual fields of differentiated social power relations. If you think of OEE as a field, there are particular organisations or structures that control the field. There are particular 'players' or positions within that field. There are taken-for-granted rules and regulations that control practice – what people know, value, do and be, such as formal policies and more implicit expectations. Some of the players and regulations govern or police who gets to be in the field (see lisahunter et al. (2015) for further explanation).

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<sup>3</sup>Ethically I draw on Martin, K., & Mirraboopa, B. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203–214 as a way to consider practice



There are particular ways of behaving that are valued and those in power get to make the rules to say what are the valued behaviours or practices. This, in turn gate-keeps who gets supported or not. Bourdieu proposed (1990) that it is our taken-for-granted, daily 'practices' that reveal the ways we are socialised, the ways that determine the nature of our society, the ways we reproduce certain fields such as OEE. It is practice, beyond consciousness and in our actions (that include thoughts) that the history of our world plays out in our bodies (think how OEE might default to particular bodies), in our tastes such as a 'love' of the outdoors (if you weren't into the outdoors you probably wouldn't be doing OEE), in the way we move (OEE people tend to be confident and competent movers), in even why we might have been drawn to OEE.

Our social practices, the things we do as individuals and groups, makes a field like OEE recognisable. Our practices indicate whether we fit in or not, but also act to change fields. A social field like OEE is a network of relationships, as a virtual site of forces and struggle for resources such as access to leisure time, for access to wilderness, for what counts as OEE, and who gets to access mentoring or support from someone in the field. The field has a logic that creates taken-for-granted assumptions that signal if someone is a member or not. It is determined by already-member participants' understanding of how things are or should be done. Fields grow out of, and determine, the social positioning and actions/practices of the individuals and collectives who identify with them. It is no accident that certain people belong or are attracted to OEE and others not. Knowing the gendered history of OEE provides clues.

### 23.3 The Past That Shapes Contemporary OEE

Historically and contemporarily, there are explicit and implicit practices that allow entry to OEE or not, and even influences the imagination of people to want to be part of OEE or outdoors. Research reveals how females were excluded from outdoor leisure/pursuits. Records of female surfers remain invisibilized with early photos often only naming surfers if they were male or wealthy (Iisahunter, 2016). By the fashion dictates of the time, women were not allowed to wear practical clothing for mountaineering or had ill-fitting/impractical clothing only designed for men (Carr, 2019). Environmental groups included particular kinds of bodies but not bodies who were female, with disability, Indigenous or black (Ray, 2013). Outdoor organisations related to OEE, such as Scouts, were set up for boys for a particular form of masculinity, described by Krumrey (2018) as toxic white masculinity. Citing military-style uniforms for Scouts and Park Rangers promoting a war-like or competitive endorsement in attitude to nature, and The Sierra Club Wilderness Handbook's (c1971) misogynist language, amongst other examples, Krumrey argues that environmentalisms roots in white supremacy and misogyny have been hidden. Only recently history is being rewritten to include women and other marginalised participants previously written out of the records captured in museums,



history books and documentary films, academic literature, and popular media. Feminism and gender theory were important catalysts.

Marginalised participants in a field have less value, power or agency to access resources and control the field. Those with economic (financial), social (connections or networks) and cultural capital (what is valued in the group or society) go on to legitimize the rules and regulations of the field. Outdoor clothing such as boots, and equipment such as early climbing harnesses, were often too big to be safe or functional for women, too expensive for the poor or not available for purchase for people who were not white. Without connections to those making the equipment so it fitted or was financially accessible it was harder to participate. Without participating it was harder to represent your identity category as competent and to insist on changes that were more inclusive. In societies where OEE developed, men were dominating women, OEE still largely embodying white pWEIRD practices reproducing certain ways of knowing-being-doing-valuing (see for example Arbon, 2008). The image of the rugged Wild Man, conquering the outdoors and empty lands (that were not empty, e.g., colonizing Terra Nullius – Australia) was embodied in being ‘outdoors’, at least until very recently with the challenge from (white-middle-class) feminism.

### 23.4 Feminism and Gender Theory

Feminists, people working towards equity for females and liberation from patriarchy, have made significant impacts on OEE. In arguing to ‘stay with the trouble’ or discomfort, that is to not look away because denial is easier than equity, feminist Haraway (2008) introduced the idea of response-ability as an ethical disposition to cultivate a sensitivity to others, an ability to respond and share suffering. Response-ability is a concept embodied by early feminists whose ways of knowing-being-doing-valuing challenged what was seen to be dominant ways, pWEIRD hegemonic ways, in OEE for instance. Women’s agency or power to influence, to make visible the structural work of white patriarchy, to rework gender possibilities meant fuller participation and influence within OEE. Once feminists were ‘recognised’ or became legitimate in OEE, taking up positions of power, they influenced female inclusion more directly. This is illustrated in the increased literary and academic presence of women in OEE as practitioners and authors during the 1980’s and 1990’s (see for example, Ball, 1986; Barron, 1995; Gough, 1999; Humberstone & Lynch, 1991; Whitehouse & Taylor, 1996). Sex-segregated outdoor programs emerged to encourage female confidence and competence without male domination (Nolan & Priest, 1993) but not without problematic repercussions.

Two significant scholars in environmental education (Gough, 1999) and outdoor education (Humberstone, 2000) centred gender, challenging dominant gender orders. Using feminist poststructural theory they unpacked the ideologies of femininity along with the ‘crisis of masculinity’ and ‘hegemonic masculinity’ within capitalist patriarchal structures. Humberstone noted ‘Despite the considerable research over the last twenty years which has identified gender as a central concept

in explaining human behaviour, and organisational and social structures, areas of the 'outdoor industry' seem frequently ignorant of this knowledge' (2000, p.21). She acknowledged recent incorporation of female data within OEE research and promotion of cultural and paradigmatic shifts in UK outdoor education to pay attention to women's aspirations, needs, strengths and values. Others, such as Pederson in Norway and Cook in the UK also recognized the gendering of OEE. With researchers such as Gough and Humberstone recognizing that participation in, and representation of female bodies within OEE, had grown significantly in numbers during the 1980's and 1990's, including in leadership in programs such as Outward Bound, and despite some arguing there was a feminisation of outdoor education happening, public and practitioner perception was still that OEE was largely masculine, a concept itself attracting attention.

Masculinities research emerged out of feminist and gender studies as attention to multiplicity and subjectivity had challenged more fixed notions of 'identity'. For example, Humberstone and Clayton (2007) tracked the ways masculinities were embodied and embedded in the UK outdoors. New insights into how gender worked came with and produced concepts such as Connell's (1987) hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Gender equity issues became more visible. Concepts that challenged gender's false binary and stereotyped or essentialised assumptions of masculinity and femininity, for example, enabled more sophisticated understanding and visibility of the issues and mechanisms of gender exclusion, OEE beginning to show signs of change.

### **23.5 Challenging Gender Binaries, Normativity and Stereotypes?**

Humberstone (2000) also suggested OEE must pay attention to gender binary. A reference to the potential androgynous effects or reduction of gender stereotypes of outdoor adventure (Friedrich & Priest, 1993) made little impression in questioning the normative binary, arguably still present today. Nor were assumed links between sex and gender theoretically explored to any great extent in OEE. Nevertheless, early foundations were laid by feminist scholars recognizing the potential for transgression towards more sophisticated concepts and previously unnoticed gender identities and relations. Male educators dominating the field, could "become agents in resisting or challenging dominant ideologies" (Humberstone, 2000, p. 27). Dominant forms of masculinity and femininity, situated in normalised heterosexual relationships (heteronormativity), were being challenged by lesbian, gay and trans identities, as well as notions such as gender fluidity, gender non-binary and agenda identities. With challenges to the gender binary and stereotypes, an attention to normativity, heterosexuality and sex/gender/sexuality (sgs) diversity was the next historical shift in OEE as we moved into the twenty-first century through to now.

Recently, in fields such as education and sport, critiques of gender normativity have emerged, either separate to or in relation to sex and/or sexuality (see summary in lisahunter, 2017). Research began paying attention to teachers identifying as lesbian, to feminine masculinities or gay presence in learning environments. In OEE-related areas such as Health and Physical Education (HPE), feminist and queer scholars were highlighting the presence of and discrimination towards lesbian teachers. Sykes, for example, suggested that “Physical education is a profession where heterosexuality has historically been regarded as normal, if not compulsory.” (1998, np). Gender diversity, and its separateness yet intersectionality with sex and sexuality was still not intelligible to any great extent in OEE literature however, and academics and practitioners who embodied such diversity remained hidden, to remain in and/or be successful within, the field (personal communications). Perhaps the rise in female representation and visibility within OEE also preserved a cisgender binary, still within a (heteronormative) patriarchal frame.

Challenging gender stereotypes became captured in the stories of mostly female-identifying practitioners and academics. Whether women/girls were embracing ‘masculine’ OEE, challenging OEE as masculine, and/or replacing a masculinised ideal with a feminised version, the feminist work clearly interrupted the field. A recent volume (Gray & Mitten, 2018) establishes the gendered nature of OEE with much greater nuance and volume than even 10 years ago. A mother and daughter reflect on changes over 30 years associated with hegemonic masculinity and the resistances to change (Oakley et al., 2018). With recurring themes of ‘beating the boys’, and ‘negotiating the superwoman complex’, they capture some of the complexity in the outdoor field, recognizing the attention to gender hierarchies and orders through ‘supportive males who resist dominant ideologies of gender to move the field towards social justice.’ (p. 375). They describe the field as still masculinist requiring transformation “to an inclusive terrain that acknowledges and celebrates diversity in experiences, abilities, bodies, identities, and desires” (p. 376). Like others, Bell explained some time ago that “gendered identities are not ‘stable,’ but have been changing social effects in Western society that inform everyday experiences” (2008, p. 430). Yet change in OEE seems slow, except within the work of female-identifying scholars, very recently, and purposefully using agency to disrupt the field.

Structural inequities in access to OEE training, employment, professorial positions in the university, or OEE organisation boards are practices that define the field (Gray & Mitten, 2018). Backlash to shifts in gender hierarchies (such as to binary and cisgendered normativity) characterised the period of female establishment in OEE. With respect to gender(binary), recent work indicates that women remain severely underrepresented in OEE and various forms of symbolic violence, as an unconscious form of erasure or explicit backlash, has us still revisiting gender inequities today, albeit in somewhat more complex and sophisticated ways. The gender order and its violence, playing out in this instance in the bodies and practices of well-meaning members of the field who have not noticed gender as an issue for everyone, is taking OEE in particular directions, such as that illustrated in the story

of the creation of *The Palgrave international handbook of women and outdoor learning* (Gray & Mitten, 2018). In its front-pages, a reviewer noted:

As a male in a profession perfused with male hegemony, this book has opened my eyes to the many profound – yet often unnoticed – thoughts, feelings and contributions of female colleagues. It is a waymark along the path towards further maturation that all involved in our profession will continue to journey. John Quay, *Associate Professor*.

Authors in the book attest to shifts still needed in OEE, shifts already evident in practices of some, but certainly not legitimated in any substantial way to change the subtleties of the field’s practices. Such shifts also include more attention the relationship between genders and sex and sexuality.

### 23.6 Sex/Sexuality and Queering OEE

Positioning according to an assumed sex-binary effects knowing-being-doing-valuing gender, as does sexuality. Mitten (2018) describes the ongoing issues of sexism, lesbian baiting and homophobia that indicate there is still a long way to travel in addressing gender equity in OEE, through evolving practices of language, visibility, awareness and processes of normalisation. Warren et al. (2018) discuss gender in the questioning of competency of women in OEE along with problematic work environments. They note ‘Transgender and gender-variant outdoor leaders are marginalized by this gendering of spaces and attitudinal adherence to a gender binary’ (p. 430). They argue that still, a heteronormative and gender-binary system characterizes the field and note the symbolic capital imbued in outdoor leadership and therefore response-ability to expose and eradicate subtle sexist beliefs and practices in the hidden curriculum training. They provide strategies to support women in leadership including supportive organizational climates for women employees. Similarly, in *Adventure Education*, Martin et al. (2018) challenge claims of gender equity representation in key structures and institutional practice that are instead tokenistic and maintain misogyny and sexism in the field. They however signal positive action for gender diversity, identifying binary gender conceptualisations and embodiment as both problematic and necessary for recognition rather than re-erasure. They recognise binary hegemony and ties to “assumptions about clothing, grooming, pronoun usage, overall presentation, and more” (p. 294) suggesting the impossibility of recognising all gender identities, but I suggest this is exactly where OEE needs to head.

As gender is more than a binary, and significant “because, like ethnicity, it can help people to understand each other, and it can help individuals create a working understanding of themselves in relation to society” (Martin et al., 2018, p. 294), we need to be more aware of how sgs specifically, and intersectionality more broadly, position participants in our practice. We must notice who is positioning and who is being positioned to avoid reinscribing the violences that beyond-binary moves, and gender diversity work might create. Going beyond binaries where the binary and

stereotypes are reinforced by those who embody hegemonic binary may result in further exclusion. Just as genders have/are constructed and do work, as binaries or essentialisations, so too they can be interrupted, reinvented or erased, if OEE is willing. Emerging and/or increasingly visible work provides clues for OEE, embracing not just identities who transition genders, whose intersex variations challenge sex binaries, or lipstick dykes for example, but also by queering gender and more broadly the field. Here queering refers to challenging the dominant with non-normative or new ways of knowing-being-doing-valuing. The double-edged nature of single-gender (binary) programming is evident in Argus' work (2018) with a 'trans' focus, exploring Girl Scouts' reflections on their outdoor experiences. If outdoor adventure/education may serve as a counterculture site of alternative femininities and masculinities, perhaps single-gender outdoor experiences for youth – such as through Girl Scouts – can allow girl-identifying and young women to challenge Western patriarchal, essentialist, and dualistic social constructs of gender. Yet the danger here is in re-inscribing gender binaries, essentialisms, orders and exclusions, in this instance of 'girl'. Such work must foster an openness that the authors ascribe to so called female adventure education, queering such categories at the same time as using them. The question then arises, who, and with which identities, can belong to the Girls Scouts?

Inclusivity, diversity and equity for those who experience exclusion, erasure or other forms of symbolic and institutional violence from their intersectional identities is yet to be adequately addressed in OEE. This sits alongside attention to identifying specific genders erased in the past- those identifying as transgender, non-binary, fluid, agenda or beyond gender, for example. Institutional authorities erasing historical disadvantage through tokenism in non-discrimination, inclusion and social cohesion, can act as a double move in sexism and misogyny, verbal and symbolic violence enacted on those who spoke out against such activity but perhaps queering OEE provides new possibilities.

Gaining currency in the 1990s, queer theory began to dismantle categorical notions, challenge the heteronormative and cisgender perspective, and move beyond sgs categories. Conceptually, queer theory's focus on normativity offers a lot, exploring beyond identity, seeking ways to understand what and how power flows and who (dis)continues to be valued, and how to change fields such as OEE. Not only does binary cisgendered heteronormativity invite further investigation and challenge in OEE and professional education, but so too does the operation of homonormativity and intersecting sgs identities, and the normative act of 'identification' and identity construction. With increasing resources to draw upon, whether about different sgs cultures, spaces, (in)visibility of identities in educator practices or queer worlding (Haraway, 2008; lisahunter, 2017), articulating an openness and acknowledgement of the fluid and variable paths for OEE means we might ask new questions, such as at the end of the chapter. Queering invites largely silenced questions of OEE. Are these to remain silences/d for (purposefully) subversive and subaltern purposes where non-queer fear to go? What would it mean for OEE/you to take up queer worlding and work to recognize and challenge sexism, cisgender binaries, heterosexism, transphobia, agenda erasure, heteronormativity, misogyny,

sexual violence and the diverse violences of identity imposing limits in what or who individuals may be or become?

## 23.7 Conclusion

As backlash politics and practices of pWEIRD continue to keep certain people ‘in their place’ through sgs-binaries and heteronormative cisgenderism, we know fields like OEE can change, challenging amnesias (Gough & Whitehouse, 2020) and moving gender issues where they get our full attention (Gray & Mitten, 2018; Gough et al., 2017). Old mind-sets of sgs deny possibilities, exclusionary and illusionary blinkers working for some and not others. Recognising when sgs is operating in OEE to exclude, changing practices towards inclusion, requires understandings about why/when/where/how OEE practices sexism, misogyny, homophobia and other violences affecting learning and experience. OEE has distance to travel, conceptually and in lived-practices, to inhabit a space where gender equity and post-gender inclusion and diversity are valued but OEE’s journey shows important changes too, challenging gender towards equity, inclusion and diversity. Over 20 years on from Humberstone’s and Gough’s calls, and 60 years since poststructural feminists spoke back to normative gender, how might you address persistent gender issues and enhance changes in/through OEE – queering practices for inclusion, diversity, intersectional complexity and representation (see Recommended readings). Changing previous ways of knowing-being-doing-valuing so previously marginalised and emerging possibilities can be enabled is a sign of OEE’s responsibility to embody diversity, inclusion, really making a difference that counts.

### Reflective Questions

1. What is gender, your experience of it, and in OEE?
2. Can/should there ever be gender equity in OEE?
3. What ways of knowing-being-doing-valuing our world (de)stabilise gender? Or (why) do patriarchal cisgender heteronormative binaries, misogyny, sexism persist in OEE?
4. How might queering help OEE create better outcomes and for whom?
5. What new ways of knowing-being-doing-valuing challenges OEE’s normativity?

### Recommended Further Reading

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# Chapter 24

## Topographies of Hope: Social Justice, Outdoor Environmental Education, and Accomplice-ship



Mary Breunig

*Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.  
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.....*

Arundhati Roy (2014), A Ghost Story

### 24.1 Introduction

I am relatively new to mountain biking and find myself really enjoying the sport. Biking on single track with some technical sections is an interesting experience. I find myself frequently peering over my handlebars, looking “just the right amount” forward to navigate the ups, the downs, and the obstacles. If I look too far ahead, I miss reacting soon enough to those obstacles that lie immediately before me on the trail. If I fail to look far enough ahead, I find myself inadequately prepared to respond to obstacles on the subsequent section of the trail. This interplay of how far forward to set my gaze while mountain biking mirrors much of my current perspective in writing this book chapter, as it is June 2020 and the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the death of George Floyd, an African-American man who was killed by a white Minneapolis police officer, are impacting individuals across the globe. In being asked to write this chapter on social justice and outdoor environmental education (OEE), I could not have anticipated doing so in the midst of such a momentous historical time.

This chapter provides opportunities for OEE educators to further develop their social justice literacy and to become social justice accomplices, underscoring the imperative for this now more so than ever as COVID-19 and worldwide racial tensions have further highlighted issues of social (in)justices. In writing this it is

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important for me to acknowledge my positionality as a female, white immigrant, upper-middle class academic, living in the United States, having recently moved from Canada to California. I consciously use the term immigrant as opposed to settler as I was recently corrected on this, being reminded that European immigrants did not “settle” the land. Rather, those of us with European ancestry, colonized North American land, appropriating it from Indigenous peoples and we ourselves are non-native immigrants to this land. Positioning myself and applying this conscious use of language serve as examples that further advance social justice literacy. More will be said about this and the following key themes in the subsequent sections of this chapter which include: social justice, COVID-19 and OEE, topographies of hope, OEE social justice accomplice-ship, and key practitioner takeaways.

## 24.2 Social Justice and COVID-19

Issues of inclusion and social justice in outdoor environmental education mirror the struggles in larger society to embrace equity in a world where historical, structural, and institutional forces impede equal access and opportunity (Davis, 2019; Warren & Breunig, 2019). One noteworthy social equity theory centres on the concept of distributive justice with its focus on promoting equalization of the distribution of material goods and resources with the goal of providing equal access for all (Rawls, 1970). Definitions of distributive justice have been expanded to include consideration of not only material goods but nonmaterial social goods, such as human rights and self-respect (Young, 1990).

Inequities stemming from distributive inequalities are acutely illuminated at this present time. Historically marginalized individuals and communities are particularly affected by COVID-19, including countries in the global south, communities of colour, individuals who struggle with food insecurity and homelessness, and those who suffer from mental illness (Johnson & Buford, 2020). The largest Indigenous reservation in the United States has always experienced disproportionate environmental challenges and is now impacted more than ever with a death toll higher than that of 13 different states combined (Truong, 2020). And those historically marginalized individuals and communities most impacted by COVID-19 are also “frontline” communities where residents, many black and Latinx, live adjacent to heavily polluting industries. Women of colour also represent the largest percentage of the current COVID-19 frontline workforce. In the United Kingdom, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups are similarly disproportionately affected with UK Pakistanis being hit the hardest by COVID-19 and BAME doctors reporting the pressures of working with inadequate PPE exposing them to greater risk (Valdes, 2020). In Norway and Sweden, the Somalian population has been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Coronavirus is not the great equalizer as many assert (Breunig, 2020).

There is a very real and unsettling chaos, stemming from the current COVID-19 pandemic that is verging on full-scale pandemonium, most recently fuelled by a

white policeman being arrested for the homicide of George Floyd leading to the (re) surge of the Black Lives Matter movement. As I sit writing this paper, there are protests and other forms of social justice activism happening around the globe, further illuminating Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) (in)justices in unprecedented ways. Around the World, people's lives and livelihoods are simultaneously literally uprooted and immobilized by these current events. Within a very short time frame and in an incredibly egregious manner, COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter are further highlighting inequities relevant to health care, education, access to resources, social and physical mobility, governmental responses, and individual rights, freedoms, and privileges.

These realities must be kept at the forefront of any discussion about social justice at the present moment and into the future as new topographies and landscapes of professional practice and education will inevitably emerge from this historical moment in time. How might outdoor environmental educators contribute to mapping the terrain that now lies before us, further developing their social justice literacy and establishing new topographies of hope? COVID-19 presents a multitude of opportunities for individuals to apply their skills and capacities to both adapt to the current challenge and to contribute to a hopeful future, one that is social and environmental-justice oriented. A hopeful future is one that you can see yourself participating in, want to participate in, and have agency and capacity to participate in (Andrews, 2018). This hope-filled future is, by design and with intention, one that must strive for equanimity.

### 24.3 Social Justice and Outdoor Environmental Education

For the purpose of this chapter, the term social justice pertains to issues of social privilege and oppression. Outdoor environmental education (OEE) refers to a wide-ranging pedagogical environment, which may include urban areas and frequently includes time spent in nature. The natural world devoid of human intervention is inherently non-discriminatory. Humans, upon entering the natural world, bring whatever discriminations they possess into the outdoor spaces they occupy. These discriminations may represent overt racism or may be in the form of microaggressions, which consist of the subtle degradation of an individual based on factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, culture, race, (dis)ability, age, sexuality, among other social identifying factors (Sue, 2010).

During this time of COVID and heightened race awareness, I am seeing signs on people's front yards and hearing the phrases "we are all in this together" and "all lives matters." These microaggressive platitudes are not helpful and, in fact, are additionally divisive, disavowing historically marginalized individuals and communities by further shielding privileged individuals from confronting societal inequities relevant to education, health care, food and housing security, and social freedoms, to name a few. Developing social justice literacy involves acknowledging our individual privilege and the larger societal (in)equities that exist. It also involves

recognizing our own complicity in contributing to these inequities often through our implicit or unconscious biases which consist of those habits of interpreting a scenario and responding to it that operate outside of our awareness and can be in direct contradiction to the beliefs and values we espouse.

All humans retain unconscious bias. Examining our privilege can shed light on those biases. Privileges are those unearned benefits, special rights, and/or immunities that are available to a particular person or group based on historical, structural, and institutional forces that impede equity (Warren & Breunig, 2019).

Developing an awareness of privilege involves examining race/ ethnicity, culture, gender and gender identity, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and religion, among other social identifying factors and how they advantage certain individuals and impede equity for others. Newbery (2003) highlights how privilege and unconscious bias may play out for OEE in recounting a solo canoe flip scenario, wherein an outdoor educator hoists and flips a canoe to prepare for a portage/carry between lakes, as one example. She describes the solo flip as embedded in Western cultural norms relevant to the privilege(s) of dis/ability, gender, class, and race. Newbery draws attention to how outdoor environmental education continues to “divide groups of people into strong/able/male and Other through this practice” (p. 205). She identifies how “carrying gear carries both physical capital but also social value, and it is easy for both guides and students to find that value and external validation alluring” (p. 211). She notes that able-bodied men are automatically privileged by such constructs and are often still called upon to be the ones who carry the weight of such items while females are often relied upon to be more relational on expeditions.

The early history of outdoor education as a white, male, able-bodied class-privileged domain still influences the administration and practice of outdoor and environmental education programs and classroom teaching (Warren & Breunig, 2019). Much of the theory and practice of OEE has emerged from narratives of power and privilege and that “history” too often fails to include the participation and voices of marginalized people and communities. For example, while women and BIPOC are making inroads in outdoor program participation, gaining increased entry into mid-level employment, and exercising some influence over educational policy, the major decision-making power and high-level administration positions in outdoor and educational organizations still tend to be the domain of white males.

Take a moment to consider your own personal privilege relevant to these social identifying factors and your individual positionality. Ask yourself the question: “What’s in your backpack of privilege (see Fig. 24.1 below)?” White OEE educators often have the physical ability and financial resources to participate in outdoor wilderness travel. We enjoy specialized camping foods which are easily accessible in most stores. White OEE educators can find representative images of people who look similar to them in outdoor magazines and be surrounded by people of similar skin colour at climbing sites. Our first aid kits have (white) flesh-coloured bandaids that match our skin colour.

It is vital as you unpack your own backpack of privilege that you do so with the understanding that privileges are unearned birthrights. Individuals do not

**Fig. 24.1** Backpack of privilege



intentionally grab as much privilege as they can as they move through life, disavowing others from that vital resource. Rather, individuals are born with them and the subsequent privilege that is afforded (or denied) is dependent upon the historical, structural, and institutional setting in which they live. Acknowledging our privilege helps us better understand our own social location in relation to others and can help allay further marginalization of under privileged individuals and groups if we actively work to use that resource and the concomitant societal power to contribute to a more equitable society. The present historical moment provides unique opportunities for those of us who (often unknowingly) hold privilege to spend that capital resource!

Further to this focus on the individual, access to the “Great Outdoors,” decisions about “acceptable” designated wilderness activities, and the concept of leisure time itself are privileges and were often derived from the interests and values of early outdoor/environmental proponents who were predominantly white, upper-middle class able-bodied men. These perspectives are too often imposed on BIPOC individuals who may not hold the same views about nature and land use (Davis, 2019). Issues of land colonization, the proximity of dumps and power plants in marginalized communities, and the class-privileged history of conservation and preservation movements further call for social justice in outdoor environmental education (Warren & Breunig, 2019). Studies conducted by two of the relevant key researchers who have explored this have emphasized that perceptions of racial discrimination, fear of wildlands, economic limitations, and misconceptions about nature spaces often preclude BIPOC individuals from choosing to spend time in nature (Davis; Finney, 2014).

These and other examples of social and environmental racism reveal the myopic and paternalistic view of distributive justice theory and its underlying assumption that underprivileged individuals and groups share the same oppressive experiences and that better allocation of resources will magically fix inequities (Young, 1990). The concept of intersectionality, developed by Black feminists (Crenshaw, 1991), illuminates that social identities do not exist independently and that many individuals are affected by multiple forms of discrimination. An individual rarely fits into

any single category of race, class, gender, sexuality or national origin – categories that have historically been used to make distinctions, create hierarchy, and make comparisons. COVID-19 is not only a medical crisis but a political and ideological one shining a particularly bright light on the real life consequences for those affected by cross-sectional, overlapping oppressions. During this challenging time of COVID-19 and rising social awareness stemming from renewed focus on Black Lives Matter, the gap between the “haves” and “have nots” has been further exposed. The concept of sheltering-in-place is premised on the assumption that everyone has a place in which to shelter (Breunig, 2020) and the current marches, rallies, protests, petitions, and calls to action happening around the Globe have further illuminated societal disparities.

Cultural or ethnic differences between BIPOC and white immigrants may lead to certain groups avoiding outdoor recreational spaces or activities perceived as belonging to a racial/ethnic group different from their own (Davis, 2019; Vaughan et al., 2018). White immigrants claiming to be “colour-blind” to racial discriminations in outdoor recreational spaces and programs are additional examples of micro-aggressions. How can this historic moment in time and the year 2020 provide us with the kind of clarity relevant to issues of social (in)justice that 2020 vision is supposed to provide?

Two social justice theorists offer insight into the value of focusing on hope. Patti Lather (2007) discusses her experiences with frequently feeling “stuck” and lost, subsequently finding herself in a cycle of falling in and out of hope (with moments of despair) when doing social justice work during challenging historical times. She emphasizes the need to cultivate hope as feelings of guilt, grief, and despair are real but will not help allay (in)justice. Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1994) suggests that pro-social action feeds hope and that hope feeds further collective action; taken together, these reciprocal efforts help allay despair. In considering social justice-oriented outdoor pedagogy, I am thinking less cyclically and more topographically.

## 24.4 Topographies of Hope

In reflecting upon the Greek economic collapse of 2009, Knight (2017) applies the phrase topographies of hope to describe the ways in which people engaged with that particular crisis as individuals attempted to situate themselves within time and place and in relation to each other in an effort to collectively (re)vision a hope-filled future. Rhetorical questions that many individuals ponder during challenging times include: “Who are we?” “What have we become?” “Where are we now? When are we now?” “Where shall we go?” (Knight). In a somewhat similar vein, part of the response to the 9/11 bombing of the World Trade Center engendered hope-oriented understandings and actions that mobilized the world to move beyond merely avoiding and coping toward creating more sustainable and just future(s). As people come to grips with the fact that this current state of uncertainty and unrest is likely to

persist for quite some time, I have been further considering the concepts of hope and hopeful pedagogies and the possibilities that may emerge from this time of challenge. What pedagogies and praxes may lend themselves to establishing (new) topographies of hope? Topography defines the shape of the earth's surface and often includes terrain features such as mountains, valleys, plateaus, watercourses, and other physical features. Interpersonal relationships and individual and collective action are also key topographic features if we adopt a more expansive view to how we regard the landscape. As Andrews (2018) notes, mapping and/or geographical descriptions of previously buried constellations of interconnectedness between humans and the environment can lead to "aha" moments in developing pro-social relationships. The concept of topographies, landscapes, place, and mapping are resonant ones for outdoor environmental educators.

OEE educators are accustomed to working in outdoor environments that are often indeterminate, involving high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability. Participant and student groups are composed of diverse and varied demographics, personality traits, and ability levels. Natural environments are changeable as the terrain and weather fluctuate.

Outdoor professionals are frequently in teaching and learning environments that are demanding, ambiguous and require creative problem solving. That said, OEE educators often possess a strong ethic of care for others as a core component of their professional practice (Gray & Mitten, 2018). OEE educator's primary personality traits tend to reflect positive psychology and a growth-oriented mindset, including positive emotions and pro-social attitudes (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). All that said, however, overly reductionist and "tidy" conclusions about OEE educator efforts to apply their positive psychology traits to issues of social (in)justice need to be continuously disrupted and expanded upon. The application of positive psychological traits, outward thinking/actions, creative problem-solving, and a growth-oriented mindset enacted by individuals who are primarily White immigrants (Davis, 2019) during this particular historical moment in time needs to be more fully engaged. How might OEE educators contribute to establishing and (re)landscaping a terrain of hope with a view toward social justice?

## 24.5 Allyship and Accomplice-ship

White immigrants must acknowledge their complicity in social injustices and are obliged to actively develop their social justice literacy and engage in antiracist allyship, activism and accomplice-ship. OEE educators may be uniquely poised to apply their positive psychology and growth-oriented skills to proactively work toward social change during this indeterminate historical moment in time, moving beyond the "easy" rhetoric of advocating for social justice to active and sustained engagement.

Allyship is a verb that encourages individuals with privileged identities to use that privilege to disrupt oppression while working alongside people who are part of



oppressed groups, together striving for equity and social justice. White outdoor educators practicing allyship need to be recognized as allies by marginalized individuals or groups not just bestow that label upon themselves. In this sense, allies serve as assistants to, not appropriators of, social advocacy. In developing social justice literacy, allies must: (1) recognize systematic societal inequalities; (2) understand the impact of microaggressions on oppressed individuals and groups; (3) believe underrepresented peoples' oppressive experiences and the ways in which intersectionality functions to illuminate the impact of multiple, overlapping oppressions; and (4) listen, support, self-reflect, and work toward change, both within oneself and outside of that self (Jackson et al., 2020). Martinez (2018) encourages white immigrants to shift their gaze and efforts from the lower risk activities of allyship to accomplice-ship, directly challenging institutionalized racism, colonization, and white supremacy by confronting racist people, policies, and structures (Jackson et al., 2020).

Accomplice-ship involves putting oneself in a position that indisputably communicates your stance on advocating alongside marginalized groups and being complicit in that struggle towards liberation (Jackson et al., 2020). Pro-solidarity activism may include participating in rallies and protests, engaging in letter writing campaigns, engaging in community service-learning opportunities, and quieting white voices, ceding privileged space, literally and metaphorically, for marginalized voices to be amplified.

## 24.6 OEE Accomplice-ship and Activism

How can OEE educators serve as social justice accomplices who individually and collectively engage in pro-solidarity activism? Although there is no comprehensive or linear set of ingredients that comprise a single, signature recipe to social justice accomplice-ship, this next section will offer recommendations for practice which I present below as a bulleted list. While I hear people talk about the need to lean in to difficult conversations, I impel you to boldly *leap* into your discomfort zone and to dwell there as equity work is a long-term commitment. I urge you to start by stopping. Before you open your mouth, open your eyes and ears and listen.....

### 24.6.1 *Developing Individual Social Justice Literacy*

- Take the 21 Day Equity challenge @ <https://www.debbyriving.com/21-day-challenge/>
- Read, Listen to Podcasts, and Watch Films to further your own education
- Avoid OEE microaggressions
- Swapping stories about epic outdoor adventures to far flung places or a rock climbing training regime that is time-consuming and costly are common in OEE



and represent examples of microaggressions that may marginalize certain individuals based on socio-economic differences

- Attend a training on unconscious/implicit bias to further develop your social justice literacy
- Further develop your critical conscious use of language
- Quotes at the end of email signatures (e.g. In every walk in nature one receives far more than he seeks ~ John Muir) reifies the white male hegemonic historical stereotype of OEE – Consider what your email signature conveys relevant to issues of social (in)justices
- Vote and contribute to the political process

### ***24.6.2 OEE Program and Policy Considerations***

- Decolonize your program and practice.
- Acknowledge at the outset of each class and/or program the Indigenous territory where you are gathered. If you are a white immigrant, ideally invite an Indigenous person who was born on that ancestral land to do this. Provide an opportunity for silence immediately following that land acknowledgment
- Include an acknowledgement of the Indigenous territory you live on in your email signature
- Avoid co-opting Indigenous practices in your outdoor programs without acknowledgement and analysis (e.g. sweat lodges, dreamcatchers “arts and crafts” projects)
- Invite students and participants to self-identify their Gender Pronoun in your introductions and email signatures (she/her/hers; they/them/theirs/he/his/him)
- Avoid “stand alone” diversity trainings, curricular units, or courses. Adopt an anti-oppressive framework and diverse-perspective content as integral components of every aspect of your teaching. Good pedagogy is, by design and with intentionality, social justice-oriented
- Choose reading lists that represent a diversity of perspectives
- Specific to outdoor and environmental education, rescript the historical “founding fathers” narrative, seeking out women and BIPOC writers and adventurers that are often underrepresented
- Conduct decolonizing research
- Go beyond an acknowledgment of your “outsider” positionality if you are conducting research with an underrepresented community/group and include individuals who are from that community as research team members
- Ensure that the sources you cite in your research and writing are broadly representative and current, intentionally seeking out historically underrepresented viewpoints
- Conduct research that extends beyond primarily North American and Eurocentric hegemonic and ideological perspectives
- OEE learning environments

- As aforementioned, for some, “nature” itself is historically a place of punishment and imprisonment, not a source of liberation as it is for white immigrants
- Be aware of your own implicit biases and proactively work to disrupt and dismantle these
- Challenge by Choice and Full Value Contracts presume individuals in any given group hold shared values and equal agency and voice, which is presumptive. What unintended outcomes might occur if a transgender individual is required to do a canoe tip test or wear a climbing harness on a ropes course, potentially exposing some body part which they choose to not publicly expose? Is that individual able to exercise “real” choice?
- Traveling to and through outdoor learning environments that are named after individuals who were rapists and executioners (e.g. Kit Carson Pass in California) without explicit acknowledgment and analysis of that place/space’s namesake is irresponsible
- Representation in Outside and Climbing magazines (among others) needs to be reflective of the diversity of individuals who participate in activities
- But not just tokenistically
- Hiring practices and program policies need to reflect equity and inclusion (and also not tokenistically). Never ever ask a BIPOC individual to serve as a representative or provide perspective for (all) people of colour
- Set a goal for where you want to be as a program or association in 6 months, 2 years, 5 years...and ruthlessly track and assess your process and progress
- Learn about, from, and with historically underrepresented individuals and emerging OEE organizations: Melanin Base Camp, Brown People Camping, Out There Adventures, Fat Girls Hiking, Outdoor Asian, Unlikely Hikers, and other organizations
- Learn from the leadership of people of colour on how to transform and dismantle racism but don’t require them to caretake you in that process
- Be prepared to feel really uncomfortable
- Show up and engage on the frontlines of this work
- (em)bodied references – “fitness” tests for outdoor courses or questions on medical forms that ask for your weight and the amount (and type) of daily exercise you do potentially represent (obesity) size-based oppressions

This is not an exhaustive list and there are many more examples than those I have listed here. Hopefully these can serve as a springboard for further consideration and implementation relevant to your own OEE praxis.

## 24.7 Concluding Remarks

In thinking back to the opening vignette, I reflect anew upon the mountain biking “tension” of setting my gaze “just the right amount” forward to navigate the ups, the downs, and the obstacles. Reacting to those immediate obstacles, while continuing

to make forward progress and preparing for other not-yet-visible obstacles that lie ahead, resonates with how OEE educators may best apply their skills and capacities with navigating the current indeterminate terrain and contribute to (re)visioning 2020 with greater clarity. Inequities are amendable. As the opening chapter encouragement offers: “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing...” I wonder: Will you “do justice” and breathe life into the opportunities that continue to emerge out of this historical moment and beyond to help cultivate a more socially just World?

### Reflective Questions

1. What’s in your personal backpack of privilege?
2. What contributions can you make to cultivate a more socially justice world in light of these “unearned benefits” (privileges) you possess?
3. What pedagogies and praxes may lend themselves to establishing (new) topographies of hope?
4. How might OEE educators contribute to establishing and (re)landscaping a terrain of hope with a view toward social justice?
5. Identify one pro-solidarity action you will individually take action on relevant to being a social justice accomplice.

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**Part V**  
**Safety Management**

# Chapter 25

## Fatality Prevention in OEE



Andrew Brookes

### 25.1 Learning from Tragedies

Although serious incidents are not common in outdoor environmental education (OEE), over the years and the around the globe there have been, sadly, enough tragedies to offer strong guidance, to those who pay attention, on how to avoid future fatal accidents. Most new OEE tragedies are instances of old stories, new people, and most accidental OEE deaths could have been prevented by learning and applying lessons from earlier incidents. It is reassuring that to become expert in OEE fatality prevention is feasible and likely to be efficacious. It is sobering that lessons from long ago or far away can easily remain unlearned if they are not actively sought.

Fatal accidents occur in particular circumstances which OEE professionals can learn to mitigate, but to become expert in fatality prevention requires focussed effort. Some fatality prevention expertise is specific. An outdoor educator could have learned to be very good at their job day to day, and to have a good knowledge of everyday safety measures, but nevertheless have deficient knowledge of fatality prevention. Preventable tragedies have occurred in programs that would have been widely regarded as exemplary, on the watches of staff who had, with good reason, considered themselves generally safety focussed and very good at their jobs.

Prevention requires actions performed by individuals according to their situations, and that informs, pragmatically, what professionals must look for in past cases. Investigation and analysis of an incident would usually find multiple missed prevention measures, including some attributable to management, to organisational matters, or to systems failures. Prevention requires that OEE professionals identify which measures *they* could implement in similar circumstances. Although fatality investigation normally considers factors such as legal compliance and liability,

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accreditation, safety standards, certification, or qualifications, after a preventable death the prominent question at 3.00 am on sleepless nights will most likely be: “What could *I* have done?”

An OEE professional who neglected the study of fatality prevention might never be involved in a tragedy, but should one occur all attention will be on what could have prevented it and who could have prevented it. Any thoughts that “calculated risk” of low probability death might be acceptable evaporate in the dreadful aftermath of a preventable tragedy. There is no quota of acceptable preventable deaths in the OEE social licence. No OEE aims or purposes justify preventable death. OEE must not be confused with expert adult outdoor recreation, where individuals might choose a potentially fatal challenge. OEE fatality prevention focusses on consistently taking all reasonable prevention measures – strict aversion – because the consequences of failure are awful.

Fatality prevention is different from, and more manageable than, the open-ended task of anticipating and mitigating all risks. Case-based learning allows those who work in the field to identify and deal with specific, narrow sets of circumstances that have resulted in past deaths. Fatality prevention helps make safety more manageable because it prioritises and concentrates attention on a limited set of considerations which have the highest priority.

This chapter draws on research which considered hundreds of past OEE related fatalities. Each death was a dreadful tragedy that not only cut short a life, but which also changed the lives of those involved and those affected. Bereaved family members have dedicated themselves to preventing future incidents. OEE professionals associated with a preventable death have subsequently struggled with a disrupted sense of self (see Rassool & Nel, 2012). It is important to acknowledge, with compassion, the trauma which each incident unleashed. Focussing on blame will distract from, and not help, future prevention. When considering an incident, if you cannot imagine how, in similar circumstances, you might have made similar decisions there is good chance you have not understood that incident.

Fatality prevention draws attention to the weighty responsibility of OEE work, but similar burdens attach to everyday situations such as driving a motor vehicle or parenting. Those who do develop expertise in OEE fatality prevention can be confident that young people in their care will be safer from serious harm than in most everyday situations. Those unwilling to put sufficient time or effort into fatality prevention should not take young people into the outdoors.

## 25.2 The Prevention Perspective

Fatal incident prevention requires a pragmatic approach to accident analysis. The focus is on whatever best informs prevention. Although causal analysis is potentially open ended – every cause identified was itself caused by something, every circumstance had a wider context – prevention directs attention to the most immediate, or proximal causes, to the mutable causes (those causes which someone could

do something about), and to those causes which lie in the orbit of those most directly responsible for the care of others in the outdoors. Elements of different approaches to understanding or theorising accident causation are adopted or rejected according to their practical applicability.

In prevention-focussed analysis we study incidents to determine, counterfactually, actions but for which a death would not, or might not, have occurred. Identifying a cause in this “but for” sense does not exclude other causes. Usually there will be many prevention failures but for which a tragedy would not have ensued. Prevention analysis homes in on measures most relevant for those responsible for the care of young people in the outdoors. Of course, what is relevant for a manager, for example, will be different from what is relevant for an adult supervising young people in the outdoors.

Prevention measures in a field such as surf-lifesaving can be measured statistically using numbers of rescues undertaken and of drownings, but OEE deaths are too infrequent to directly monitor fatality prevention success. Instead we take a “what if” approach, looking for potential failures, based on knowledge of how things could go wrong drawn from past calamities. A program with latent fatality prevention failures might operate for years without serious incident; the aim is to recognise such potential failures before a tragedy exposes them. Lay individuals, or OEE professionals not trained in fatality prevention, might struggle to envisage the need for certain fatality prevention measures, particularly if a serious incident seems broadly unlikely. Fatality prevention requires that professionals have the expertise to recognise and act on what could possibly go tragically wrong. Fatality prevention is not weighed up against other priorities and is implemented based on what is known to be possible, even if improbable.

OEE fatality prevention requires time and effort and can cause inconvenience. Prevention measures can degrade over time. An important part of fatality prevention is to understand how and why organisations or individuals fail to take prevention measures.

### **25.3 Fatality Prevention Expertise**

Some OEE deaths are not accidental. Deliberate deaths – homicides and suicides – can occur in OEE programs, as can deaths from natural causes. There are also genuine freak accidents which could not have been prevented, but those are uncommon.

After an OEE tragedy it not unusual to read that a fatal incident “must have been a freak event”, and that “nothing like this has happened before”. Usually the “freak accident” was preventable, and while there would likely not have been earlier deaths in a particular program, very similar incidents will have occurred in other programs. Most fatal incidents are first fatal incidents for the OEE program and for the staff involved. Only non-experts think that a good safety record and “haven’t lost anyone yet” is sufficient evidence of sound fatality prevention.



The fact that programs can operate for years with deficient fatality prevention, but no deaths, helps to explain why preventable fatal incidents occur not only in programs conducted by generally under-prepared adults, but also in programs run by evidently well-qualified individuals with previously good safety records:

- Experience, generally so important to expertise, is an unreliable friend when it comes to fatality prevention. Experience contributes to program quality and general safety, but until tragedy strikes experience provides potentially false reassurance.
- A good safety track record is not evidence of sound fatality prevention, because measures effective for day to day safety are not necessarily related to measures required for an uncommon deadly circumstance.
- Preventable fatal incidents can occur in well-run, successful programs. It doesn't help if a program is generally poorly run or unsafe, but fatality prevention requires time and effort that could otherwise have been devoted to improving program quality. Fatality prevention could actually get in the way of a smooth-running program.
- Fatal prevention does not amount to “bubble wrapping”, or generalised over-protectiveness. It focusses, expertly, on a relatively small set of known, recognisable circumstances and employs targeted measures.

## 25.4 The Three Foundations of OEE Fatality Prevention

Fatality prevention can be thought of as a three-legged stool. All three legs must be sound:

1. Deaths have occurred when a known potential for death was tolerated. *There must be strict aversion to fatal incidents*, which means consistently making fatality prevention the overriding priority, never trading it off against other considerations, and not using low probability as an excuse for half-measures<sup>1</sup>.
2. Deaths have occurred because responsible adults were unaware of a potentially deadly circumstance or hazard. Knowledge is acquired from past experience, from sources such as maps, forecasts, or weather records, from reconnaissance trips and from supervision or observation of programs. Deaths occur in specific, recognisable local situations. *There has to be a decision maker who understands local hazards and who can observe conditions and behaviour in the field.*
3. Deaths have occurred because responsible adults failed to envisage what could go wrong or failed to recognise a circumstance was deadly. *Key individuals must have knowledge of past fatal incidents.* Those responsible for others in the

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<sup>1</sup> Spiegel (2010), in a classic study of motorcycle riding calls the fallacy of combining probability and seriousness, in the case of catastrophic events, “the risk composite”. He gives the example of the motorcyclist taking blind corners a little slower because there could be a lorry coming, but not slowing enough to prevent disaster if there was in fact a lorry.

outdoors must monitor and study cases, discuss incidents, and study lessons from past tragedies.

## 25.5 Developing Fatality Prevention Expertise Involves Pattern Recognition

Limited competence in fatality prevention might be achieved by learning rules or guidelines originally derived from past cases, but expertise almost certainly requires that a professional personally studies past cases in depth, in order to develop expert intuition. Loveday et al. (2013) sum up expert intuition as pattern recognition. Expertise is:

non-conscious recognition of problem-states based on patterns of features that prime appropriate scripts in memory ... The efficiency of expert pattern-recognition appears to be based on highly nuanced and automated feature-outcome associations in memory .... These 'cue' associations represent an association in memory between the features of the environment and a subsequent outcome or problem... Cue-based pattern recognition reduces cognitive load during information acquisition without sacrificing depth of processing. (Loveday et al., 2013, p. 1)

In what follows I consider examples of patterns which can inform fatality prevention. Understanding patterns contributes to fatality prevention expertise, but fully developed fatality expertise, depending on the environments and activities undertaken, could require many hours learning the details of past incidents, periodic refresher study, and days or weeks in an environment learning to understand hazards.

## 25.6 Learning from Patterns

Some patterns emerge when incidents are grouped that can direct initial focus of fatality prevention efforts. Most fatal incidents have occurred in a relatively small set of circumstances, broadly associated with steep ground, falling objects, water, heat and cold.

For example, deaths as a result of a fall comprise one distinct group. I searched for OEE related incidents involving falls in the UK and Australia and found 27 deaths between 1976 and 2013. All of the incidents found involved a single victim. Twenty-one of the victims were adolescent males. Each of those incidents involved either absent direct supervision, or supervision that had lapsed or been evaded. Adolescent risk-taking (Reyna & Farley, 2006) is a consideration, but it is important to infer what motivated behaviour case by case. Some incidents might be characterised as misbehaviour-related, but more commonly it could be inferred a victim was motivated by program goals, which is to say misjudgement rather than misbehaviour.

Deaths can occur in roped climbing but of the deaths considered above none were due to belay failures and many were not directly associated with roped climbing or abseiling. The pattern of falls illustrates what is true of many OEE tragedies, which is that hazards in an *environment* can be a more important consideration than potentially hazardous *activities*. Many deaths have occurred in down time or around the edges of organised activity. Deaths during actual roped activity have mostly been from falling rocks, not falls, which I do not consider in this chapter.

Not all deaths were adolescent males. Two deaths were adolescent females, both, under direct supervision, attempting to do what their young male instructor had directed. There were 3 instructor deaths, all male. Two involved circumstances where an adult attempted, un-roped, what would have been safer roped.

Surf lifesaving provides a useful benchmark when thinking about what fatality prevention might require in different environments. Surf life guarding on a patrolled beach is almost 100% effective in preventing deaths (e.g. Hartmann, 2006). In addition to general knowledge of surf safety and rescue, effective life guarding requires knowledge of the fixed hazards at a particular beach, knowledge of ephemeral or periodic hazards on the day (Short & Brander, 2006), and ultimately expert intuition that can recognise when a particular individual is at risk. Most individuals on a high energy beach most of the time are not at imminent risk of drowning, but one individual in the wrong place at the wrong time could be at very high risk. That is why the details of fatal incident cases are important, not just broader epidemiological factors. Fatality prevention around steep ground also requires local knowledge and specific supervision, informed by an understanding, derived from studying incident reports, of how falls occur. Falls are mainly associated with adolescent males around steep ground, but when that circumstance occurs there is not usually a death. Prevention requires a deeper dive into the details of past cases.

Deaths on ski slopes further illustrate differences between everyday safety management and fatality prevention. Those who teach on ski slopes learn that most injuries are to extremities, attributable to skill deficiencies. A capable instructor reduces injuries by grading exercises and choosing slopes that enable a learner to remain in control on progressively more difficult terrain (Brookes & Holmes, 2014). Fatal OEE related incidents on ski slopes have almost all been as the result of collision with a fixed object, usually a tree. Both males and females have died in similar numbers. Some victims wore helmets. Some victims were novices, but generally fatal collisions involved skiers or boarders with sufficient skill to move on steeper slopes at higher speeds. The distinct nature of ski slope fatal incidents directs attention to the presence – or absence – of collision hazards, and to managing speed in locations where potential collisions are unavoidable. These are not necessarily simple requirements, and do not really overlap with what is required for everyday competent supervision of groups on ski slopes.

## 25.7 Falling Trees and Branches – A Grey Area?

Each of the several trillion trees on the planet will fall to the ground eventually. There are trees in urban areas, on school grounds, and along roadsides. There is some risk in the vicinity of trees even if trees and branches appear sound and the weather is fine. Because not every tree related incident can be prevented, those who take youths into treed areas have to decide which prevention measures are reasonable. There could be shades of grey in deciding what is reasonable.

Figure 25.1 documents OEE related Australian deaths due to falling trees or branches. Only two incidents did not involve either victims in a tent, or severe weather. The incidents point to fatality prevention focussed on assessing tree safety at campsites and other locations where groups linger, and on limiting exposure to trees in weather which increases the risk of trees or branches falling.

Tree safety requires some expertise in assessing individual trees and knowledge of where specific tree hazards – and potential refuges – are located. If weather conditions, in particular wind gusts and rain or snow loads on canopies, have increased the likelihood of branches or trees coming down an OEE professional has to evaluate the safety of nearby locations compared to the safety of any exit route. Tree safety introduces considerations which might be otherwise unrelated to successfully planning and running an OEE program, reinforcing the point that fatality prevention has its own distinct, demanding requirements.

A tree or branch might fail due to hidden weaknesses or disease which an ordinary observer might not detect, but there are also important indicators of failure which an OEE professional could become more expert at recognising. Trees and branches fall frequently in timbered country and a careful observer of fallen timber can infer how failures occurred. Trees fall under gravity and by observing lean observers can discern where a tree will fall, if not when. Trees or branches could fall during a canoeing trip, a fishing trip, or a climbing trip – an OEE professional might have expertise in those activities and know little of tree safety. As in other examples, fatality prevention has its own knowledge base and requires dedicated activity.

## 25.8 Floods in Gorges

On February 10 2020 ten junior high school girls died when a group of 250 students accompanied by four scoutmasters on an adventure hike in Sempor Valley, near Yogyakarta on the Indonesian island of Java, were caught by a flood. Reportedly local residents had warned the group not to proceed because of flooding upstream (Muryanto & Wahyuni, 2020). From available reports some prevention lessons can be outlined – the importance of knowing if any part of the planned route would be unsafe in a flood, and of prior research – in particular understanding flood severity even if floods are rare, how the catchment responds to rainfall or dam releases, and whether there is significant water going into the catchment during the planned trip.

Incident	Deaths	Date	Location	Institution	Brief description
Steavenson Falls 1968	M19 M18 F15 F13	9/1 1968	Steavenson Falls, Marysville, VIC	Group of seven teenagers	Party of 7 teenagers bushwalking on well-used track on steep slope. Top of Mountain Ash snapped off (no wind) 12 metres up. Broken section, 1 metre in diameter, broke on impact and rolled down the hill, killing 4 and injuring 3.
Two Scouts Track 1975	M16 M16	19/9 1975	Towimbuk State Forest, Bunyip, VIC	Scouts	Group of 6 Venturer Scouts bushwalking (Armstrong 500 competition). Light wind. Tree (23 metres 2.2 metres girth) fell across a tent, killed both occupants.
Meander Falls 1993	M17 M38*	17/8/1993	Meander Falls TAS	Hellyer College	5 students, 2 teachers, bushwalk in forest. Severe weather, very high winds. Tree snapped at base, fatally injuring 1 student 1 teacher. Remaining teacher injured, students went for help.
Rowallan 1998	M12	11/9 1998	Rowallan Camp, Riddells Creek, VIC	Scouts	7 Scouts asleep in tents (150 at camp). 3 metre Stringybark branch fell on tent, 1 killed, 1 injured (broken leg).
Crosslands Reserve 2001	F15 F15	3/12 2001	Crosslands Reserve, Hornsby Heights NSW	William Clarke College	10 adults, 39 students. Camping, severe storm. 15 metre branch fell from 5 metres onto tent. 2 occupants killed, 2 survived. D of E expedition. Unclear if adults present at the time.

Fig. 25.1 OEE related deaths in Australia from falling trees or branches. (Brookes, 2007)

Wombeyan 2005	F16	2/2/2005	Wombeyan Caves area, 15km west of Mittagong, NSW	Queenwood (Sydney) (Wombaroo Adventure Centre)	Wilderness component of whole school camp. 16- year-old leading 15 year- 8 girls, supervised by teacher and 1 camp staff. Severe storm, large tree fell on tent, 1 killed, 1 survived.
McKillops Bridge 2005	F16	31/8/2005	McKillops Bridge, VIC	Toorak College/The Outdoor Education Group	12 students, with staff (? #) on first night of rafting trip. Camped in forest camping ground. Severe weather, very high winds, tree branch fell on tent around 2.00 am, killing one, one uninjured.

Fig. 25.1 (continued)

In the case of imminent floods prevention requires that a trip not proceed, further underlying that fatality prevention can require unwelcome decisions that disrupt or cancel a program.

Research and observation are part of fatality prevention. Rivers exhibit evidence of past floods and their power, and observation can evaluate locations where a flood could not be escaped. It is safer to make those observations prior to any trip with dependent youths. Research is also part of fatality prevention. Any trip into a river gorge requires definite information about forecast coincident rain or releases in the catchment, and knowledge of how the valley floods, either from monitoring or from local residents. A leader could visit a river dozens of times over many years and consider herself or himself highly experienced yet not have seen the kind of severe flood that occurs infrequently and lasts only hours.

For the lay person the Sempor tragedy might seem to be a rare, one-off event, but while such events are rare there is a pattern. On October 25 2018 twenty one people died, including 13 students from a party of 37 students and seven teachers visiting hot springs near the Dead Sea, Jordan, when swept away by a flood (Associated Press, 2018). On April 26 2018 ten students of a party of 25 died when swept away by a flood while hiking in the Tzafit Creek, in the Dead Sea Valley, Israel (TOI Staff, 2019).

I previously found ten similar incidents internationally, searching for English language reports (Brookes, 2018). For example, in 2008 six students and a teacher died in the Mangetopo Gorge, New Zealand in a flood. Thirteen died, some children, on the Storms River in South Africa in 2000. Twenty-one died in the Saxeten Gorge, Switzerland, in 1999. The record of such incidents reinforces that competence in normal operations is not evidence of sound fatality prevention, and that prevention requires knowledge of past incidents, detailed knowledge of local circumstances, and must be an overriding priority. Well before tragedies in Indonesia,

Jordan, and Israel, it was known that in the case of flood risk, decision makers have to know when to call off or postpone a planned excursion, however long-planned and however inconvenient.

## 25.9 Fatality Prevention and the OEE Profession

“Please make sure my child comes back alive” is a tacit contract between every parent and OEE professionals who undertake to care for a young person in the outdoors. It is perhaps the one thing that unites every OEE excursion around the globe. Fatality prevention knowledge is derived from past incidents and honours a promise made after nearly every tragedy to “never let this happen again”.

For those who teach or train outdoor educators, design courses, develop programs, manage operations, or work in the outdoors caring for young people, the implications of a careful review of fatality prevention measures will range from reassurance that necessary measures are already in place to a weighty realisation that a program or component must be discontinued or urgently remedied. Either way the necessity for continuous review of fatality prevention is part and parcel of the social licence for OEE. For those who work in any facet of OEE, developing expertise in fatality prevention commensurate with their role is non-negotiable.

### Reflective Questions

1. Search online for reports of incidents discussed above at the Sempor River Indonesia, the Dead Sea valley Jordan, and the Tzafit Creek Israel. Were you able to find detailed reports? What could the OEE field do to help share lessons from past tragedies?
2. Use Google New Zealand to find reports on the death of Catherine Peters on a bridge swing in 2009. How would you recognise situations where human error could result in a death, and how would you protect against human error in such situations?
3. How would you apply knowledge of past incidents to planning and reconnaissance for a future OEE trip?
4. If you were responsible for training future OEE professionals, or for maintaining the expertise of OEE employers, how would you make use of fatality case studies? What would a fatality prevention curriculum look like?
5. How can you determine if your knowledge of OEE fatality prevention is sufficient?
6. Are there things the OEE profession should do to improve fatality prevention across the board?

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# Chapter 26

## Place-Based Fatality Prevention in Action



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### 26.1 Introduction

Safety is a critical component of outdoor environmental education (OEE) practice. In this chapter we reflect on the experience of working with a fatality prevention (FP) approach to safety in a higher education OEE programme. A FP approach shifts the focus of safety in OEE from limiting accidents via risk management, to holding fatality prevention at the centre of decision-making. Each of the authors have previously worked in school-based outdoor education programmes that employed primarily risk management approaches and through this chapter we highlight some key differences in practice.

Risk management approaches to safety are widely employed in outdoor educational contexts (Priest & Gass, 2017) and consider risks and hazards in terms of a likelihood versus consequence probability framework (Haddock, 2004). Such approaches bring with them many advantages, not least of which is the ability for educators to systematically identify, evaluate and document risks and hazards. However, what also comes with such understandings is a way of thinking about safety in relation to outdoor experiences that addresses the act of *weighing up* decisions. In other words, it highlights the idea of probability (rather than possibility). A fatality prevention approach (Brookes, 2018) questions and critically examines the taken-for-granted primacy of risk management approaches to preventing fatalities in OEE because they inherently focus on balancing risk and consequence, offsetting losses and accepting control measures. As Brookes (2011) highlights in

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relation to fatal incidents in OEE, “the burden of loss is absolute and cannot be compensated for or offset against a gain elsewhere” (p. 20).

FP rethinks a key understanding of safety programmes by asserting that where there exists the possibility of a fatality in OEE, however remote, that the magnitude of this consequence is so great that the (un)likelihood can never outweigh the priority that must be attributed to preventing that fatality. In other words, “while the public might accept bumps, scrapes, discomfort or burnt toast in exchange for presumed benefits of outdoor education, preventable death is another matter” (Brookes, 2011, p. 3). Such a change in thinking, once accepted, prioritises fatality prevention over all other forms of accident prevention and as such fundamentally changes the way we think and make decisions in OEE practice.

In line with the idea of threshold concepts (Thomas et al., 2019), fatality prevention adds to an understanding of safety by outlining a concept which is troublesome, transformative and irreversible (Meyer & Land, 2005). It critically changes ways of thinking and being in the outdoors that provide a threshold, or limen, from which is difficult to step back over. FP is described in depth in other articles and chapters (see for example, Brookes, 2011, 2015, 2018); however, what we highlight in this chapter are foundational aspects of FP that have changed the way we act in practice.

Working with a FP approach changes the way we think and act – personally and at a programme level. By accepting the underlying concept of FP, it fundamentally changes the way we address not only safety, but also programme design, staffing, curriculum and pedagogy – these things become inseparable. In this chapter we describe our experiences around three key ideas that guide our actions; (1) determination to enact fatality prevention, (2) understanding previous fatality incidents, and (3) environment and place-based knowledge.

## 26.2 Determination to Enact Fatality Prevention

Determination asserts a firmness of purpose, but also suggests coming to an understanding based upon considered research. In accepting the premise of FP, decisions and actions taken must exhibit strict aversion to fatalities rather than weighing risks against benefits or expedience. This might seem obvious in hindsight or even based on the phrase “strict aversion to fatality” – after all, who would not have a strict aversion to fatalities? However, actions do not always provide evidence of such aversion.

Strict aversion to OE fatal incidents is not simply a matter of good intentions. It requires knowledge derived from counterfactual analysis of past tragedies. It is enacted, it can be observed, and it can be explained. It does not involve avoidance of all risks, only deadly risks. (Brookes, 2018, p.22)

Implementing FP is not always as simple as it might seem, and for many of the authors the change represented not only a rethinking of the underlying foundations of program safety, design and leadership in the field; but, also of educational

purposes. Adopting a FP approach goes to the heart of one's way of being in the outdoors.

### **26.2.1 Personal Determination**

There exists, in adopting a FP approach, an affective level of responsibility that each of the authors feels impacts their lived experience of decision-making, when compared to a risk management approach. In OEE, the educator in the field is key to ensuring safety because “the leader may be the only person in a position to recognise, assess and act on a safety-critical situation” (North & Brookes, 2017, p.195). This has particular implications in the field for FP. Consider how a leader might choose a campsite, for example, during a 3-day overnight walk with a group of high-school students. As with many journeys we may have a number of planned campsites or alternative options. There is a lot to think about when making such a choice – the likely weather and protection offered by the campsite, how much further our participants are able to travel, and which campsite would serve the aims of the program best. However, by adopting a FP approach, we notice subtle differences. There is less of an inclination to weigh up options surrounding campsites for a multitude of competing options. Rather, at the forefront of one's mind is the concept of fatality prevention; so, the question might be ‘what do we know are the possibilities (rather than probabilities) for a fatality in this context?’

For a school group in a local south-east Australian context, for example, this could include rocky outcrops/steep ground (Brookes, 2018, pp. 129–140), tree/branch fall (Brookes, 2007), lightning strikes (Brookes, 2018, pp. 175–179) and associated weather events. Such understandings of fatality possibilities are derived from patterned knowledge of previous incidents (often through case-based learning). Yet to understand how knowledge of previous fatality incidents might be critical at any moment in time we must also have the environmental and place-based knowledge to contextualize these understandings. The educator in the field, then, is critical – there is no-one better placed (or able) to do this. Thus, an affective level of responsibility is invoked and, necessarily, a determination to act.

This apparent felt responsibility appears, at least in part, related to an unnerving feeling that we cannot primarily rely on external (pre)planning or information. Leading any OEE programme involves paying careful attention to the participants, weather and environmental concerns; however, FP does so with an overlay of the knowledge garnered from previous case-studies and asserts that the determination of the leader in the field to synthesise previous fatal incident knowledge, make safe decisions and enact such decisions is paramount. In this way, there is a kind of *thinking with* FP that necessarily involves a place-based knowledge, flexibility and determination to act.

### **26.2.2 *Institutional Determination***

We have found, also, that the determination for staff to continuously enact a strict aversion to fatalities, can be reinforced through key institutional commitments. As an example, we highlight the idea of staff meetings that include a standing safety agenda item – and that such meetings can convey a distinctive tone. An open, no-blame and transparent attitude to safety and accident prevention can provide an enhanced level of shared determination to enact FP. We have found that discussion of safety incidents in this transparent context enables an overlay of FP to be demonstrably applied by experienced staff members, provide support to change programs (or even not run programs), and support staff to continuously hold FP at the forefront of their thinking. In addition, institutional determination can be evidenced via valuing the decision-making importance of educators in the field and hiring staff based on FP fundamentals and support for place-based knowledge.

## **26.3 Understanding Previous Fatality Incidents**

Researching past incidents and cases of fatalities is critical for educators seeking to implement a FP approach. Studying past cases is important because “OE fatalities exhibit patterns [and] form tacitly recognised gestalts” (Brookes, 2018, p. 18) that professionals can use to inform how they might best prevent comparable incidents in their own contexts. It involves more than a determination to avoid fatality prevention, it involves specific knowledge of past incidents. We offer two examples of case-based learning.

### **26.3.1 *Staff Engagement with Case-Based Learning***

Most outdoor professionals do not have direct experience of dealing with an OEE fatality and, therefore, cannot rely on accumulated personal experience to understand fatalities in their work. Instead there is a need to turn to “distilled wisdom from past tragedies” (Brookes, 2018, p. 15) to inform practice. This necessarily involves outdoor professionals reviewing examples of previous fatalities and serious incidents in similar contexts to those in which they work. As an example, one of the authors works in open waters contexts (lakes, estuaries and offshore locations) and therefore spends time actively reviewing and understanding cases in relation to (but not limited to) open water fatalities. In undertaking a considered review of similar contexts recognisable patterns are derived. Such patterns in the context of open water fatalities include a lack of understanding of the following: impact of severe

weather (ie wind strength and direction); lack of knowledge of the specific body of water and surrounding environs; an acceptance of a risk/adventure foci; inflexibility regarding route; lack of communication technology and cold water immersion. Once these patterns have been determined, staff can consider how to apply place specific responses to these learnings.

Many understandings derived from open water fatality cases are clear, such as the now legalised and broadly accepted requirement for mandated use of personal flotation devices (Brooks, 2014; Quan, 2014), the upkeep and maintenance of equipment, the use of satellite devices and/or cellular phones (SPOT devices, GPS, Personal Locator Beacons) and developing a deeper understanding of weather. Yet there are just as important behavioural understandings derived from cases. For example, previous fatality cases highlight a causal factor of continuing to cling to a planned finishing point, situated across open water, even when a severe cold front or strong wind is forecast. This type of destination orientation appears as an important factor. The key assertion here, though, is that decisions are based on understanding patterns of previous fatal incidents – and this requires time and effort to study those cases. Studying previous fatalities can offer clarity to these moments for a staff member once they have ‘worn the shoes’ of those involved in the case studies and understood their situation, and the pressures they faced, in making their decisions.

### ***26.3.2 Student Engagement with Case-Based Learning***

As well as actively engaging with cases to inform personal practice, case-based learning can be extended to higher education curriculum. In the case of the authors’ institution students enrolled in an OEE degree are scaffolded through a FP approach to safety via specific curriculum and pedagogy. During their studies students are familiarised with the FP approach and, in particular, study specific cases (including coronial inquests) of previous of fatal incidents relevant to specific environments (such as open water, moving water and alpine environments) to understand resonate patterns (see for example, Brookes, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). In addition, cases relating to general environmental circumstances (such as floods, lightning and severe weather) are studied and evidenced through the curriculum. This approach builds a scaffold of fatality prevention understanding for students as they become leaders and educators for children and young adults.

At the university where the authors work, OEE students in third year are tasked with leading school students, and are required to develop a teaching and safety plan that refers to relevant fatality case studies for the particular places and environments in which they are teaching. For example, due to the specific nature of the places that students teach (a local State Park), they often highlight fatality case study patterns centred on cliff falls, falling tree/branches and environmental conditions. Such an approach is scaffolded through a subject in which students (individually or in small

groups) engage with relevant cases, and then convey learnings to their peers through a class presentation. This has proved to be a highly engaging strategy. Patterns derived from these case studies and subsequent discussions are then used to focus on fatality prevention within teaching and safety plans.

In this way students come to understand that the patterned behaviour of tree/branch fall fatalities, for example, can centre on severe weather (wind and/or extended soaking rain), tree type, fire/rot damage and choosing an unsafe campsite (Brookes, 2007, 2018). Such understandings are then combined with specific reconnaissance of areas to be travelled in to identify campsites that are less threatened by falling trees/branches and the design of walking routes that avoid identified unsafe treed areas (depending on weather conditions). In this way a case-based learning curriculum provides understandings that enable a FP approach to be effectively adopted.

Difficulties can arise when using case-based learning as a teaching method. For example, carefully examining circumstances and impacts of fatalities can provide distress for some students who have been involved in personal trauma or a recent fatality. We have found that key to positive case-based learning is a forewarning of content and safe options for individual students to take time out. However, for the most part students recognise the intention of offering a sound pathway to preventing such fatalities in the future. We find, also, in agreement with North and Brookes (2017), that some students can find it difficult to engage with case-based learning because of the abstractness and distance that cases or coronial findings can involve. North and Brookes suggests using a narrative style (see also, Ricketts et al., 2010) to explore cases that generate effective learning whereby students place themselves in a series of fatality events (i.e. standing in another person's shoes). In reframing cases and/or coronial inquests as narratives, then, the aim is for "students to not simply analyse the incident in hindsight, but to view the accounts from the perspectives of the people involved at the time" (p. 191). The significant advantage of narrative case-based learning, to which we can attest, is that it allows individuals to imagine themselves in the place of the leaders experiencing these fatalities, which is a useful lens to accentuate FP.

## 26.4 Place-Based and Environment Knowledge

The third aspect of a FP approach considered by the authors is related to specific and nuanced environment and place-based knowledge. Decision makers must have sufficient knowledge and experience of particular locations and environmental conditions in which programmes are conducted to recognise not only potentially fatal hazards, but also how FP factors (derived from knowledge of past incidents) that come to bear at a particular moment in time. We highlight below three examples of place and environmental knowledge production.

### ***26.4.1 Reconnaissance Trips***

Reconnaissance trips enable staff and students alike to develop and maintain specific place-based knowledge. Developing such intimate/micro place-based knowledge allows for understandings about the effects of specific (localised) combinations of weather events, topography and eco-systems that is not possible to extrapolate from experiences in other places (or derived from universally accessible knowledge of similar environments). For example, through repeated, multi-season visits to a specific alpine location, one of the authors, along with other OEE staff, developed knowledge about a particular emergency campsite that would at first glance appear (on a map) to be directly in the path of the prevailing winds as it is funnelled up a deep gully from the lowlands. This campsite is, however, very well sheltered from these regular gale force winds by a localised combination of topography and tree density (the benefits of which are not immediately apparent even upon initial inspection), but rather needed to be learned over multiple visits in a range of conditions.

Students come to understand the importance of gaining and maintaining place-based knowledge through the inclusion of dedicated reconnaissance trips for their third-year teaching plans described in the previous section. During reconnaissance trips to the alpine location, for example, students observe, and record, specific snow surface hazards and combinations of conditions which may present dangers when leading school students. As noted by Brookes and Holmes (2014), safe supervision in winter alpine environments is dependent upon the supervisors having place-specific and up-to-date knowledge of the snow surface conditions (p. 38), framed with an understanding of how the weather, terrain, student cohorts and conditions contributed to previous alpine snow incidents (p. 37). In this way reconnaissance of particular places is critical:

Most snow sports injuries are linked to particular environmental situations. It is almost impossible to conceive that supervision could be optimal if supervisors are not familiar with the trails and slopes, or have not themselves checked for hazards informed by an understanding of snow sports accidents (Brookes & Holmes, 2014, p. 38).

Third year students, then, utilise familiarity with local conditions and place-based knowledge as the basis for their teaching and safety plans. We acknowledge that these reconnaissance trips require institutional support through the provision of resources and time, however, we highlight also their crucial role in enacting FP. Such support allows staff to ensure programs are delivered with a place-based FP approach.

## ***26.4.2 Implications for Programme Design***

Adopting a FP approach to safety also has potential implications for overall programme design. Whilst a risk management approach has subtle inferences in terms of prioritising weighing up probability that can align with programming ideas of adventure and/or uncertainty (see for example, Brown & Fraser, 2010), a FP prevention approach brings with it subtle prioritisations as well; for example, the requirement for specific place-based knowledge. We are not suggesting that risk management approaches and place-based programming cannot work together (they often do); rather, that a FP approach and developing place-based programmes within OEE can be intertwined in effective and empowering ways.

We have found that a FP approach enhances an understanding of OEE that is place-based, because a FP approach is founded on the known rather than the unknown (potentially in opposition to some taken-for-granted tenants of outdoor adventure education). If the educational aim of an outdoor program is to create challenge and uncertainty for the development of character, then this does potentially suggest weighing up risk through uncertainty and adventurous activities. But if we work with a FP approach to safety and a combined place-based understanding of OEE then this brings into question the accepted status quo of extant risk as a programming feature in outdoor education (Brown & Fraser, 2010; Priest & Gass, 2017).

Place-based FP prioritises multiple visits to the same (fewer) environment(s) over multiple seasons and years – over and above the selection of relatively unknown locations from an activity-focussed perspective. We highlight another example related to the alpine location described previously. Historically students visited multiple alpine locations across their course to develop skills and knowledge. However, when staff reviewed the programme and focussed on developing place-based knowledge it was decided to revisit a particular location multiple times across three consecutive years. This decision, which was partly influenced by climate change (for example, the reliability of snow in novice-friendly terrain and increased summer bushfires), also enabled students to build up place specific knowledge and experience during these experiences. More than that, it enabled place-based knowledge to be effectively extended in practice and reach; providing opportunities for further experiential curriculum and pedagogical understanding.

## ***26.4.3 Consideration of Weather and Environment Knowledge***

Weather is a known critical factor in fatality incident patterns, as Brookes (2015) asserts, “in 70 per cent of the catastrophic incidents I considered (other than bus, ferry or aircraft incidents) weather or related conditions, such as water temperature,



tides or snow conditions, were a critical factor, if not a cause” (p. 451). Such factors are often locally apparent (ie. flash flooding, thunderstorms and/or funnelled winds) and require both place specific knowledge and up-to-date access to weather forecasting. In this way safety and weather information management “must be transformed in the light of advances in weather forecasting, weather warnings and provision of information on weather-related conditions” (p. 451). Where once decisions had to be made without ready access to weather and environmental conditions, this is no longer the case. Given the critical nature of weather conditions for decision-making, we have found access to this information via mobile and/or satellite devices to be indispensable in the field.

We also note an increased need to respond pro-actively to broader environmental issues such as climate change. The extended and catastrophic Australian bushfire seasons, for example, over the previous decade have prompted a change of times during the year when we can safely operate extended or remote journeys. Recent changes in lightning safety protocols (Cooper & Holle, 2019; Mainwaring & Fricska, 2016; Roeder & Rockledge, 2014), as well, have meant a reconsideration of the way we might prepare for and enact in-field lightning safety. For example, during overnight field trips at a local State Park, schools involved in teaching activities with OEE pre-service teachers are now asked to ensure buses used to transport school students to the park remain on site, rather than returning to school (as had previously occurred). In this way, if a lighting event was imminent (based on up-to-date weather forecasts), students could walk to vehicle-accessible locations and shelter in buses; as Cooper and Holle (2019) suggest, “there are only two reliable places to be safe from lightning. One is inside a large substantially constructed building; the other is inside a fully enclosed metal-topped vehicle. These locations provide an effect similar to a Faraday cage” (p. 161). Such responses are driven by a strict aversion to fatalities and rely on not only planning but also having a leader in place for whom aversion of tragedy is a first priority and who has a sound knowledge of the actual potential (not likelihood) for a death in each situation.

Prioritising place-based and environmental knowledge can present challenges, including programme and budgetary prioritisation that can be difficult to achieve. Although we have found challenges in consistently promoting such requirements institutionally, we have also found great value in aligning educational purposes (i.e. place-based knowledge) with safety (in this case a FP approach). In addition, there is a layer of desired control around staffing – including advertising and hiring staff. We highlight that a long-term effective approach in line with FP is crucially aided by transparently available elements of FP within advertised position descriptions, coupled with the ability to achieve a level of control over staff selection for programs in specific places. The reality is that safety approaches, curriculum design, pedagogical approaches and staff selection operate as an integrated whole.

## 26.5 Conclusion

It can be difficult initially to see how enacting a threshold concept such as FP in OEE might impact across safety management, programme design and personal experience. We suggest the transformative nature of this undertaking is ultimately best understood through practice. A key determination of FP is to have a leader in place for whom aversion of tragedy is a first priority, and who has a sound knowledge of the actual potential (not likelihood) for a death in each situation. And that knowledge must be based on patterns derived from previous fatal incidents combined with environmental knowledge. FP relies on having supported staff in the field who base their decisions on a strict aversion to fatalities in a moment by moment way. Enacting a FP approach in OEE to be transformative, both professionally and personally. The process of enacting FP will vary depending on context, yet the critical nature of the task remains, to prevent fatalities in outdoor environments from occurring.

### Reflective Questions

1. In what ways does a FP approach to safety differ from a traditional risk management approach to safety?
2. What are the critical components required to enact a FP approach?
3. How can you access, and learn from, previous fatal incidents?
4. How might FP inform or enhance programme approaches in OEE?
5. How would a FP approach change your OEE practice – can you provide an example?

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# Chapter 27

## Systems Thinking Approaches to Safety in Outdoor Education



Tony Carden

### 27.1 Introduction

Managing safety in outdoor education means minimising the chance of unacceptable harm. Understanding what caused previous harmful incidents empowers outdoor educators to learn and adjust practices in ways that reduce the chance of such incidents recurring. All of this has been long understood and accepted in outdoor education. Despite this, accidents and fatalities continue to occur. In recent times, new methods have been applied to questions of what causes incidents. At first glance, causality can seem obvious and straightforward. However, on closer examination, causality is rarely as simple as it looks.

#### 27.1.1 What Is Systems Thinking?

Systems thinking is a paradigm that recognises complex systems and distinguishes them from simple systems. Systems thinking is informed by general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950) and complexity theory (Cilliers, 1998). Systems theory has evolved over the past century, driven initially by observations in the physical and life sciences, later evolving to shape thinking in some areas of social science. The key feature of the systems paradigm is that it is based on a holistic view of the world. Whereas earlier mechanistic views held that the world could be understood as simply the sum of its parts, systems thinking holds that the parts of a system can only be properly understood in the context of the whole system and through

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relationships, synergies, emergence, and change. This has important consequences for understanding causality.

### ***27.1.2 How Is Systems Thinking Different from Other, Earlier Paradigms?***

Societies and culture have become more complex over time. Our technologies, the ways we organise ourselves, and our understanding of the world around us have changed and grown over time. The scientific revolution sparked by scientists like Sir Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century, transformed the world. This revolution generated a new paradigm. Instead of explaining the world by reference to scripture and tradition, people could gain more accurate explanations by observation, hypothesis, experimentation, and verification (Newton, 1999). This scientific, rational process quickly gave rise to discoveries that transformed every aspect of human life. The central process driving these discoveries was reductionist analysis. By looking at things in ever finer detail, by breaking them down to see how their parts worked, great advances were made in science that gave rise to technologies that transformed life.

Scientific rationalism produced revolutions in transport, energy, communication, health and industrial production. These powerful outcomes entrenched the rational paradigm of reductionist analysis in thinkers of the time as the ultimate way of thinking. This view is encapsulated in the idea known as ‘Laplace’s Demon’. Proposed by the French scholar Pierre-Simon de Laplace (de Laplace et al., 1902), this thought experiment held that, if someone (e.g. a demon) knew the exact position and momentum of every particle in the universe at a given moment, they could extrapolate from this information every past and future state of the universe. This worldview is referred to as the mechanistic, clockwork, or deterministic paradigm. This set of pervasive and powerful ideas shaped the development of not only the technologies, but also the social institutions of the modern era, including economics, government, and education (e.g. Dierksmeier, 2016). Through these social features, the mechanistic paradigm powerfully shaped the way we think.

From the early decades of the twentieth century, gaps in the mechanistic paradigm began to appear. First in some areas of physics that dealt with very small systems (e.g. quantum mechanics) and very large systems (e.g. cosmology, fluid dynamics), researchers encountered observations that could not be explained by deterministic theories. As new explanations and theories emerged to explain these phenomena, they began to be applied more widely. Recognition grew that while the deterministic view explains many phenomena, it has limitations: not all systems in nature are mechanistic. Some of them defy explanation by reductionist analysis but can only be understood within the context of their whole. This recognition was the genesis of contemporary systems thinking.

## 27.2 Background

### 27.2.1 Systems Thinking in Safety Science

Safety science is concerned with finding and understanding the causes of adverse incidents and accidents and discovering ways to prevent them (Aven, 2014). Both aspects of this endeavour are quite tricky: how can we discover all of the causes of an event when both the event and all its causes happened in the past? Once we have decided what we think the causes were, what are the best ways to ensure that they don't cause another adverse incident or accident?

As Lundberg et al. (2009) pointed out, “what you look for is what you find” and “what you find is what you fix” (p. 1297). If we want to do the best we can to optimise safety, we need to use the best, most accurate models and methods available to support our thinking and thereby our observations, explanations, and interventions.

The history of safety science can be seen to have evolved through three distinct phases (Toft et al., 2012). This evolution has been informed by the development of general systems theory and complexity theory. These explanatory frameworks emerged in response to gaps that were observed in the prevailing and extremely successful Newtonian approach to science that had provided the extraordinary explanatory power that drove the scientific revolution.

The history of accident modelling and the development of models of accident causation are described by Toft et al. (2012) in three generations, as illustrated in Fig. 27.1.

In the first generation, accidents were thought to have single ‘root’ causes. These were represented by simple linear sequential models, such as Heinrich’s Domino model. In the second generation, accidents were seen to have multiple causes, including errors and violations by workers, and latent causes within the

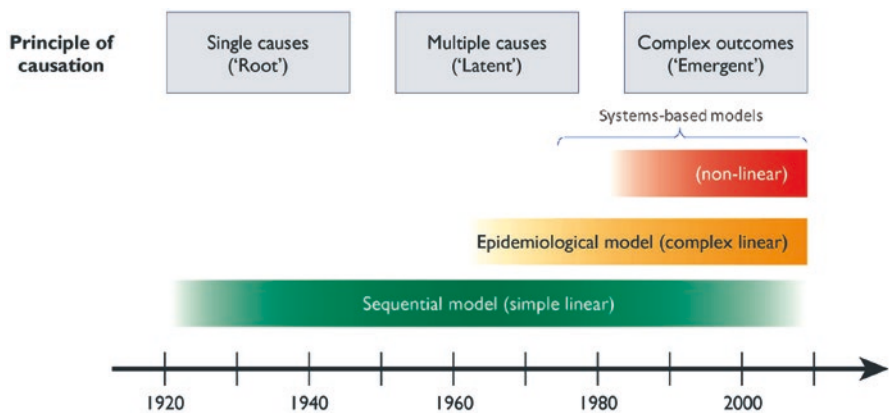


Fig. 27.1 Three generations of safety science and accident models. (Adapted from Hollnagel (2010) in Toft et al. (2012))

organisation, equipment, and environment. A widely used model from this generation is Reason's Swiss Cheese model. The third phase recognises the formal complexity of work systems and includes models that are designed to account for features of complex systems such as emergence, non-linearity, uncertainty, and unclear system boundaries. Some examples are discussed in the following sections.

Systems models can be seen to have emerged during the second generation. They include two prominent bases: the hierarchic and the ecological. Early systems-based models (e.g. Swiss Cheese, Fishbone, Bowtie) are hierarchic in structure. They reflect a view of the system as complicated but deterministic – if the position and momentum of all system elements were known, all past and future states could be reliably known (remember Laplace's Demon). Later systems-based models (e.g. AcciMap, STAMP, CWA, EAST, FRAM) are ecological in structure. They reflect a view that new phenomena can arise through unpredictable interactions between combinations of system elements, that elements can enter and leave the system, and that small causes can have large effects (and vice-versa).

Hierarchic systems models include fault tree analysis and causal tree analysis. As the names suggest, the models underlying these approaches resemble trees with branching nodes. These approaches are good at identifying local and linear causal relationships, including parallel causal chains. This approach is underpinned by the reductionist analysis paradigm in which the whole is understood as the sum of its parts.

Ecological systems models go beyond recognising immediate and linear causal relationships. Many of them are also capable of representing non-local and non-linear relationships. Although some of them do include hierarchic and tree-type representational elements, ecological systems models include network and web structures that can more accurately represent the systems they model. This approach is underpinned by the holistic synthesis paradigm which recognises the whole as greater than the sum of its parts and that new system properties and outcomes emerge through interactions between system elements.

Rasmussen's Risk Management Framework (RRMF; Rasmussen, 1997) is a systems-based ecological approach that accounts both for the hierarchic levels of social control that shape decisions and actions in works systems and the interactions between actors and other elements in systems of work. RRMF is the basis for a family of systems analysis methods. It is shown on the left side of Fig. 27.2, with AcciMap, an early and central model in that family shown on the right. Rasmussen was also the originator of a framework of methods, later refined by other scholars, called Cognitive Work Analysis (CWA; Vicente, 1999). Both AcciMap and CWA have been adapted for use in outdoor education.

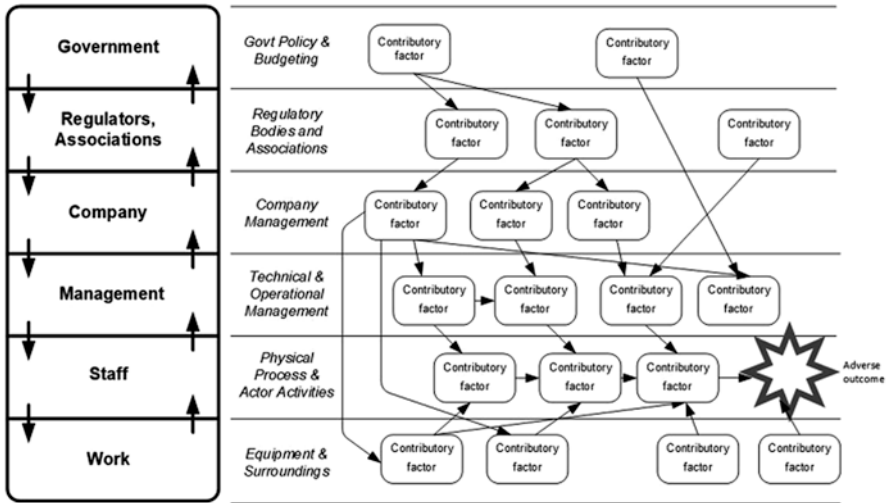


Fig. 27.2 Rasmussen’s Risk Management Framework alongside an AcciMap. (Adapted from Svedung & Rasmussen, 2002)

### 27.2.2 How Is Systems Thinking Relevant to Outdoor Education?

It has been demonstrated that even a relatively uncomplicated outdoor education experience exhibits the characteristics of a complex system (Carden et al., 2017). By comparing a simple outdoor trip with the characteristics of complex systems (Cilliers, 1998), this study showed that even the most logistically uncomplicated outdoor education experience exhibits the formal features of complex systems. These include non-linearity (small causes can have large effects and vice-versa); elements interact dynamically with many other elements; emergence (new features can emerge from interactions); open system boundaries (things leave and enter the system); and self-organisation (although starting with a set structure, the system dynamically organises itself in response to emerging events).

The nature of both the work of outdoor educators and the environments in which they work are well suited to systems thinking. The variability of outdoor education work contrasts with more routinized types of work, such as administrative or industrial work. Outdoor leaders tend and need to think holistically in order to adapt to constant variations in the people they lead, the weather, and the events that emerge as groups undertake outdoor activities. As Trotter et al. (2014) have shown, outdoor leaders are quite good at improvising and adapting to emerging conditions. This adaptiveness is a key characteristic of complex systems.



### ***27.2.3 Safety in Outdoor Education – History of Approaches***

Outdoor education has a strong history of approaches to understanding accident causes for the purpose of maintaining and improving safety. Paralleling the progression shown in Fig. 27.1, these methods have included Meyer's (1979) Principal Causes Model, Brackenreg's (1999) Accident Potential Model, Davidson's (2007) Root Cause Model, along with analytic inductive approaches (e.g. Brookes, 2011).

Many outdoor education activities have the unusual feature that their value relies on intentional engagement with risk. This is true for a range of led outdoor activities. It includes the thrill factor that is central to adventure-based recreation. It is the premise of Mortlock's iconic model of real and perceived risk that suggests that some degree of real risk is required for learning to occur in outdoor education. Both adventure therapy and corporate outdoor training can sometimes rely on engagement with risk to generate emotional states in participants that are conducive to cognitive and behavioural change. While some scholars have challenged the necessity or benefit of this reliance on risk (Brown & Fraser, 2009), risky activities remain central to many outdoor education experiences. This reliance on risk creates a significant tension with the legal requirement for employers to eliminate risk or reduce it as far as reasonably practicable.

### ***27.2.4 Risk Vs Benefit: What's an Acceptable Level of Safety in Outdoor Education?***

The tension between the need or desire for students to engage with risk and the legal requirement for outdoor educators to eliminate or minimise it, is not easily resolved. Orthodox approaches to risk management, including the International Standard for Risk Management (ISO 31000; International Organization for Standardization (ISO), 2018), advise managers of risk to balance risk of loss with expectation of gain. This calculation is included in the ISO 31000 approach in the establishment of risk tolerance through stakeholder consultation and is usually represented in a risk matrix, against which calculated or estimated risk ratings are compared in the risk assessment process. The idea is that a higher expected benefit of an activity can justify a higher risk of loss.

### ***27.2.5 The Law Doesn't Care About Benefit***

Despite the advice to balance risk of loss against expectation of gain in the risk management standard, legal frameworks usually do not include such calculations. Instead, work health and safety legislation tends to require employers to eliminate or reduce risk to workers and others affected by their undertakings 'as far as is

reasonably practicable' (e.g. State of Victoria, 2004). While there can be some leeway and subjectivity in views on what is 'reasonably practicable', such leeway tends to be confined in the law to considerations of cost, availability of means to reduce risk, and what the duty holder should reasonably know about the risk and how to minimise it.

## ***27.2.6 Constraints and Affordances***

Human factors scholars have drawn upon ecological psychology (Gibson, 1977) to incorporate the concepts of constraints and affordances into the modelling of socio-technical systems. Affordances are actions a person can take by interacting with objects and other actors in a system. Objects and actors in the outdoor education system include people, equipment, and the environment. Constraints are the factors that limit that action. For example, affordances of a river include paddling, swimming, drinking or drowning. Constraints may include rules, supervision, or flotation devices.

There are many constraints applied to ensure safety in outdoor education. Some of these are within the direct influence of leaders, such as decisions about where to camp, which route to take, when to intervene during an activity. Many, at times, are not, such as the choice of venue, state of equipment, accuracy of participant information, and organisational policies. These factors are often influenced and controlled by people and management processes at a distance in time and space from the actual activity. Further removed from the action but still exerting influence upon it, are regulatory and legal constraints such as guidelines, standards, and laws. These factors are all used, either directly or indirectly, to constrain or influence actions of students, outdoor educators and outdoor program managers in ways intended to maintain acceptable levels of safety.

### **27.2.6.1 The Ineffectiveness and Injustice of Over-Reliance on Frontline Workers for Safety**

Frontline workers have control over various aspects of the work system that supports safety. However, other aspects are sometimes beyond their control. These include elements of the work environment and task design. Furthermore, human capabilities and limitations mean that all people (unlike machines) will vary over time in their performance of tasks due to a wide range of variables. Work systems that account for these limitations are more resilient to unanticipated events. While frontline workers are always essential facilitators in safety, any safety system that relies on 100% consistent performance of tasks by people will occasionally fail. This means that not only were earlier approaches to safety and accident modelling less effective than systems-based approaches, they were also less just (Dekker & Breakey, 2016; Lundberg et al., 2009). Earlier approaches demanded of people

levels of performance that are unrealistic and punished people for failures that are normal. This recognition has led systems thinkers in safety to develop frameworks to incorporate principles of both resilience and justice into approaches to work safety (Dekker & Breakey, 2016).

### 27.3 Systems Thinking in Outdoor Education Safety

Salmon et al. (2010) compared systems-based accident modelling approaches to a root-cause-based approach that had previously been applied to outdoor education accidents (Davidson, 2007). This study confirmed that systems models offer richer representations of incidents than methods that were then prevalent to analyse and learn from outdoor education accidents and incidents. In particular, methods based on the work of Jens Rasmussen (e.g., Rasmussen, 1997) were found to be particularly useful. Further work by Salmon et al. (2012) compared several different systems-based modelling approaches. Figure 27.3 shows an AcciMap representation of an outdoor education accident from that study. Subsequent research applied systems-based methods to outdoor education accident analysis (Salmon et al., 2014), risk assessment (Dallat et al., 2018), the design of safety standards (Carden et al., 2019), learning from near-misses (Thoroman & Salmon, 2020), and identifying and strengthening risk controls (Goode et al., 2015). The following subsections describe some detail of several of these applications.

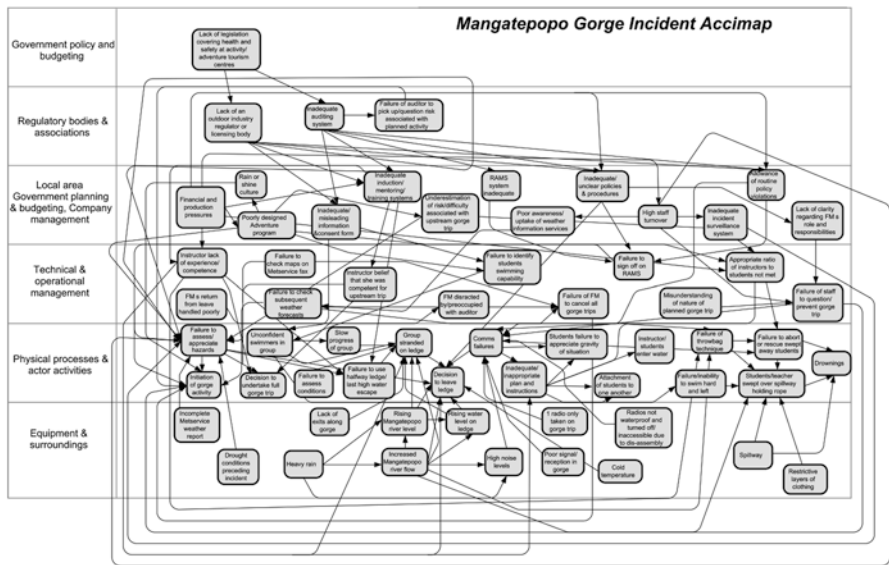


Fig. 27.3 An AcciMap representation of a multiple fatality LOA accident. (Salmon et al., 2012)

### **27.3.1 UPLoadS**

Understanding and Preventing Led Outdoor Accidents Data System (UPLoadS) is an incident reporting and learning system developed in Australia for the outdoors sector (Goode et al., 2015). Based on Rasmussen's AcciMap, UPLoadS allows outdoor education providers to record incidents, accidents and near-misses using an online system built on a taxonomy of causal factors developed through extensive consultation with outdoor educators. This taxonomy supports a consistent base set of questions to which incident reporters respond about causal factors and links between them. The UPLoadS system then generates an AcciMap representation of that incident, showing the network of causal factors across the 6 RRMF levels. Users of UPLoadS can choose to periodically share their data with a central administrator who aggregates it and reports back to the sector on accident trends, causes and learnings. UPLoadS offers several advantages over previous incident reporting and learning systems. These include a taxonomy of likely causal factors based on the collective learning from prior incidents, a consistent framework that can be used by all outdoor education providers, and the capacity to share learning about accident causes and controls across the whole sector.

### **27.3.2 NetHarms**

NetHarms (Dallat et al., 2018) is a new risk assessment method that combines systems models to support the systematic assessment of intrinsic and emergent risk. By combining task analysis with error prediction, risk assessors can methodically predict likely failures for all tasks in a system of work. Following this initial process, NetHarms supports the subsequent assessment of risks that emerge from the interaction of the newly identified risks with all other system tasks and identified risks. This process can be repeated an unlimited number of times. NetHarms offers several advantages over previous risk assessment methods. These include a methodical means to consider all work tasks, the capacity to predict emergent risks, and the necessity to include the people who do the actual work in the assessment of risk. Although initially developed in and for outdoor education risk assessment NetHarms can be applied in any domain.

### **27.3.3 Regulatory System Design**

Systems methods have been shown to be useful in the analysis and design of safety regulation systems for outdoor education. Work Domain Analysis (WDA), the first phase of Cognitive Work Analysis (CWA; Vicente, 1999), is a method that supports the analysis and design of work systems. WDA shows how objects in a system give

rise to processes that support the functions necessary for achieving the system's purposes. In addition, it shows how system values and priorities are met or can be met. WDA has been applied to several outdoor sector regulatory systems, producing insights and design recommendations for improving system efficiency and effectiveness (Carden et al., 2019). This application of systems thinking and methods to regulatory systems has introduced a new way of evaluating and supporting design for, not only outdoor education safety regulation, but all regulatory systems.

### **27.3.4 Program Design**

Beyond the application of systems thinking to outdoor education safety, researchers have applied systems methods to other aspects of outdoor education service provision, including program design, educational effectiveness, and the incorporation of new educational aims. For example, NetHarms has been applied to the assessment of cultural risk in outdoor education programs while WDA has been used to identify design features that support psychological wellbeing in school-based camps (Schuler et al., 2020).

## **27.4 Discussion**

Approaches to understanding and improving safety that primarily focus on the behaviour of workers and other people in the system lead to safety systems that primarily focus on controlling the behaviour of people. Even with the best training, skill and intentions, human performance naturally varies. Therefore, a safety system that relies on people to never make mistakes will fail. In contrast, systems that are designed with risk controls that account for predictable human limitations are more resilient to unanticipated events and change. Systems thinking provides ways to better and more accurately understand the whole system in which outdoor education happens, including the individual, social and technical elements of the system and how they interact. Systems thinking approaches empower outdoor education practitioners, managers, organisations, regulators and governments to design safer outdoor education systems and programs.

While systems thinking and methods have provided new insights and approaches to safety in outdoor education, there are a number of challenges to their wider application. Firstly, the notion of complexity can be overwhelming and may discourage some outdoor educators from embracing systems methods. Some of the methods described above can be complicated and require special expertise. This can lead to concerns that adoption of systems based safety may rely on external and potentially costly advice. These concerns could be addressed in a number of ways over time.

These could include integrating the teaching and learning of systems-based safety in outdoor educator training courses, sector-wide development of shared resources, and customised adaptation of systems methods. Secondly, the insight that the causes of safety and of accidents are shared across multiple levels of the system has the potential to encourage the blaming of others and avoidance of responsibility. This risk may be addressed in a range of ways, for example, by shared learning about how whole systems work and by ensuring that accountabilities in work systems are clear, understood, and agreed. Dekker and Breakey's (2016) Just Culture approaches offer in-depth ways of addressing these factors.

## 27.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the application of systems thinking and methods to a range of common functions that support outdoor education safety: accident analysis, risk assessment, risk mitigation, standards design and program design. In each case, these applications of systems thinking and methods have provided new and improved ways to support outdoor education safety. However, there is great potential for further application of the systems methods discussed here. Other systems methods that could be used and combined to improve the safety, scope and effectiveness of outdoor education programs include System Dynamics, Event Analysis of Systemic Teamwork (EAST), Functional Resonance Analysis Method (FRAM), and Agent Based Modelling (ABM). The potential for further application of systems thinking and methods to outdoor education service provision in support of, not only safety but also program design and delivery is extensive.

Systems thinking and methods can give analysts and practitioners alternative insights and, potentially, a more comprehensive picture of events than earlier approaches to safety. For designers, managers and leaders of outdoor education experiences, this wider scope of knowledge offers an improved capacity to understand outdoor education safety risks and how to mitigate them. Future application of systems thinking may prove to be a critically useful tool in helping outdoor education practitioners better achieve their aims of improving lives, environment and society.

### Reflective Questions

1. How does the systems thinking approach to outdoor education safety differ from other risk management approaches?
2. What advantages do you see in the systems thinking approach to outdoor education safety?
3. What limitations do you see in the systems thinking approach to outdoor education safety?
4. What features of the outdoor education work system could be better leveraged to improve safety?
5. How else could systems thinking be applied in outdoor education beyond safety?

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**Part VI**  
**Professional Practice**

# Chapter 28

## On Becoming a Reflective Practitioner



Morten Asfeldt and Paul Stonehouse

### 28.1 Introduction

The notion of experience and reflection as a critical process of an outdoor environmental educator's practice is not new. Outdoor environmental educators commonly point to the lack of experience and reflection in education as motivations for the emergence of modern Outdoor Environmental Education (OEE). For example, in the North American context, the ideas of Dewey (1933) are commonly used to demonstrate the need for both experience and reflection in creating meaningful learning experiences. More recently, Schön (1983) encouraged teachers<sup>1</sup> and other professionals to engage in regular reflective practice that examines their professional lives. However, as Tannebaum et al. (2013) point out, "reflection dates back millennia" (p. 242). Socrates, for example, claimed that an "unexamined life is not a life worth living" (Plato, trans., 2002, Apology 38a), connecting a personal reflective practice to a life well lived. Likewise, we believe that an unexamined practice is not worth practicing. Therefore, in this chapter we invite both emerging and experienced educators to consider their own reflective practice. To facilitate this process, we explain what reflective practice is, provide a rationale for why it is important, and present practical strategies for educators to enhance their reflective practice.

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<sup>1</sup>For convenience, we use the terms educator and teacher interchangeably within the paper. We intend these broad terms to include outdoor environmental educators, facilitators, instructors, and guides.

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## 28.2 What Is Reflective Practice?

Reflective practice is used by scholars and practitioners in many professions (e.g., Education, Nursing, Engineering, Business) to enhance conceptual understanding and practical skills. The origin of the term “reflective practitioner” is credited to Schön (1983), who identifies a gap between professional knowledge (i.e., theory) and real-world practice (i.e., experience). Schön’s work is largely influenced by Dewey (1933), an educational philosopher who believed quality reflection is a necessary element of meaningful learning. Both Schön (1983) and Dewey (1933) believe that the goal of reflection is to articulate what we know from experience; to enhance understanding of our actions and experience regardless of whether that knowing is congruent with current theory. For example, the educational theories and practical skills taught in university may not adequately equip a teacher for the experiences they face in the classroom or sufficiently train them to teach effectively in ever-changing outdoor environments. Therefore, one goal of reflective practice is to use theory to inform practice and to use practice to inform theory; or, to bridge the gap between knowledge acquired in university and real-world teaching experience in order to improve a practitioner’s professional effectiveness. Put simply, reflective practice is a form of professional development.

Central to Schön’s (1983) model of reflective practice are three key phrases: knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. Knowing-in-action describes the tacit knowledge that teachers use every day without much thought, but struggle to describe despite it being publicly observable. For example, an observer may notice a teacher listening carefully to a student’s question and responding in a nuanced manner that the teacher may not be aware of or be able to describe. Yet, the teacher knew in the moment what the student needed. Reflection-in-action is thinking about what we are doing while we are doing it. For example, an educator reflects-in-action when they ask themselves during a lesson if their methods are working and how they might adjust or adapt their methods in the moment to be most effective. Reflection-on-action refers to thinking back on our practice and trying to understand, assess, and learn how our knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action contributed to our success or failure. For instance, a teacher reflects-on-action when they contemplate a recent teaching experience. Thompson and Thompson (2018) suggest reflection-for-action as a missing element of Schön’s (1983) reflective practice process. Reflection-for-action involves planning and thinking prior to engaging in professional action. By way of illustration, when a teacher identifies learning objectives and plans a teaching strategy, they are reflecting-for-action.

We then have a three-phase reflective practice process: reflection-for-action; reflection-in-action; and reflection-on-action. Reflective practice is a repeating cycle where each phase informs the other. Ideally, as reflective practitioners, we regularly reflect in each of the three phases. However, the process can be entered at any point in the cycle and engaging in one of the phases is better than engaging in none. As you can see from the simple diagram (see Fig. 28.1), knowing-in-action is



Fig. 28.1 The reflective practice process

the tacit knowledge that practitioners bring to their reflective practice and that influences reflection in all the phases.

Reflective practice is about awareness, a mindfulness of sorts. Reflective practice might also be described as an open dialogue with yourself and your situation. Further, reflective practice might be viewed as a means of disrupting our assumptions and practices so that we might challenge our assumptions and improve our practice.

Expanding on Schön's (1983) seminal work, a number of authors have presented definitions of reflective practice (Dubé & Ducharme, 2015). These include well known educational thinkers such as Boud et al. (1985), Mezirow (1991) and others. Considering these definitions as well as those of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983), common elements include some form of reflective or contemplative activity that enhances our understanding of our professional practice and facilitates new awareness that shapes future practices. Based on these definitions, the current reflective practice literature, and our own experience as practitioner educators, we propose that central to being a reflective practitioner educator is the intentional, rigorous, and thoughtful "research" into your own practice. It is about contemplating and analyzing your teaching joys and struggles, successes and failures, what you know, what you think you know, and what you know you don't know. In short, becoming a reflective practitioner educator is to embark on a journey of improving our knowledge and teaching practice by blending our theoretical knowledge with our everyday professional experience.

### 28.3 Why Become a Reflective Practitioner?

Becoming a reflective practitioner is important because it is difficult to see beyond our own experience. Brookfield (1998, p. 197) likens us to prisoners trapped within our minds, able to see only through our own filters, assumptions, beliefs, and values.

These internal and at first imperceptible predilections act like screens haphazardly guiding some decisions while ruling others out (Larrivee, 2000, p. 299). As teachers, this screening process creates inconsistencies and oversights within our instruction, which may lead to problems and dilemmas that need solving (Dewey, 1933). By exercising reflection, we are better able to stand outside ourselves and see how our default preferences, perceptions, and actions positively shape—and sometimes distort or constrain—our teaching practice. For example, I might notice that a lesson I teach is repeatedly ineffective, students just don't get it (e.g., the j-stroke in a canoeing class). This concern sparks me to reflect on my own preferred means of learning technical skills. When I realize that I learn best through detailed auditory description, I begin to see a bias towards this instructional style which isolates my students who prefer other learning modalities.

While the above example illustrates how reflection can address practical challenges, reflection can also serve to illuminate far more consequential insights. Larrivee (2000) associates reflective practice with critical pedagogy, where reflection can unearth unexamined judgements, reveal privileged interpretations, and highlight entitled expectations. A *critically* reflective practice highlights the ethical implications and consequences inherent to teaching. Thus, a willingness to reflect critically on one's practice is then a moral commitment to bring justice and emancipatory thinking to the classroom, whether indoors or out (Goulet et al., 2016, p. 146). For example, how does the equipment necessary for the outdoor activities I choose make assumptions about the socio-economic status of my participants? How do the readings I select affect who is given voice, and thus power, within the field of OEE? Or, to what degree is a place-responsive pedagogy prioritized in my expedition planning?

Fundamentally, a reflective practice places thoughtful and integrity-filled action at the heart of teaching (Gillies, 2017, p. 26). It requires a sustained commitment to humility as the educator searches for ways to learn, grow, and improve their practice (Lawrence, 2011, p. 258). McClintock (2004, p. 393) combines these dual roles of searching and improving in the term “scholar practitioner,” summarizing reflective practice as an “ideal of professional excellence grounded in theory and research, informed by experiential knowledge, and motivated by personal values, political commitments, and ethical conduct.”

## **28.4 Challenges and Strategies to Becoming a Reflective Practitioner**

Becoming a reflective practitioner isn't easy. There are common challenges that might be encountered, but also strategies that can be employed.

### ***28.4.1 Seek Clarity and Understanding Regarding Reflective Practice***

Kinsella (2009) cautions that “reflective practice is in danger of becoming an empty, meaningless phrase, that at once means everything and nothing” (p. 5). Perhaps the greatest obstacle preventing reflective practice is a lack of understanding of what reflective practice is and why it is important. We hope that after reading this chapter, heeding these challenges and strategies, contemplating our reflective questions, and pursuing the suggested readings that you will feel well-informed and ready to begin (or continue) your journey as a reflective practitioner.

### ***28.4.2 Be Attentive to Organizational Culture***

It is much easier to engage in reflective practice in an organization and with peers that understand and value reflective practice (Hickman & Collins, 2014). Without this support, becoming a reflective practitioner can become a lonely and uninspiring process. If you face this barrier, we encourage you to gently introduce your organization and peers to the process and value of reflective practice while seeking other strategies outside the organization to deepen your development as a reflective practitioner.

### ***28.4.3 Work with (or as) Coaches, Mentors and Co-teachers***

Receiving (or giving) coaching, mentoring, and supervision are effective means to mature your reflective practice (Mann et al., 2009). There are many advantages to working with a trusted coach, mentor, or supervisor including someone: to help you develop a systematic and structured reflective practice plan; to assist you in seeing your experience from multiple points-of-view; and to support and encourage you in your reflective journey. Co-teaching is another form of reflective practice mentoring that can be very valuable. When co-teaching with someone you trust, you have a partner who you can collaborate with as you reflect-for-action, reflect-in-action, and reflect-on-action. Furthermore, you have two sources of knowing-in-action which brings multiple perspectives to one situation. In such situations, you open each other to new perspectives and new opportunities for disrupting your assumptions and practices. While the above examples of coaching, mentoring, and co-teaching assume others' contribution to your reflective practice, as an outdoor and environmental educator, you can similarly encourage reflective practice within your participants and learners.

#### ***28.4.4 Accept That Becoming a Reflective Practitioner Is a Learned Skill***

Even with the support of others, your progress as a reflective practitioner may feel slow. Be patient with yourself and remember that it is a new and learned skill. Not all people are naturally reflective and not all professions embrace reflection. Therefore, just as learning to play a new sport or musical instrument requires practice, so does becoming a reflective practitioner. Reflective practice is a conscious, deliberate process that may or may not be intuitive (Goulet et al., 2016). Therefore, we encourage you to accept the role of learner as you develop your reflective practice and embrace the uncomfortable and awkward moments that are a natural part of developing any new skill; it will take time and patience. Mann et al. (2009) note that the more effort we commit to reflection, the greater our learning will be.

#### ***28.4.5 Commit to the Craft of Reflective Practice***

Reflective practice requires significant effort! For, “effective teaching is much more than a compilation of skills and strategies. It is a deliberate philosophical and ethical code of conduct” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294). Reflective practitioners, then, often see their work as an extension of their values, and understand their role as teacher to be one infused with meaning, purpose and responsibility. This dedication might better be described as a vocation (literally, a calling) than a job. Without this deeper commitment to our practices, it is less likely that we will practice them reflectively. However, it is a good reminder that we “can’t be mindful or reflective about everything all the time” (Rogers, 2001, p. 52). Nevertheless, becoming a reflective practitioner requires the teacher’s full readiness and willingness to commit to the craft of teaching.

#### ***28.4.6 Devote Regular Time***

A commitment to becoming a reflective practitioner will require significant time. An effective reflective practice is one that is intentionally structured and systematic, deliberate and guided, and requires internal motivation to maintain (Goulet et al., 2016). Much like becoming physically fit, we get in shape by setting aside regular time for exercise and following a structured and systematic workout plan. Similarly, in order to develop your reflective practice, you must set aside regular time to engage in intentional, rigorous, and thoughtful reflection before, during, and after your professional practice. Although this can be particularly challenging in outdoor settings where an outdoor environmental educator is responsible for students

24 hours a day, even short periods during these busy spells, when coupled with devoted time before and after, can enable meaningful reflective practice. With that said, if you routinely struggle to find reflective space in the field, then you can assume your participants are struggling too. If this is the case, we suggest examining your course itinerary and curricular priorities in order to ensure a contemplative pace that affords the reflection that time spent in natural environments so often inspires.

### ***28.4.7 Be Alert to Selective Inattention***

Your time commitment will pay off as you identify areas of selective inattention within your practice. Schön (1983, p. 61) reminds us of the danger here: “if a practitioner becomes selectively inattentive to that which doesn’t fit their knowing-in-action, their work may become routine, causing disengagement, which could lead to boredom or burnout.” Schön goes on to say that it is the engagement in the reflective process that breathes life back into our practice. Therefore, becoming a reflective practitioner requires being willing to take risks and embrace the surprising and disruptive experience of teaching. For example, perhaps we hold personal beliefs about our own abilities or the efficacy of specific pedagogies that we are not willing to examine. By ignoring, or being selectively inattentive to difficult and challenging questions and situations, we risk limiting our growth and effectiveness as teachers.

### ***28.4.8 Seek Challenging and Novel Experiences***

As noted above, reflective practitioners must sometimes embrace risk. A number of scholars and researchers (Mann et al., 2009; Rogers, 2001) have identified new and differently challenging situations as occasions ripe for learning through reflective practice. For example, Rogers’s (2001) claims that “an event or situation beyond the individual’s typical experience” (p. 42) can be a trigger for reflection. Some suggestions for seeking challenging and novel experiences include moving to a new teaching location, teaching new groups of students (i.e., different ages; culturally different; economically different), teaching new topics, intentionally trying a new teaching method, observing other teachers in action, and participating in a teaching exchange with another country. There are many more possibilities. In short, taking risks in your teaching practice can be a rich source of new learning.



### ***28.4.9 Find Your Preferred Forms of Reflection***

Reflection can take many forms. We suggest you try a variety of forms of reflection to discover your preferences. Perhaps the most common form of reflective practice is the reflective journal (Moon, 2006). Without doubt, a reflective journal can be a very effective tool for developing your reflective practice. However, journaling is not for everyone. You might also try semi-structured small group discussion, facilitator lead discussion, pre and post experience role plays, critical incident reviews, case studies, peer support groups, computer simulations, mind-mapping and many more (Dubé & Ducharme, 2015; Mann et al., 2009; Thompson & Thompson, 2018). A mode of reflection that we have found helpful is reading contemplative and thought-provoking literature, such as those mentioned in the suggested readings below. All in all, we encourage you to use whatever form of reflection that works best for you and your situation. If one form is not working for you, try another until you find one that generates insight.

This section identified a number of strategies to aid you in your journey to becoming a reflective practitioner. The next section provides several specific methods you might use along the way.

## **28.5 “Model” Methods for Becoming a Reflective Practitioner**

For fear of implying that reflective practice involves a fixed or linear progression, we're reticent to suggest a model for becoming a reflective practitioner beyond our simplified diagram (see Fig. 28.1). Rather, in this section we present two methods, or frameworks, that you can use as you develop your reflective practice. When reflecting-for-action, we might wish to obtain greater awareness of the preferences and biases we bring to our teaching either globally or with regard to a particular lesson. Thus, Larrivee's (2000) four-level reflection on challenging beliefs and limiting assumptions and expectations may prove useful. Within each level, the practitioner explores the content relative to themselves. Level One examines philosophical topics like: our core beliefs about human nature, personal values, and ethical convictions. Level Two explores the dominant educational frameworks and principles that inform our teaching: for example, human developmental theory, learning theory, and sources of student motivation. Level Three connects the first two levels with daily practice: how might my reflective insights from Level One and Two enlighten how I approach today's lesson? Given the reflection that transpired in the previous three levels, Level Four makes informed decisions about how to strategically structure a learning experience. Larrivee (2000), p. 303) provides the following example from this process: Level 1: For the most part, each student is doing the best they can, given the complexity of their lives; Level 2: most human dysfunction stems from unmet childhood needs or traumatic life experience; Level

3: I will therefore refrain from judging and offer kindness should I meet with disappointments or inexplicable behavior in class today; Level 4: I will actively look for opportunities to offer trust and understanding within today's class.

Brookfield (1998) suggests another practice method using four different lenses. The first lens is Autobiography as a Learner of Practice, and it can be used in the reflection-for-action period: "analyzing our autobiographies as learners often helps explain to us those parts of our practice to which we feel strongly committed, but that seem unconnected to any particular pedagogic model or approach we have learned" (Brookfield, 1998, p. 198). By exploring our journey as a learner, we often discover that our convictions or instincts are unreflectively rooted in experiences where we were affirmed or demeaned as students. Autobiographical reflection helps us become more intentional teachers.

Brookfield's (1998) second lens, Our Learners' Eyes, straddles the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action periods. Here, we attempt to learn what our students' learning experiences were like. Near the end of class, Brookfield (1998) recommends administering a Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) to students. The CIQ contains five questions: i) At what moment were you most engaged as a learner this week? ii) Similarly, when were you most distanced as a learner? iii) What action, that anyone took this week, did you find most affirming or helpful? iv) Similarly, what action left you most confused or puzzled? v) What surprised you most about our classes this week? By reflecting on the students' answers after class, reflection-on-action, the CIQ alerts a teacher to potential problems, oversights, and misperceptions, while grounding future action in accurate information.

Brookfield's third lens, Our Colleagues' Experiences, may occur in the reflection-on-action period where we share our educational challenges, fears, and confusion with colleagues. By listening to our struggles, our colleagues act as "critical mirrors reflecting back to us images of our actions that often take us by surprise" (1998, p. 200). Brookfield's fourth and final lens, Theoretical Literature, could occur in either the reflection-for-action or reflection-on-action periods. Here, we read intentionally to address obstacles we presently face.

## 28.6 Reflective Practice in Action

As a final section to our chapter, we share a personal example of being reflective practitioners. Recently, the two of us were leading a 7-day snowshoe expedition in Canada. Morten had led this trip many times, but it was Paul's first time on this trip. On the third morning, we were outside the tent discussing plans for the present and remaining days of the expedition. The morning was very cold (-43C) and we engaged in a combination of reflecting-in-action (discussing what was presently happening) and reflecting-for-action (looking ahead to the next four days). Paul's fresh perspective on the trip prompted him to ask Morten why he had planned a 7-day outing? Further, the extreme cold pushed both of us to ask how the challenging conditions might impact our planned expedition and the achievement of our learning

objectives. While we didn't come to a final answer on whether 7-days was the ideal length for this trip, we had a thoughtful discussion, which examined the assumptions that Morten had used when designing the experience. This discussion naturally led to a conversation about the values of risk and challenge in education. The discussion also led us to explore our knowing-in-action (that tacit knowledge we both hold based on years of OEE experience), which led to a decision to use that third day as a layover day, rather than to pack-up camp for a third straight day in such cold temperatures. The day's plans we developed that morning resulted in meaningful and purposeful learning for students and shaped how we used the remaining 4 days. After finishing the trip, we devoted time to sitting with the expedition map and reviewing the route and daily activities (reflection-on-action) and thinking ahead to the next offering of this course (reflection-for-action). In the end, we decided to continue with the 7-day format.

## 28.7 Summary

In this chapter we set out to explain what reflective practice is, provide a rationale for why it is important, and present practical strategies for outdoor environmental educators to enhance their reflective practices. Reflective practice is a form of professional development that requires engaging in the three phased process of reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action while being attentive to our knowing-in-action. By becoming a reflective practitioner, we are able to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to see beyond our own experience, knowledge, and assumptions which shape our teaching. In order to develop as reflective practitioners, we must be aware of common challenges and strategies in order to develop an intentional and structured method for reflection. Just as Socrates claimed the “unexamined life is not a life worth living” (Plato, trans., 2002, Apology 38a), so we believe that an unexamined practice is not worth practicing. Becoming a reflective practitioner can be a powerful means of examining our teaching practice, which in turn can lead to increased student learning and a great deal of personal and professional satisfaction. Finally, reflective practice “is not only a way of approaching teaching—it is a way of life” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 306).

### Reflective Questions

1. Imagine you are having dinner with friends. One of them, knowing your interest to OEE, mentions an interview they recently heard about an outdoor educator becoming a reflective practitioner. Someone else at the dinner table asks, “What’s a reflective practitioner?” How would you answer?
2. As an outdoor environmental educator, how do you believe that students learn best? What experience or philosophy of learning has shaped this belief? When was the last time that you challenged and examined those beliefs?

3. Do you have a systematic and structured process for becoming a reflective practitioner? If so, describe it. If not, begin to develop a process that you believe will get you started on your journey towards becoming a reflective practitioner.
4. Can you identify a peer or colleague who, through patient listening and thoughtful questions, might serve as a “critical mirror” (see Brookfield, 1998) and thereby assist you in reflecting on your role as an educator? If so, what questions or activities might you prepare for your first meeting with them? If not, how can you find such a peer or colleague?
5. We recommend you consider creating a reflective practice post-trip/teaching journal. Making entries could become a ritual that helps you transition from the field to conventional rhythms. Once the gear is neatly stowed and you’ve had a chance to shower, find some time to reflect-on-action. What questions might you want to ask yourself and respond to in your post-trip journal?

### Recommended Further Reading

- Aurelius, M. (2003). *Meditations* (G. Hays, Trans.). New York: Modern Library. (Emperor Aurelius is often considered a model reflective practitioner. See: <http://seinfeld.co/library/meditations.pdf> for a free digital copy).
- Goulet, M., Larue, C., & Alderson, M. (2016). Reflective practice: A comparative dimensional analysis of the concept in nursing and education studies. *Nursing Forum* 51(2), 139–150. (A clear and comprehensive survey of the Reflective Practice literature).
- Heider, J. (1986). *The Tao of leadership: Lao Tzu’s Tao teaching adapted for a new age*. New York, NY: Bantam Books. (This is a great source of thoughtful and challenging short readings to inspire reflection).
- Thompson, S. & Thompson, N. (2018). *The critically reflective practitioner* (2nd. ed.). London, UK: Palgrave. (A practical guide to developing reflective practice).

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# Chapter 29

## Outdoor Environmental Education Research and Reflective Practice



Heather Prince

In many university outdoor environmental education (OEE) programmes, students' first encounters with research may well be during the process of completing assignments. Integrating evidence from published research usually is a mandatory part of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and inescapable for the award of a degree. Moreover, many degrees also comprise a weighted research project, dissertation or thesis with the expectation that students engage in the process as researchers themselves. The process of designing a research project to explore in depth a new or existing area of interest is an exciting opportunity with the potential to create new knowledge, read widely about the chosen area, evaluate critically sources of information and previous research, and subject the final output to scrutiny (Prince & Mallabon, 2020). In retrospect, outdoor graduates usually reflect positively on their research, particularly where it is connected to, and has meaning for, practice.

This chapter examines the importance of research in outdoor practice, the differences between reflective and reflexive practice, the ways in which research informs reflective practice and *vice versa*. It includes illustrations of research, both conceptual and empirical, to demonstrate its integration in the practice of a professional outdoor environmental educator.

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## 29.1 The Importance of Research in Outdoor Practice

Fiennes et al. (2015), examining the evidence base for the effectiveness of outdoor learning found that, 'Because the existing research is spread quite thinly, few questions about effectiveness are yet answered reliably' (p. 8). Other researchers concur with this claim of a limited research base in OEE; it is still an embryonic subject with wide scope. The number of researchers and outputs has grown, particularly since 2000 as more journals and books have been published (Humberstone et al., 2016; Prince et al., 2018). There is not only the need for an evidence base to demonstrate outcomes and the effectiveness of outdoor interventions, but also for sharing and using findings in practice, and for policy review and development. Organisations engaged in OEE increasingly are finding that they need such evidence for funders and stakeholders, to justify, maintain or enhance their programmes.

## 29.2 Reflective Practice, Reflection, Reflexivity: What's the Difference?

The term 'reflective practice' is practice by which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge, behaviours, values and impact and learn from their experience (Schön, 1983; see Asfeldt & Stonehouse, Chap. 28, this volume). That outdoor educators routinely engage in reflective practice is identified as one of the seven threshold concepts for Australian Outdoor Education programmes. These concepts articulate what a student who completes at least a major in outdoor education should know and be able to do (Thomas et al., 2019).

Professional development is a form of reflective practice and outdoor environmental educators are encouraged to engage in such development throughout their career to explore current thinking, research and practice, and the interaction between these in terms of the implications for their own outdoor practice and that of others. This development may be formalised within technical skills, intra- or interpersonal skills or the outdoor sector more widely, and on an individual or collective basis. Early career outdoor practitioners and researchers can contribute a significant amount to the field as they are often able to engage in reflective practice without reference to established norms and traditions and can pose objective questions.

More informally and intrinsically, most practitioners will continually reflect on the ongoing and overall effectiveness of achieving the intended learning outcomes of their programmes and develop reflection at a deeper, more critical level to mature their practice (Blenkinsop et al., 2016). Reflection can be defined as, 'learning and developing through examining what we think happened on any occasion, and how we think others perceived the event ... opening our practice to scrutiny by others' (Bolton, 2018, p. 13). For example, a beginning practitioner facilitating a ropes challenge course may place importance on structuring the session to enable each participant to 'have a go'. With more experience and reflection, the outdoor

environmental educator may focus more on the achievements of each individual and then extend that through a review of the experience with the group and/or individual focussing on outcomes that will have transfer value to other settings (e.g. perseverance, overcoming fears, resilience, mindset etc.).

The term ‘reflexive practitioner’ is used to question self- attitudes, thinking, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions to understand an individual’s role in relation to others. Reflexive practitioners operate at a deeper, more critical level, have an openness to multiple perspectives and create innovative non-dichotomous solutions, which can be informed by research. The key focus is on beliefs, values, professional identities and consciousness of wider social, cultural, historical, linguistic and political dimensions. In the example above, the outdoor environmental educator needs to have sensitivity towards the cultural expectations of individuals and their communities, recognising that such experiences may also be in the domain of the privileged – those who can afford and can access such experiences, and not representative of all demographics. In qualitative research, which explores people interactions, researchers should acknowledge and take account of the many ways they influence findings and thus, the conclusions they arrive at and the knowledge they create. The practitioner also needs to be aware of the larger field of work outside their own milieu; research is one aspect of supporting that broader understanding and context. An example of this might be the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor activities for a specified population or community, where the outcomes will have meaning in, and synergy with, therapeutic, sport and public health domains. This could mean that the outdoor environmental educator needs to direct their focus (in practice and/or research) towards these outcomes and perhaps marginalise others such as enhancing environmental awareness that may be important to them as an individual, in response to a political agenda.

‘There is a place in every research inquiry for both reflexivity and reflection’ (Ryan, 2005, p. 2) and this is the approach taken in this chapter. Outdoor environmental educators should engage in reflection and reflective practice. In research terms, both reflective practice and reflexivity are important.

### **29.3 Research Informing Reflective Practice**

Research can inform practice in a number of ways. As a starting point, engagement with empirical research studies (both large and small scale) enables educators to reflect on data to provide evidence to explore an issue, challenge, hypothesis or question. Through careful reading of research studies, an educator might be able to make more explicit the positive outcomes and benefits of outdoor practice. Careful engagement with research can also reveal unexpected, surprising or negative outcomes of OEE and this might prompt a reader to think about areas that might need addressing, and factors that affect variable outcomes for operational and strategic planning. For example, research examining the benefits of an outdoor programme might find that although there were positive benefits for disabled participants whilst

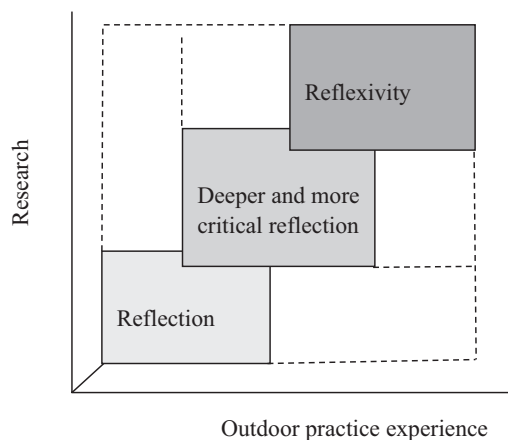


attending a programme, on returning to their home setting, these benefits could not be maintained due to lack of opportunity, support or access, with a consequent negative effect on mental and physical health and wellbeing. When an outdoor educator takes the time to engage with research to learn more about the evidence base around OEE, their own practices can be challenged or supported.

There are other types of research that do not comprise data per se, but instead are more conceptual or philosophical. This kind of research can also influence practitioners' beliefs, values and convictions. For example, Dewey's view on child-centred experiential learning has been influential for the practice of many outdoor environmental educators. Sometimes a moment of practice can be reflected on with reference to a conceptual model: On an extended canoe expedition, a group of second year undergraduates found themselves sharing an overnight campsite with a group of postgraduate students who had just started their course at a different university. The leader of the postgraduate group complained to the other leader that their students would be distracted and kept awake by noisy, younger undergraduates. In fact, the postgraduate students moved their leaders' tents when they were not on the site, partied all night and could not be roused the following morning. The undergraduates cooked their meal, slept soundly and were ready early the following morning with all their kit packed and ready to start the next day of the expedition. The postgraduate students were 'storming'; the undergraduates, because they knew each other and understood expectations were 'norming/performing' in the stages of Tuckman's model of small group development (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). A familiarity with theoretical research helps an educator locate their practices in broader constructs.

The inter-relationship between the prominence of research and the amount of outdoor practice experience for an individual is shown in Fig. 29.1. As experience increases, reflection deepens and becomes more critical leading to reflexivity. Beginning and less experienced practitioners do reflect and this leads them to ask questions. More experienced practitioners may be reflexive but this does not mean that they have lost the ability to reflect.

**Fig. 29.1** The prominence of research and reflection in individual outdoor practitioner consciousness



The ultimate hope is that research studies (empirical, theoretical and conceptual) will initiate reflection at the individual level that may in turn effect changes in practice. For example, a teacher might read about research that describes the benefits of using school grounds for outdoor education but they have no allocated curriculum time for it, behavioural challenges when taking children outdoors, and little support from senior managers for an outdoor programme. Reflective practice may involve asking such questions as, why are there differences between the practice I experience and other similar practice? What are the reasons for this? Can I make improvements to my practice and how? The answers to these questions could be related to assumptions that school managers make through lack of knowledge, information or experience in relation to outcomes or safety, bias towards classroom learning, and for the outdoor educator, professional confidence. Often though as is illustrated in the examples below, reflection on research often results in asking more questions than it answers; it is an iterative process.

### ***29.3.1 Large-Scale Research Studies***

Outdoor environmental educators might use the evidence from larger scale studies to review existing evidence across a specified outdoor context or timescale. These might be ‘systematic reviews’ (reviews of all the extant evidence that fits the pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer the research questions) or more general evidence-based reviews of literature and/or other reported research. Some studies also report a ‘meta-analysis’ within a systematic review, a statistical procedure to combine numerical data from multiple separate studies.

Case Examples 29.1, 29.2, and 29.3 are illustrative of published large-scale research studies relating to outdoor contexts. Each one subsequently is reflected on and interpreted in relation to how meaning can be elicited for professional practice.

#### **Case Example 29.1 A review of evidence-based research in outdoor learning**

Rickinson et al. (2004) examined 150 pieces of research on outdoor learning from 1993 to 2003 and reviewed critically research on fieldwork and outdoor visits, outdoor adventure education and school grounds/community projects for primary school students (aged 4–11 years), secondary school students (11–18 years) and undergraduate learners. The research provided a clear endorsement for certain kinds of outdoor learning provision, but the aims of programmes were not always realised in practice. The report made recommendations not only for practitioners but also for policy makers and researchers.

This review identified through research the need to deliberate and reflect on certain issues in practice, particularly not just using evidence to substantiate the value of outdoor learning but also to improve quality. The outcomes of this research helped direct reflection and thinking by school staff in terms of the focus, structure and timing of opportunities in their curricula and programmes. In terms of research, it identified gaps in the evidence base that have informed subsequent foci for empirical investigations. It outlined the importance of sound, robust research evidence to capitalise and link successful initiatives and highlighted the need for research training and development to understand, foster and disseminate good practice.

In some cases, research can have unplanned outcomes as is shown in Case Example 29.2.

### **Case Example 29.2 The evidence base for the effectiveness of outdoor learning in the UK**

Fiennes et al. (2015) examined research evidence through a systematic review of academic literature and inviting submissions, ‘crowdsourcing’. They found that almost all outdoor interventions have a positive effect (or that was the way in which the research was reported), that effects measured immediately after an intervention were stronger than measures a few months later, and overnight and multi-day activities had a stronger effect than shorter experiences. The researchers also emphasised the importance of reliability of research. If research is unreliable (i.e. it cannot be replicated) then its potency as a source of information for practice, in this case planning programmes etc. is questionable. Interestingly, Fiennes et al. (2015) were also able to look at the implications of their research findings for policy and practice although this was not their initial objective.

This published report (also known as the ‘Blagrave Report’) did cause the outdoor sector to reflect on the ways in which research should be informing practice. Perhaps the most important outcome was that their recommendations have led to reflection and rethinking (in the UK at least) about strengthening the evidence base and for a much closer working relationship between practitioners and researchers to prioritise research topics and manage the sector-wide research agenda. Practitioners need to reflect on their practice and ask questions that would benefit from research, and researchers need to ensure that they are working to answer questions, or to address issues or problems that have real impact on practice. To this end, there is now a network of active research-practice hubs in the UK comprising both practitioners and researchers to inform and influence local policy and an overarching ‘Strategic Research Group’ that gathers evidence to inform policy at government level (see Hedges et al., 2020). This type of model of working also helps the dissemination of unpublished research (for example, in theses, dissertations or research reports) and the collation of evidence.

**Case Example 29.3 Adventure education and Outward Bound: Experiences that make a lasting difference**

Hattie et al. (1997) undertook a meta-analysis of 151 unique samples from 96 studies of adventure programmes to examine their effect on a range of outcomes such as self-concept, locus of control and leadership. In addition to aiming to synthesise the findings across many studies, the research sought to ascertain the magnitude of effect sizes (a way of quantifying the size of the difference between samples). Their results suggested that adventure programmes can have notable outcomes and strong, lasting effects but that there is variability in outcomes between different studies, programmes and individuals. Outcomes improved as the length of the programme and the age of participants increased.

Case Example 29.3 is another large-scale research study, which some would now regard as seminal (i.e. one that is considered original and the foundation of future developments) as its findings are considered reliable and valid.

The reasons for these findings are largely conjecture – reflection on this research might, for example, cause a practitioner to say that different providers have different objectives for their adventure programmes and that older participants are more likely to be able to recognise the benefits. It could be that variability in intended outcomes for outdoor programmes depends on participants' motivation and engagement and the outdoor environmental educator's skills in directing the group towards specified outcomes, or the importance they or their employer place on achieving them. They could, for example, be more interested in the gain that each individual will make over the duration of a programme. Interestingly, the study excluded effects from studies considered to be of low quality and not in scope (for example, school-based programmes that were non-challenging and often of shorter duration). Thus, although Hattie et al.'s (1997) study is regarded as sound, evaluative research, it is important to determine the parameters of research when reflecting on it for your own practice.

Research relying on primary data is time specific and by the time it is reported, published or read, practice might have changed or developed. For example, there is now more recent research to indicate that the intensity rather than the duration of outdoor residential experiences has stronger impact on participants in the longer term (defined as 12 months and beyond). Thus, short but intense overnight adventurous experiences in the dark, for example, might have a more lasting effect on individuals than five-day outdoor programmes with more 'downtime'. Interestingly, the *reasons* for these differences are subject to speculation and more empirical research may provide answers (and perhaps ask more questions in a reflexive way such as, do the outcomes depend on opportunity, demographics or the skills of the facilitator?).

### 29.3.2 *Small-Scale Research Studies*

Reflective practice often informs research in small-scale studies, at least in the early stages of research or project design. Students of OEE are encouraged, for example, to undertake research in an area of interest that has relevance to practice or emanates from practice, and often for students, is based on personal experience. A reflective approach can question how or why certain practices take place, or what measures could improve practice.

This section gives case examples of small-scale outdoor education research studies by researchers with different amounts of experience. These examples in which the author was involved, illustrate how reflective and reflexive practice inform research and how the outcomes of the research inform professional practice.

#### **Case Example 29.4 Outdoor learning in primary schools (children 3–11 years)**

This research was carried out by a university researcher who is a qualified teacher and who works with her students in schools as part of their outdoor programme. The research drew on empirical data from surveys involving teachers in primary schools in England between 1995 and 2017 in order to look at changes in practice, examine the places that were used for outdoor learning, the challenges and opportunities for implementation of outdoor programmes, the expertise teachers had for outdoor provision and the ways in which they integrate it into the curriculum.

The research identified the strength of teachers' values and beliefs, an open approach to curriculum interpretation, the importance of suitable locations, a culture of risk benefit and positive initiatives as key ingredients for successful outdoor learning in primary schools. It is published in two papers in international journals (Prince, 2019a, b) and presented at international conferences and at research symposia for practitioners and researchers.

Case Example 29.4 illustrates a small-scale study by an experienced researcher:

In this case example, the reflective practice of teachers through the primary data (their answers to questionnaires) has informed the research but the real impact of this research is through the changes it might make to enhancing outdoor opportunities for all children in school. Outdoor educators working in schools have been interested in the recommendations of this research as highlighted by the titles of the publications: 'Lessons for good practice' and the 'Sustained value that teachers

### **Case Example 29.5 Trans and non-binary participants in outdoor programmes**

Approaching her final undergraduate year on an outdoor programme and working as a watersports instructor, Chloe (a cis practitioner) recognised the challenges for trans and non-binary participants and the apparent lack of understanding of their needs and adaptive behaviour by providers. She wanted to find out what it was like for those participants, the level of understanding and confidence of practitioners (both trans and cis) and whether by raising their awareness, policies, practice and facilities might be modified or improved. She obtained a good response to a questionnaire distributed on social media, supplemented by interviews and presented vignettes to reflect their lived experiences. The data indicated that aspects of outdoor programming policy in respect of gender were unsuitable, outdated and incongruent with the opinions and aspirations of many practitioners. Chloe wanted her research findings to encourage outdoor providers to review their policies in relation to gender and to strive for explicit inclusivity in respect of accommodating and welcoming gender variant participants.

Chloe presented her research at the European Institute of Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning International Conference in 2019 and co-authored a journal paper (Bren & Prince, 2021 in press).

place on outdoor learning' to reflect on their own practice. This is one reason why it is important to disseminate robust research.

The following Case Examples (29.5 and 29.6) illustrate the engagement in research of a less experienced researcher and practitioners respectively:

In Case Example 29.5, Chloe reflected on her practice initially, becoming more reflexive as she worked in other contexts, and met more practitioners. Practice then informed her research, which led her, practitioners and providers to become more reflexive.

In Case Example 29.6, research became gradually more embedded in practice because of the commitment of national and international organisations in pushing it up their agendas. Over time, and because of their involvement in generating their theory of change, sail training practitioners have begun to think in different ways. They have moved from practice informing research to research informing reflective practice. Knowledge about research findings and the need to articulate to researchers what they want and need to know has been key to this shift in mindset.

### **Case Example 29.6 Sail training**

Sail training is an adventurous activity, which involves young people living, working and sailing together offshore, usually on large vessels. Traditionally, the emphasis was on teaching and learning seamanship skills (of which there are many and in which staff and volunteers have extensive experience). More recently, Sail Training International and associated national organisations have been interested in the social and personal development of the young people who have experienced voyages, and any lasting impact these have on their lives. However, the research and practice were very separate and the challenge was to engage sea staff in reflecting on their practice and to think about any changes or variation in approach they could make on board, to further these outcomes.

The ASTO (Association of Sail Training Organisations, UK) has supported the embedding of a research theme in their annual conference. Sail trainers inputted into a theory of change model – a ‘map of causal links, which seeks to explain why and how an intervention has impact’ (Noble et al., 2017, p. 1) – and one of the recommendations of Fiennes et al. (2015). Subsequent progressive annual workshops encourage practitioners alongside researchers to think about how they bring research into practice or practice into research, for example, considering how they could develop their own or their organisation’s practice to attain a wider range of outcomes.

### **29.3.3 Indicators of Research Quality**

Whilst, it may not be possible for an individual student researcher to make a significant contribution on their own, collective research can make a difference and there are indicators of high-quality research that it is worth being mindful of. The need to demonstrate **impact** of research – an effect on, change, or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia (Research Excellence Framework (REF), 2019)– with a defined causal chain, is critical for university researchers across all disciplines in relation to funding for research in higher education. The extent to which the work has influenced, or has the capacity to influence, knowledge and scholarly thought, or the development and understanding of policy and/or practice – the **significance** of research- is also a key metric. Reflexive practice with its reference to wider dimensions of the research with more reach may result in greater impact and significance than reflective practice. **Originality** is the extent to which the output makes an important and innovative contribution to understanding and knowledge in the field and rigour is understood as the extent to which the work demonstrates intellectual coherence and integrity, and adopts robust and appropriate concepts, analyses, sources, theories and/or methodologies (REF, 2019). An example in outdoor

practice might be to reflect on the effects of overnight experiences (residential, camp, expedition, journey) for young people that show a direct impact on increasing their cognitive abilities (*impact* shown through causal chain). The *significance* of this is development of policy on including overnight experiences as part of curricula, or in an aspect of non-formal education (e.g. scouting). It is *original* as the causal link has not previously been reported in that context.

## 29.4 Conclusion

The place of research in practice is unequivocal. Research might be in the conscious or sub-conscious of outdoor environmental educators at various stages of their professional practice or career. For all practitioners, knowing and reflecting on or in practice might inform research; research findings may inform practice. Reflective practice is key to being a professional outdoor environmental educator and the place of research in this is important. As outdoor environmental educators gain more experience, I suggest that research informs reflexive practice and is inclusive of personal, critical and deep reflection.

### Reflective Questions

1. In Case Example 29.5, what might be the impact and significance of this research?
2. Reflect on an example of your outdoor practice (e.g. a journey or expedition, work at an outdoor/environmental centre or camp, a specific outdoor activity). As an educator, which activities have the greatest impact and how do you know? If you do not know, how could you find out? How might research inform your practice?
3. In your own outdoor practice, how could you mediate or alter an activity for participants to increase the meaning for them?
4. If you were asked at an interview for a job why research is important in OEE, what would your response be?
5. How could you extend your reflection and reflexive practice?

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# Chapter 30

## Professionalism, Professionalisation and Professional Currency in Outdoor Environmental Education



Scott Polley

Professional currency is a term used to describe maintaining skills and knowledge for professional practice. This intent of this chapter is to begin a conversation about professional currency for graduates of Higher Education (HE) programs. The frame of reference is the Australian context of outdoor environmental education, where the accepted term for a professional in this field is ‘outdoor educator’ (Thomas et al., 2019). ‘The Fremantle Declaration’ (Meredith, 2010, p. 6) provides one framework for professional practice developed at the 2010 Australian National Outdoor Education Conference:

Outdoor education provides unique opportunities to develop positive relationships with the environment, others and ourselves. These relationships are essential for the wellbeing and sustainability of individuals, society and our environment. (Meredith, 2010, p. 6)

This chapter begins with a discussion about the current status of outdoor environmental education as a profession, with particular reference to the Australian context. International examples of professional recognition and practices in demonstrating professional currency in outdoor environmental education are explored before investigating selected examples of other professions. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the future of outdoor environmental education professional currency recognition.

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### 30.1 Professionalism and Professionalisation in Outdoor and Environmental Education

Professional currency is demonstrating *current* knowledge and capability for professional practice. It might also be interpreted as avoiding ‘professional obsolescence’ (Ferdinand, 1966 in Clayton et al., 2011), with a ‘discrepancy between job performance and an expected level of competence’ (Chauhan & Chauhan, p. 1, in Clayton et al., 2011, p. 3). Professional currency demonstrates professionalism in a chosen field of endeavour.

There are potential benefits to HE graduates in maintaining professional currency. Murray and Lawry (2011), when interviewing professional Occupational Therapists about their perceptions of maintaining professional currency, conclude that professional currency assists with promoting self-determination, raising perceptions of professional capacity and positively impacting the workplace, encouraging working with others and encouraging professional and personal self-care (Murray & Lawry, 2011).

Professionalism can be a values system able to contribute positively to both members of the profession and to society. However, it can also be an ideology that seeks to impose a belief system a mechanism of control to increase status, income and upward mobility. Professionalism potentially can narrow the field of endeavour and create barriers to alternative ways of thinking and discourage creativity. The process of professionalizing outdoor and environmental education has the potential to positively influence the dominant narratives about professional practice, however may curtail the focus on innovations.

Cautions about professionalism and professionalization of outdoor and environmental education are not new. For example, in Ford (1986):

There is no nationally standardized outdoor education curriculum and no nationally standardized measure of outdoor education competency or knowledge. Outdoor education programs are sponsored by elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, youth camps, municipal recreation departments, and private entrepreneurs. They exist in every geographic location and are administered by people of widely varied backgrounds. There is no single body of outdoor professionals in outdoor education because the field transcends school boundaries into recreation departments, youth-serving agencies, conservation organizations, resource management agencies, and many other facets of society. As a result, outdoor education is viewed from different perspectives. (Ford, 1986, p. 1)

Brookes (2004) is critical of any approaches to narrow the field of outdoor and environmental education. He examined attempts to define the body of knowledge through education curriculum and textbooks and warned:

Universalist or absolutist approaches are not helpful in Australia. If there is a lesson from Australian environmental history over the last two centuries, it is surely that if there is a need for outdoor education, it can only be determined by paying careful attention to particular regions, communities, and their histories. In Australia at least, approaches to outdoor education theory, which try to eliminate or discount differences between societies and communities, cultural differences, and geographical differences, are seriously flawed. (Brookes, 2004, p. 32)

Potter and Dymont (2016) summarising from an earlier article in 2015, explore the claims of outdoor education to be a *discipline* and suggest that great progress has been achieved in three of six of the components listed by Liles et al. (1996, in Potter & Dymont, 2016). These components are: a focus of study; a worldview or paradigm; and an active research or theory development agenda. In their view, the three areas that remain under-developed are: a lack of strategic and systematic approach to the promotion of professionalism; a lack of clarity about reference disciplines; and a lack of clarity about principles and practices.

In Australia, Martin (2003) identified five ‘signposts towards a profession’ in his consideration of outdoor education and its development towards this status. He compared outdoor education with other fields such as nursing and physiotherapy and their path to becoming recognised and distinct allied health professions. Arguably the profession of outdoor and environmental education in Australia has arrived at a destination for at least two of these ‘signposts’ (1 and 3, below) and have made some progress for the other three. Likely it is a similar situation for a number of other countries.

### 1. ‘A motive of service beyond self- interest’

Building on the work of Martin and others a ‘green paper’ was released, summarizing the ‘issues, directions, and priorities from the Australian national outdoor education “Bendigo Summit 2001”’ (Kiewa, 2003, p. 11) with nine goals for outdoor education in Australia. Goal One was “Clarify and interpret the motive of service of the outdoor education profession” (Kiewa, 2003, p. 11) with conference attendees achieving agreement about ‘The Motive of Service’ declaration:

Through interactions in the natural world, Outdoor Education aims to develop an understanding of our relationship with the environment, others and ourselves. The ultimate goal is to contribute towards a sustainable world (Kiewa, 2003, p.12)

### 2. ‘Development of a specialised body of knowledge’

Although contentious, there are emerging academic works that support the view that outdoor education has both a broad and specialised body of knowledge (Potter & Dymont, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019) and that outdoor educators require specific skills and knowledge beyond the field of outdoor recreation (Thomas et al., 2019).

However, outdoor and environmental education has not developed a shared scope of practice or clear minimum thresholds for graduates, an important milestone for other emerging professions such as Physiotherapy, Exercise Science and others. Recent efforts by the Australian Tertiary Outdoor Education Network (Thomas et al., 2019) to address a shared understanding between Australian universities lay the foundation for a development of such a scope of practice for the role of ‘outdoor educator’ in the future.

### 3. ‘A code of ethics’

Following the Bendigo Summit in 2001, Griffith University Masters of Outdoor Education student Innes Larkin undertook a multi-stage consultation process to

arrive at what is now accepted as the Australian Code of Ethics for Outdoor Educators.

- The outdoor educator will fulfil his/her duty of care.
- The outdoor educator will provide a supportive and appropriate learning environment.
- The outdoor educator will develop his/her professionalism.
- The outdoor educator will ensure his/her practice is culturally and environmentally sensitive. (Larkin, 2003)

#### 4. 'Admission to profession'

In Australia, outdoor environmental education is a profession that slips between the cracks at present. Unless the individual is a teacher, psychologist, social worker or other accredited professional, outdoor educators are not required to demonstrate minimum capabilities for a professional role or to demonstrate currency to a registering body. Other recognised professions require completion of an accredited higher education program and demonstration of capability to practice as an entry level practitioner before formal admission to the profession.

#### 5. 'Public recognition'

As Potter and Dymont (2016) suggest, outdoor (environmental) education is making progress towards recognition as a discipline, however without a clear scope of practice to define the specialised body of knowledge and a recognised process for admission to the profession, public recognition is highly problematic.

## **30.2 What's Happening with Professionalism and Currency in Outdoor Environmental Education in the Rest of the World?**

Two examples of professional accreditation and requirements for professional currency that encompass the role of outdoor educator provide a discursive context for professional recognition and professional currency for Australian outdoor environmental education. They are 'Outdoor Professional' in the United Kingdom (UK) and 'Outdoor Educator' in the United States (US).

In the UK, the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) has devised a professional recognition process that is inclusive of a broad range of professional and volunteer roles in the outdoors. This approach is not specific to outdoor environmental education but is a clear attempt to provide pathways for professional recognition for all those working in 'outdoor learning'. 'The Outdoor Professional Profile' allows recognition of all outdoor professionals working in 'sports participation, outdoor education, youth development, wellbeing, workforce training or adventure tourism' (IOL, 2020). 'Outdoor Professionals provide safe activities and effective learning in the outdoors'. They have focussed on recognising 'Values and Behaviours' ('values

learners', 'values the environment', 'values their development') and 'Competencies' ('competent to provide safe activities and effective learning in outdoor environments', 'current', 'professional compliance', 'accredited', 'ethical', 'informed', 'connected') (IOL, 2020). Some HE providers are accredited to provide programs that meet these professional recognition standards. Professional currency is demonstrated by continuous professional development (CPD) outlined by the manifesto 'The Seven Steps to Continuous Professional Development' These seven steps are summarized as (1) reflecting on motivation for CPD; (2) seeking feedback; (3) mapping current strengths; (4) deciding development goals; (5) selecting best options; (6) applying learning; (7) keeping a record. To support this learning, they provide a useful 'Professional Development Record' to categorize CPD according to: (1) activity skills and coaching; (2) facilitating learning; (3) outdoor leadership; (4) experience and judgement; (5) environmental knowledge; (6) professional practice. Currently, the IOL is establishing 'Occupational Standards' for roles that include 'Outdoor Activity Instructor' and 'Outdoor Learning Specialist/Professional' (IOL, 2020).

In the US, the Wilderness Education Association has developed a training structure with levels of recognition as 'Certified Outdoor Leader', 'Certified Outdoor Educator' and 'Certifying Examiner'. These awards are available via Outdoor Leadership Training organisations accredited by Wilderness Education Association (WEA, 2020). Assessment is based on achieving standards in the 'WEA 6 + 1' (WEA, 2020) areas of judgement, outdoor living, planning and logistics, leadership, risk management, environmental integration and education. The accreditation is not specific to HE outdoor environmental education and encompasses a broad range of outdoor leadership contexts, with a 'Certified Outdoor Educator' endorsed to teach 'Certified Outdoor Leaders' rather than outdoor environmental education. Professional currency is demonstrated through completion of a professional portfolio with evidence of field experience and CPD is required to demonstrate continued knowledge and skills at the 'WEA 6 + 1' standards (WEA, 2020).

Both approaches are quite broad to be inclusive of outdoor environmental education and prescribe the initial standards of recognition. Each has a defined system of demonstrating currency rooted in demonstration of experience, reflective practice and professional development. Each of these systems supports Martin's signposts. Both schemes have the potential for institutions to deliver accredited programs, with scope to register and re-register to demonstrate technical skill currency. As yet neither scheme provides explicit professional recognition and professional currency procedures for HE graduates of outdoor environmental education.

### **30.3 What Is the Professional Currency Situation in Australia Today?**

The present situation for outdoor environmental education in higher education in Australia is that there is no accreditation or governing body to recognise the professional role of outdoor educator, as distinct from outdoor activity leader. Further,

Marsden et al. (2012) note the absence of HE guidelines for outdoor leaders regarding the knowledge and skills for outdoor leadership, including the broader body of knowledge, skills required and practical experience. However, their discussion included a broad range of outdoor leadership roles and contexts cited by Mann (2003) including corporate development, (bush) adventure therapy, outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism and outdoor education.

Although professional recognition for the role of outdoor educator is not available it is likely that employers value evidence of current practice, with Munge (2009) surveying 32 Australian employers in the broad range of fields identified by Mann (2003) finding around 50% of respondents valued a HE background. However, employers sought other characteristics as well, including specialist (outdoor activity) knowledge, personal attributes, strong theory and philosophy as well as professional capability (Munge, 2009). Graduates from HE programs in Australia may be required to accredit in state and/or national outdoor activity leadership schemes in addition to their HE qualification to obtain employment (Polley & Thomas, 2017). Recently, the Australian Tertiary Outdoor Education Network (formed in 2016) have attempted to develop a shared understanding of what a HE outdoor and environmental education graduate knows and can do with the aim of clarifying graduate capability (Polley & Thomas, 2017; Thomas et al., 2019).

### **30.4 What Are Other Professions Doing About Professional Currency?**

For most professions, formal recognition of admission to the profession involves accreditation demonstrating a graduate level of knowledge and competence. At regular intervals (1, 3 or 5 years) professionals are required to re-accredit, with graduates demonstrating development beyond beginning professional capability and verifying currency of practice for continued admission to the profession. Failure to demonstrate currency may result in debarment. Two examples of Australian professional currency are discussed here – Occupational Therapy and Teaching. Both have motives of service to contribute to society, professional recognition pathways and professional currency requirements.

Occupational Therapy (OT) formally emerged as a profession in the early twentieth century, developing professional currency standards in a broad range of contexts. Murray and Lawry (2011) discuss professional currency of Occupational Therapists and suggest:

A practitioner is professionally current if they can demonstrate engagement in some or all of the following:

1. Lifelong learning by:
  - (a) Using evidence to inform practice and clinical reasoning;
  - (b) Updating skills and knowledge through attendance at professional development events;



- (c) Enrolling in and engaging in further study;
  - (d) Participating in research activities.
2. A reflective process to evaluate performance
  3. Being interested in and contributing to the development of the occupational therapy profession. (Murray & Lawry, 2011, p. 161)

Professional currency in OT requires evidence of ‘recency of practice’ with a minimum 150 h of practice within their scope of practice, 20 h of continuous professional development over the previous 12 months (or pro-rata) and meeting statutory requirements for working with clients professionally (OTCBA, 2019). Examples of professional development are provided and include HE courses, conferences, research, online learning, reflective practice journals, reviewing literature, quality assurance, professional committees and association participation, interprofessional interaction and developing capability in emerging knowledge areas (OTBA, 2019).

Teaching is probably the most aligned profession to outdoor environmental education (Potter & Dymont, 2016). Teachers graduate as probationary until completion of sufficient teaching time with endorsement from mentors of higher standing. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership developed Standards’ (AITSL, 2018) that are intended for use by employers and teachers to make judgements about their current stage of practice at ‘Graduate’, ‘Proficient’, ‘Highly Accomplished’ or ‘Lead’ (AITSL, 2018). The standards were developed with the involvement 6000 teachers, 120 submissions and all Australian Education Ministers. Each standard has increasing expectations of evidence for attaining them and maintaining currency grouped into three categories and seven standards. The categories are ‘Professional Knowledge’ (know students and how they learn; know the content and how to teach it); ‘Professional Practice’ (plan for and implement effective teaching and learning; create and maintain supportive learning environments; assess, provide feedback and report on student learning); and, ‘Professional Engagement’ (engage in professional learning; engage professionally with colleagues and the community) (AITSL, 2018). At re-registration teachers demonstrate professional currency with a minimum of 20 days of professional practice either as a teacher or principal at a school, or prescribed service, in Australia or New Zealand; 20 h of professional learning per year referring to the AITSL standards; along with meeting statutory requirements for working with children. Most state education departments and private schools require teachers to refer to these standards when applying for promotion. Examples of learning for teacher professional currency are on-line learning, research, conferences, seminars, participating in practice communities such as projects between clusters of schools, further study including post-graduate and certificate courses, research including reading, action research and HE study. In an evaluation of the effects of professional development for 3250 Australian teachers, Ingvarson et al. (2005) found significant impacts on content focus, active learning, knowledge and professional community.

To summarize, Teachers and Occupational Therapists have clear standards for demonstrating professional currency at re-registration. These standards include evidence of minimum experience (150 h for OT and 20 days per year for Teaching)

acting in the role of a professional, demonstrating continuous development within prescribed frameworks as well as meeting statutory requirements. If a graduate outdoor environmental educator is to become a professional, then these two professions provide useful benchmarks to consider when assessing professional currency.

A common theme for graduating professionals in other disciplines such as teaching and occupational therapy is that completion of a HE degree is viewed as a foundation for entry level practice. Recency of professional practice evidenced by appropriate professional learning activities such as mentoring and being mentored, reflective practice, literature review, professional development events, professional memberships, inquiry, research, resource development and interdisciplinary learning are all activities that provide evidence of currency.

Where does this leave the graduating HE outdoor and environmental education professional? They graduate into a profession that has yet to fully demonstrate it has achieved professional status; does not have a clear mandate for practice and resists such a mandate; has not yet arrived as a discipline; has not clearly established itself as an independent profession; does not have a clearly defined scope of practice; does not have a national registration and lacks guidelines for professional currency, at least in some countries. The case for maintaining professional currency upon graduation appears, on the face of it, to be weak.

### **30.5 Future Directions**

The debate about whether outdoor and environmental education should become a profession is not resolved here. Should this be the aim of outdoor environmental education to achieve public recognition through accreditation, they might choose to follow the generic advice from the (Australian) Professional Standards Councils (PSC). They describe ‘The 5 E’s of professionalisation’ as education, ethics, experience, examination and entity. Education includes currency, with a requirement for ‘on-going education or continuing professional development expectations’ (PSC, 2020). Additionally, they list 40 elements of professionalism. These 40 elements are summarized under the four themes of (1) Legislation, advocacy and responsiveness; (2) Organisational and internal governance; (3) External governance and public accountability; (4) Responsibilities and functions (PSC, 2020).

If the PSC (2020) standards are applied, then the analysis of the ‘signposts’ described earlier in this chapter confirms the profession of outdoor environmental education has made progress with more still to be done. The debate now turns to whether demonstration of professional currency has any value to the graduate. Statutory, regulatory, risk minimization, activity leadership re-registration and program requirements increase administrative load for HE graduates. Despite this lack of apparent external incentive, it is argued here that through graduates pursuing currency of practice they will benefit themselves and others. Murray and Lawry’s (2011) observation that maintaining professional currency for OT’s suggests that HE outdoor environmental graduates may be rewarded in ways that are not easily

measured such as improving graduate identity and sense of being a professional. Murray and Lawry (2011) cited benefits for professional currency as: achieving greater clarity about what further learning would enhance practice ('self-determination'); increased knowledge about how to engage in further learning ('perceived capacity'); improvements in practice and the broader workplace ('workplace impact'); connecting with other professionals to support further learning ('you need to have people around'); and, improvements in their wellbeing ('looking after yourself') that gave personal satisfaction and confidence. Challenges experienced by OT's in the Murray and Lawry (2011) study included making time with heavy workloads and obtaining the support of managers.

Hopefully this chapter contributes to the professional currency debate for HE outdoor environmental education positively. Teachers and learners can continue to support the development of the professional identity of graduates through involvement in professional organisations and on-going discussions about professionalism, professionalization and professional currency. Professional currency should enhance outdoor environmental education professionals' ability to 'provide(s) unique opportunities to develop positive relationships with the environment, others and ourselves' (Meredith, 2010, p. 6). The pursuit of professionalism, professionalisation and professional currency may not yet have a defined end. As Michael Leunig (Fig. 30.1) suggests, the path to getting 'there' may not be clear when the

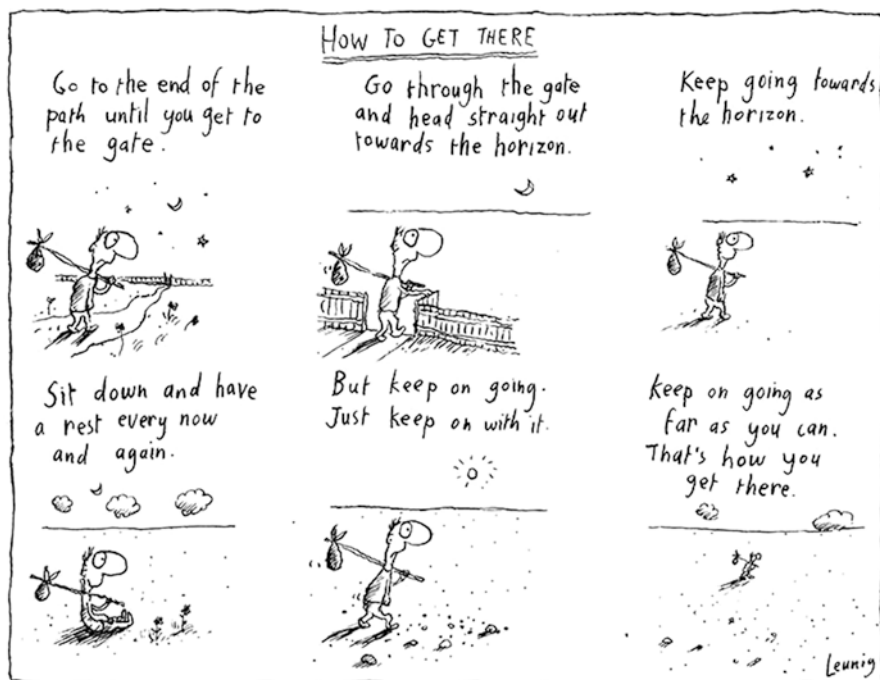


Fig. 30.1 How to get there. (Image courtesy of Michael Leunig, N.D.)

destination is ill-defined, but we can still open the gate and head to our professional horizon.

Like any outdoor environmental education experience, it may not be the destination that provides the deep learning and intrinsic reward, but the journey to get there. It is the author's view that HE outdoor environmental education graduate professionals will enhance the journey for others and themselves by 'going through the gate' and pursuing professionalism and professional currency.

### Reflective Questions

1. What is professional currency?
2. What are the 5 'signposts' for outdoor environmental education to be recognised as a profession?
3. You are preparing for a job interview. How would you answer the question, 'Should outdoor environmental education become an accredited profession?'
4. Critically evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of requiring outdoor environmental education graduates to demonstrate professional currency to employers.
5. List five activities that an HE graduate can undertake to provide evidence of professional currency in outdoor environmental education.

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# Chapter 31

## Introducing Ecologies of Skill for Outdoor Leaders



Philip M. Mullins

In this chapter, skill is explained ecologically for outdoor leaders. The big idea here is that people interrelate with the world through their skills and practices, and understanding this can enable critical self-reflection and alternative structures for outdoor education programs. Beringer (2004) drew on ecopsychology to propose an ecological paradigm for adventure programming, pointing out that “theoretical frameworks and explanatory models of why and how adventure programming works rarely give sufficient credit to how simply ‘being in nature’ can contribute to personal development, healing, and therapeutic success” (p. 52). Ecological approaches seek to understand outdoor education and adventure activities within their relational and emergent contexts. That is, as inescapably interlaced with social and biophysical realities and forces, and therefore with issues of social and environmental justice (Clarke & Mcphie, 2014; Mullins, 2009, 2014b, 2014c).<sup>1</sup> From a position of human belonging in the world, social relations are understood as a subset of ecological relations through which life is lived (Ingold, 2000). To open different understandings and approaches to outdoor education and student journeys Clarke and Mcphie (2014) and Mikael and Asfeldt (2017) drew on the notions of the rhizome and of lines of becoming described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as well as Ingold (2000, 2011) to emphasize the continual becoming of people, animals, and the world.

Ecological approaches to skill try to better recognize, understand, and integrate (a) the active and reciprocal role of environments in/with outdoor and adventure education, travel, and therapy (Beringer, 2004; Clarke & Mcphie, 2014;

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes terms such as *socio-ecological* or *socio-environmental* have been used, though these also connect with systems-based approaches.

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Mannion & Lynch, 2016; Mullins, 2009, 2014c; Mullins & Maher, 2007), (b) the functioning and value of ‘adventure activities’ or ‘technical skills’ in outdoor education (Mullins, 2014b; Mullins & Maher, 2007; Seaman & Coppens, 2006; Thomas, 2005), as well as (c) multiple critiques of dominant Western forms of outdoor education theory and practice. These critiques include outdoor experiential education being focused on personal improvement in the tradition of humanistic psychology, and learning assumed to occur unproblematically through challenge, risk, and conquest in natural settings. Outdoor education was also felt to lack relevance and application to pressing issues such as social justice, environmentalism, and sustainability (Mullins, 2014b; Thomas, 2005; Warren et al., 2014).

### 31.1 Reconciling Mobilities, Place, and Knowing

Ecological approaches share concerns and efforts with place-responsive approaches that seek to understand people and places as co-emergent. The mobilities paradigm helps to resolve an apparent tension between movement and place by suggesting that qualities and types of human and non-human movement as well as other flows (e.g. of air, water, goods, labour, traffic) contribute to shaping landscapes and making and knowing places over time through relationships that also shape environments and people (Ingold, 2000; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Ingold (2011) argued that, in contrast with transport, it is in

dexterous movements along paths of life and travel, ...that inhabitants’ knowledge is forged. Thus locomotion and cognition are inseparable, and an account of the mind must be as much concerned with the work of the feet as with that of the head and hands. (p. 17)

Outdoor and adventure travel, then, can be understood as ways of knowing, coming to know, and relating with landscapes and environments that contribute to place-knowing and place-making. Movement, then, is a way of participating in and knowing landscape and place, and it is therefore inescapably political and deserves critical self-reflection (Mullins, 2009, 2014c).

Taking critiques of wilderness seriously, Mullins and Maher (2007) and Mullins (2009, 2011, 2014a) drew on Ingold’s notions of dwelling, wayfaring, and skill to examine canoe travel and canoe tripping practices as place-responsive and place-generative outdoor education. Payne and Wattchow (2010) explored and developed a slow pedagogy of corporeal engagement, and Brown and Wattchow (2016) drew on Ingold’s (2000) concept of *taskscape* to connect place-responsiveness with enskilment in landscapes of outdoor education. Crucial for an ecological approach, the mobilities paradigm also highlights the various resources gathered in the production and operation of an outdoor education program. Thus, people come to know and shape places through the ways in which they move about them and the landscape.



## 31.2 Questioning and Re-conceptualizing Skill

A renewed interest in skill came about in part through a healthy critical debate, summarized by Thomas (2005), questioning the assumed role of adventure activities within outdoor education concerned with environmental awareness, understanding, and action. This debate exposed a lack of appropriate theoretical and empirical research into skill and embodied engagement with environments and landscapes, and its pedagogical function (Mullins, 2014b, c).

Needing deeper understandings of skill and instructor competency as complex and situated practice, Seaman and Coppens (2006) suggested using Wenger's metaphor of a 'repertoire of practice' and retiring the metaphor of 'hard' and 'soft' skills. Such dualistic classifications have been used to gender and stereotype leadership practices and competence; they oversimplify and sever skill from the body, environment, and context; and falsely position "the instructor as a neutral facilitator of other people's learning, a user of disembodied, universal, and timeless skills" (Seaman & Coppens, 2006, p. 25). Mullins drew on various works by Ingold (2000, 2011), as well as fieldwork and literature from outdoor studies to frame a *participatory ecological approach* to outdoor adventure that re-conceptualized skills as enabling "people to act within, shape, and be shaped by (i.e. interact and develop with) various, specific, and dynamic human and nonhuman communities, landscapes, and environmental processes that include the social, economic, and biophysical" (Mullins, 2014c, pp. 328–329). Skill, he suggested, can be understood

as an intentional ability of an individual or group to create and/or maintain an outcome, product, experience, or relationship that is imagined in advance but can only be realized through performance of embodied capabilities of perception and action that involve the whole organic being(s) (indissolubly body, mind, and spirit) within a web of particular relations extending throughout and shaping an active environment and dynamic landscape that include other beings. (Mullins, 2014c, p. 328)

Importantly, skills are relational, and they exercise power: they shape and represent people, environments, and landscapes. Beedie (2003) discussed mountain guides as carefully *choreographing* safe and satisfactory adventure tourism experiences through trip and route planning, equipment selection, group dynamics and management, and instructing clients in the use of their bodies and equipment relative to one another and the surroundings. Expanding on Beedie's (2003) notion, Mullins (2014c) described *an activity* as "a choreographed suite of one or more tasks and skills, situated within multiple traditions, and having various typical and atypical patterns of practice" (p. 328), and *outdoor adventure* as "practices of individuals or groups in developing, performing, and choreographing skills to actively inhabit and negotiate a dynamic outdoor environment in the production of an experience that has uncertain outcomes and shapes the environment and participant(s)" (p. 328). Understanding some of Ingold's basic concepts will help outdoor leaders broaden and deepen their understandings of skill's ecology, see it in their practice, and identify opportunities to inform their instruction and leadership.



### 31.3 Ingold and Inhabitation

Rejecting the Western nature-culture dichotomy, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) framed an ecological ontology of inhabitation and life in which skill is central.<sup>2</sup> To do this, he drew on diverse studies and contexts, including Indigenous ways of life, craftsmanship, and phenomenology. His writing provides needed concepts and language that scholars have begun to integrate into outdoor and adventure education and recreation research and practice. Ingold's work can inform alternative theory but also professional practices, logistics, and pedagogies in outdoor education (Mullins, 2014a; Mullins & Maher, 2007; Prins & Wattachow, 2020). Sociocultural, Indigenous, and ecofeminist scholarships in outdoor studies complement and invigorate the critical and political implications of Ingold's work.

Ingold (2000, 2011) described *wayfaring* (in contrast to transport) as a type of movement fundamental to humanity in which the wayfarer attends to, copes with, and responds to their surroundings and other inhabitants (human and non-human) along a way of life, during which they exchange substance and knowledge, and in so doing grow and leave traces of their presence in the world.<sup>3</sup> Oriented to the journey (rather than the endpoint), learning and development in relation to others and the surroundings happens along the way. Places occur where wayfarers meet, mingle, and pause for rest. The environments, landscapes, and places a person inhabits and often visits become familiar, woven into their life, and they shape the person's growth.

According to Ingold (2000), *skill* is learned, developed, and incorporated into the body/mind by working with skilled others in an education of attention over time and in situ. In this way, one gains knowledge, attunes attention, and develops abilities to perceive and respond in subtle and creative ways to an ever-changing environment in order to achieve the imagined but uncertain end of the task. Skill is relational, necessarily engaged with relevant processes, features, elements, and others that enable, impact, and afford action. This field of practice Ingold called the *taskscape*, which "exists not just as activity but as *interactivity*" (Ingold, 2000, p. 199), and becomes familiar to a skilled practitioner. With enough time and practice in an environment, a person can develop a *sentient ecology*—a felt knowledge and understanding of that environment (Ingold, 2000). People are shaped by environments and landscapes through skills they practice, which are developmentally incorporated into the practitioner and shape their whole being including mind and body, and enable them to go about their life in particular ways and environments. People also shape and leave their trace in the world through their skills and along their ways of life. Thus, people and environments interact through skills and practices.

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<sup>2</sup>Ingold moved away from calling it the *dwelling perspective* to avoid unintended romantic, cozy and sedentary connotations of being at peace and solitude in nature.

<sup>3</sup>In his book *Perception of the Environment* Ingold (2000) referred to this as *wayfinding* (as used in Mullins, 2009; Mullins & Maher, 2007), later switching to *wayfaring*.

## 31.4 Outdoor Educating

Story and fieldwork combine in the choreography of a trip: shaping landscapes, places, and communities—and student experiences of them—by routing, equipping, provisioning, and enskiling the party to inhabit particular surroundings in particular ways (Mullins, 2009, 2011, 2014c). Prins and Wattochow (2020) suggested that enskilment as a pedagogical approach to outdoor learning involves attending to the entangled threads of taskscape, guided attention, storytelling, and wayfaring. This section builds towards a critical understanding of outdoor trips as weaving together diverse relationships through which travelers participate in and with dynamic surroundings, the meanings and experiences of which are brought to the experience, nurtured along the route, and also expressed to others (through storytelling), forming a hermeneutic phenomenological circle (Mullins, 2014a). These meanings and stories, practices, and impacts are sometimes in tension with one another.

### 31.4.1 *Fieldwork*

Thomas' (2015) description of practical, student-centered, fieldwork as a 'signature pedagogy' of outdoor education and outdoor leadership training resonates strongly with Ingold's concepts of enskilment and education of attention. Environments can be novel, possibly quite risky or dangerous, and challenging when learning a new skill or activity, and thus demand students' and leaders' attention. Crucially, novices learn through field-based mimicry, guidance, instruction, apprenticeship, and role modeling to negotiate, participate, and inhabit dynamic outdoor environments, to advance in their skills, and eventually participate without a leader/guide, and perhaps learn to lead others in the activity (Beedie, 2003; Prins & Wattochow, 2020; Thomas, 2015). Leaders-in-training need to become skilled in attending and responding to an additional suite of concerns requiring further education of attention and practice in situ (Mullins & Maher, 2007; Prins & Wattochow, 2020; Thomas, 2015). Students in an activity learn the rules and how to belong as 'a paddler', 'a mountaineer,' and an 'outdoor leader' able to operate independently, and are thus enskiled, socialized, and enculturated as members of a community of practice, with which they identify to some degree. Depending on how experiences and learning are structured and narrated, they can seem and remain disconnected or isolated from students' everyday lives and in need of transfer, rather than constituting an enskilment for their lives. Outdoor education can also approach enskilment seriously, strategically, and self-critically towards enabling diverse sentient ecologies, participation in communities, and student becoming; mindful that becoming skilled takes

time, effort, and guidance within particular settings. Such an approach holds the possibility of expanding fieldwork and its contexts, but first we need to examine how stories shape outdoor education and experiences of place through choreography.

### ***31.4.2 Story and Language Expressing Relationships***

Outdoor education, curricula, and students' involvement occur within sociocultural and historical contexts. Public, professional, and scholarly understandings of what outdoor education is, does, and is concerned with (and for whom) are shaped by powerful discourses, narratives, and stories (e.g. discourses of risk, challenge, and conquest; narratives of whiteness, masculinity, and class; stories of 'connecting' with nature and exploring wilderness...). Academic theories present stories about how something works (e.g. 'comfort zone' and 'transfer of learning'), hopefully based on evidence and research, but also shaped by ongoing events and discourses. Students, teachers, and professionals relate to outdoor education and outdoor activities relative to these various stories and discourses (to celebrate, structure their practice, avoid, resist, work to change), and use them to make sense of their activities and surroundings. Outdoor trips follow, ignore, and leave stories and traces on the land in ways that contribute to participants' creating, perceiving, and sharing meanings of place; journeys also become narratives for participants and contribute to their storied lives (Mullins, 2009). Prins and Wattchow (2020) explained that stories and storytelling play a crucial role in place-responsive outdoor teaching and learning because they enfold place and time, require empathic listening, guide attention, and lead to personally-relevant learning.

Clarke and Mcphie (2014) as well as Mikael and Asfeldt (2017), and Mullins (2014a) were concerned with prevalent and alternative language in outdoor education that tells stories and makes claims about the structure of reality (ontology), how knowledge works (epistemology), and explanations of practice (theory), in ways that reinforce the dominant Western nature-culture dichotomy, around which much of Western outdoor education is structured and made meaningful (Mullins, 2014b). Examples include: "nature," "out there," "back home," "in the middle of nowhere," "pristine," "timeless," "back in civilization," "in real life," "direct experience" or "(dis)connection to nature." Indeed, overdetermined cultural narratives, which students bring with them, are a recognized problem for outdoor education research and practice (Wattchow, 2008). Authors highlight the need to develop and find alternative narratives and guiding metaphors that better engage social and environmental sustainability and place (Clarke & Mcphie, 2014; Mannion & Lynch, 2016; Mikael & Asfeldt, 2017; Mullins, 2009).

### 31.4.3 Structuring Senses of Movement and Place

Mullins (2005) explored Ingold's (2000) theory as an alternative to romantic and (anti)modern approaches/stories about place, practice, tools, and technology in outdoor recreation and education practices and theories built around problematic ideals and myths of wilderness in Canada. Using the commonplace journey methodology to facilitate praxis, he then worked with students and outdoor educators in the field during an extended canoe expedition to explore applications and implications of Ingold's work for skill-based outdoor and adventure education, recreation, and travel (Mullins, 2009, 2011, 2014a; Mullins & Maher, 2007).

Mullins (2011, 2014a) found participants used *structural practices* and equipment within a trip architecture that shaped their education of attention, wayfaring, and engagement/enskilment with the land and its inhabitants, opening a space for a particular and preferred sense of 'being on trip' that approximated in some ways—particularly geographically and socially—a typical 'wilderness experience' in the tradition in which they had been raised and trained. Structural practices included, for example, negotiating time and relationships with work, partners, and family, limiting communication with home, pre-purchasing and packaging food, pre-planning the route using maps, and trying to hold to an itinerary.

In practice, participants' sense of being on trip was more rhythmic, responsive, at risk of falling out of phase, and receptive to landscape and environments as contributing to their journey (Mullins, 2009, 2011), akin to the dance metaphor used by other scholars and participants (Brymer & Gray, 2009; Wattchow, 2008). It closely matched Ingold's concept of correspondence along lines of becoming. Participants strongly identified with this sense of being on trip as a form of self-expression in connection to the land, and they particularly identified and resonated with landscapes that felt familiar and similar to those in which they had learned to paddle (Mullins, 2009).

This sense of travel, movement, and place was held as central even as participants in Mullins' research were aware and critical of wilderness ideals and purposefully engaged diverse practices, landscapes, and inhabitants along the way—which they valued—but which felt different, and they struggled to fit these into their frames of reference (Mullins, 2009; Mullins & Maher, 2007). A tension appears within trip experiences between expectations based on stories from one's culture or tradition, and aspects of the surroundings that may not fit those expectations. Wattchow (2008) reported on students working between culturally-expected stories of romantic wildness, and sensing connections to river places. The more-experienced participants in Mullins' research had integrated wilderness stories into their practice and preferred experience, which they had to negotiate in the diverse landscapes of the route. Paddlers with fewer ties to and less training in the wilderness tradition, however, were more open to finding value in what the landscape presented (Mullins, 2014a).

The travelers in Mullins' (2009, 2011) study choreographed their practices according to their tradition, these practices interrelated and shaped them, other inhabitants, landscapes, and environments to enable a particular experience of being-in-place for themselves and their students, along and through the journey. Their training, practices, and experiences were strongly shaped and informed by dominant wilderness-based stories and norms of practice and equipment, even as other realities crept in. These stories and norms are not neutral. Outdoor leaders mentoring another generation might consider normalizing more diverse routes and purposes and remaining open to how dynamic environments, landscapes, and inhabitants present themselves. Moreover, various material, economic, social, and ecological relations that are not obvious to participants are nevertheless bound up in practices and program operations that are the responsibility of institutional leaders, and which shape socioecological communities near and far over time.

#### ***31.4.4 Diversity in Choreography and Practice***

Crucially, outdoor experiences are not neutral, universal, or simply 'direct experiences' (of nature, for example). People have different frames of reference, they relate to stories, practices, and 'experiences' differently; an experience may *be* different, hold different meaning, and exert power differently relative to indigeneity, histories, class, race, culture, gender, ability, and/or sexual orientation (Gray & Mitten, 2018). The stories and structures used to choreograph a trip also value, represent, and shape landscapes and environments differentially: influencing ecological conservation, health, and sustainability in regions that further impact human and non-human inhabitants, communities, and their ways of life. Moreover, the student/participant group itself need not be the central focus of the programming; instead, they could learn, become, and gain skills while addressing an issue, reality, or problem, or while serving a community larger than themselves.

This perspective allows us to understand outdoor experiences as spaces skillfully opened up/built for particular purposes (but with various effects) by skilled, situated, and privileged practitioners working in place, within and relative to multiple historical traditions. The positioning of the choreographer; the stories used, told, closed down, buried, and ignored; the relations enacted, maintained, and put on hold; the experiences and spaces produced; and how all of these address, shape, and represent the world and other people are crucial. These are issues of diversity, indigeneity, and intersectional environmental justice within outdoor education as a land-and-body-based pedagogy (Maina-Okori et al., 2018). Neutrality is not an option because the becoming of people and landscapes is ongoing, political, and inescapably shaped by powerful practices and stories. Outdoor leaders can dedicate themselves to diverse and inclusive choreographies that promote and strive to be socially and environmentally just and sustainable.

### 31.5 (Re)structuring

Ecological approaches suggest the possibility of adding to and re-structuring Western outdoor education to better facilitate and guide enskilment in ways that integrate activities, landscapes, and issues into leaders' and participants' lives and communities over the long term. Taking time, enabling mentoring relationships, and facilitating access to landscapes of practice will help. To encourage enskilment, programs could also, for example, partner and connect students with locally-available and relevant organizations, clubs, and groups that engage issues, settings, and activities. Place-responsive education and following diverse socioecological stories and issues through different landscapes and environments can help draw connections to students' lives (Mikaels & Asfeldt, 2017; Mullins, 2009; Prins & Wattchow, 2020). Further, program and trip leaders could choreograph and use structural practices that respond to and build resonance and skill for diverse stories, landscapes, and purposes. Learning to dance within relations involved in modes of outdoor travel can extend the taskscape beyond wildlands and beyond the trailhead, put in, or take out of the 'adventure' activity so that, for example, routes weave together home, industrial, agricultural, and protected areas (Mullins, 2011). Such skills can include, for example, listening to and engaging communities; growing food, making equipment, hunting and gathering sustenance; thinking critically, understanding issues and reciprocity; analyzing ecological health, advocating for change, participating in politics; and media, multi-media, and storytelling. Such training, experience, and practice are intended to develop more engaged, sensitive, and active students. Indeed, lived reliance on, understandings of, and correspondence with socioecological communities might help motivate, teach, communicate, and address significant 'real world' issues and position students as active citizens. Outdoor leaders and instructors, then, can be understood as choreographing engaged learning and enskilment of students who are participating in shaping our shared world, with implications and applications for sustainability and justice.

### 31.6 Conclusion

Although often overshadowed by prominent and popular narratives related to risk, challenge, and wilderness, accounts of skilled outdoor practice also include narratives that tell of resonance with outdoor landscapes—often described as a dance (Brymer & Gray, 2009; Mullins, 2009, 2014b; Mullins & Maher, 2007; Wattchow, 2008). The concepts and ecological approach described by Ingold help make sense of, bring forward, and value such experiences of learning and enjoyment in movement as profoundly ecological. Enskilment in an outdoor activity involves learning how to inhabit and participate in dynamic settings, which become meaningful in the context of the activity, and which grow in familiarity and resonance as participants grow in ability and experience, over time and with practice and journeys. Mullins

(2011) suggested that this amounts to a sentient ecology that can be shaped and limited by structural practices. Outdoor activities enable correspondence, learning, and the mutual participation in being/becoming of students and environments, landscapes/places, and other inhabitants (Clarke & Mcphie, 2014; Mikaelis & Asfeldt, 2017; Mullins, 2009; Prins & Wattchow, 2020).

Taking up an ecological ontology, outdoor skills cross-cut the Western nature-culture dichotomy where educators and students *do* (or do not do) things pragmatically, materially, and narratively that grow and shape themselves, others, and their shared world—thus building/growing people and places along the way (intentionally, and otherwise). Such approaches are useful in developing understandings and practices within outdoor education that can respond critically and creatively to socioenvironmental realities and imperatives (Clarke & Mcphie, 2014; Mullins, 2009, 2014b; Mullins & Maher, 2007). Moreover, they also help represent, explain, and value the felt human-environment interrelationships and embodied knowledge which most skilled participants sense and display deeply and intuitively (Brymer & Gray, 2009; Mullins, 2009), which depend on an activity of some sort that often draws people to outdoor lifestyles and professions (Thomas, 2015).

Western outdoor education, recreation, and tourism traditions have lacked supporting language, concepts, and evidence with which to understand, value, situate, and critically engage with such ways of being or becoming. Drawing on examples from their teaching, Prins and Wattchow (2020) explored *enskilment* as an outdoor pedagogy. Mullins has offered three ways to help apply Ingold's theory in outdoor education: first, by taking a participatory ecological approach to interpreting and choreographing practice, overviewed in this chapter (Mullins, 2011, 2014c); second using the commonplace journey methodology for research and teaching with groups in the field (Mullins, 2014a), and third he proposed a participatory ecological ethic in response to Leave No Trace (Mullins, 2018).

Understanding skill ecologically through the mobilities paradigm helps negotiate the activity-environment tension by highlighting the foundational role of movement and skill in sensing and making places (Mullins, 2014c). Negotiating this tension in practice means responsibly recognizing and embracing embodied knowledge and participation within environments, and choreographing experiences using the skills and ways of moving that enable desired learning. Embracing skill within outdoor education may also require enabling pedagogies of longer duration and mentorship, and resisting problematic social discourses related to skill and the land (e.g. chauvinism, conquest...). Doing so may challenge some mainstream epistemologies, narratives, and program structures in outdoor education.

Ingold's notion of *enskilment* involves learning to inhabit a world while recognizing and appropriately responding to opportunities for action that contribute to making the imagined. Thus, Ingold's notions of *enskilment* and *wayfaring* help outdoor educators better understand what they already do, and its value, while at the same time open opportunities to extend, re-imagine, and alter outdoor education practice for change in diverse contexts relevant to the purposes, values, students, and communities engaged.



### Reflective Questions

1. What is it like to ‘do’ or ‘be in’ your favorite outdoor activity, what are the important elements of the taskscape? What relationships beyond the taskscape are involved? What ways do you (or could you) reciprocate and care for the surrounding and related environments and communities?
2. What are some of the dominant discourses that guide outdoor education practice in your country or region? How might a trip or experience be re-structured to alter the experience of movement and place, or resist problematic discourses?
3. What resources are available for you or your students to extend and supplement skill development and repertoires of practice for, or related to, an outdoor activity in their everyday lives? How accessible are these resources?
4. What tradition(s) of outdoor education are you a part of? Try identifying other traditions regionally, nationally or internationally; how is outdoor education differently structured and taught in these traditions, and why?
5. Try to identify the values and stories that guide your work, are they consistent with one another, and in what ways do they support and/or detract from social and environmental justice and sustainability?

### Recommended Further Reading

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# Chapter 32

## Managing Outdoor Education Fieldwork



Brendon Munge and Glyn Thomas

### 32.1 Introduction

The nature of outdoor fieldwork varies both within the field of outdoor education and across other disciplines such as geography, biology, and geology. Therefore, it is essential to clarify the nature of outdoor fieldwork, as we discuss it in this chapter. We define outdoor fieldwork as “the purposeful use of an outdoor environment to achieve educational objectives” (Munge et al., 2018, p. 2). In cross-cultural contexts, fieldwork in outdoor education may have broader descriptors such as outdoor ‘activities’, ‘experiences’, ‘pursuits’ or ‘practicals’, with educational outcomes. Outdoor educators work in a range of formal, non-formal or informal settings, including schools or other youth agencies in programs that have aims, objectives, curriculum and pedagogies in some sense – even if the organisations do not typically use these terms when describing their practice. Throughout this paper, we use the terms students and participants interchangeably to describe the beneficiaries of outdoor education programs.

Although the ideas shared in this chapter have drawn on multidisciplinary research on fieldwork across a range of disciplines, we focus on the outdoor learning components of outdoor education programs. Outdoor fieldwork may include the study of geographical, environmental, social, historical, and cultural aspects of the location, and engages individuals and groups in outdoor activities that have participants learning, working, living, and travelling in those places. Consequently, outdoor fieldwork will not always look the same in different programs. Outdoor fieldwork can involve an interaction with a chosen environment for a single activity, multiple repeat visits to one or similar locations, an extended journey through an

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area, a residential fieldwork program at a particular site, or an international field trip to a specific place. In outdoor education, the activities used to facilitate the achievement of intended learning outcomes can vary significantly in terms of their physicality, skill, risk and knowledge requirements. The key underpinning element for all outdoor fieldwork is the outdoor environment. In this chapter, we explore the role and purpose of outdoor fieldwork, the challenges outdoor fieldwork presents for organisations involved in the delivery of outdoor programs and the messiness of experiential learning outdoors. We describe the traditions of outdoor fieldwork and how they shape practice and reflect on the personal implications of outdoor fieldwork for outdoor educators.

## 32.2 The Role and Purpose of Outdoor Fieldwork

From our research across a broad spectrum of disciplines that utilise outdoor fieldwork (Munge et al., 2018), we have identified that there are three overarching purposes for outdoor fieldwork when we consider the outdoor education context:

1. to integrate theory and practice and provide real opportunities for learning in the affective, cognitive and skills domains;
2. to provide authentic learning opportunities that allow students to “explain, confirm, rationalize, and externalize understanding” (Mogk & Goodwin, 2012, p. 131). Sometimes, students will create artefacts for assessment purposes that provide evidence of engagement and learning;
3. to initiate outdoor educators into a community of practice and the development of professional identity. As identified by Mogk and Goodwin (2012), this includes developing “the accepted norms and practices related to language and discourse, selection and use of tools, ethics and values, and a common understanding of the assumptions, limitations, and uncertainties inherent in the discipline” (p. 131).

We argue that outdoor fieldwork fulfils the three purposes of education proposed by Biesta (2015). He stated that “the point of education is that students learn *something*, that they learn it for a *reason*, and that they learn it *from* someone” (p. 76). We believe that outdoor fieldwork represents an opportunity for students to learn in an appropriate context. This authenticity is not always possible in sessions conducted indoors. Applying Biesta’s ideas, the reason the experience occurs outdoors is that the environment provides the best place to learn. The ‘something’ is the blending of theory and practice in an authentic manner *in situ*. The students learn hands-on, face the complexities of working with others in an environment that is variable and with a focus on safety pertinent to their wellbeing. The student learns from outdoor educators who have the skills, knowledge and experience to lead and teach safely, using learner-centred approaches that are responsive to, and respectful of, the environment and cultural traditions.

In 2015, Thomas conducted research with outdoor education teacher educators and proposed that outdoor fieldwork was the signature pedagogy of outdoor education. Shulman (2005) argued that a signature pedagogy enables students to be inducted into the critical aspects of a profession, which primarily includes the capacity to think, perform and act with integrity. Shulman outlined that disciplines can utilise a signature pedagogy to teach emerging professionals the theoretical knowledge and enable them to develop the necessary skills required to work in their chosen professional context. Furthermore, emerging professionals must be educated on how the practice of their discipline aligns with theories and accepted codes of practice. Thomas (2015) highlighted that outdoor fieldwork within outdoor education provides a critical contribution to student learning as it ensures active participation, makes students responsible for their learning, which diminishes aspects of student passivity and provides elements of enculturation into the profession. In an outdoor education context, it is the engagement in long or short journeys, the necessity to cook, set up tents, paddle your craft, be confronted by the weather, and monitor the group's interactions. Outdoor fieldwork also provides induction and enculturation into the language and norms of outdoor education, the mentoring and appraisal of behaviour, the development of community and the enmeshing of individuals into the fabric of the traditions, norms, ethics and culture of being an outdoor educator. The outdoor fieldwork that a student participates in critically shapes the outdoor educator they become.

As the signature pedagogy of the outdoor education profession, outdoor fieldwork exposes emerging outdoor educators to many of the challenges of designing, organising, and facilitating outdoor fieldwork in organisations. The effective transition from being a participant in outdoor fieldwork to becoming the leader or teacher of outdoor fieldwork requires an understanding of some of the challenges that outdoor fieldwork creates for and within organisations.

### **32.3 The Challenge of Outdoor Fieldwork in Organisations**

It can be disappointing for outdoor educators to find out that not everyone in their organisation shares their belief in the value of outdoor fieldwork and what it offers in terms of student learning. Some senior leaders or administrators will not always appreciate or accept the justification we offer for taking students out of class for multiple days utilising activities that can be expensive, and which expose the students and the organisation to risk. The following section addresses some of these challenges and how outdoor educators may respond.

The cost of outdoor fieldwork can be problematic for financial administrators within organisations. Outdoor fieldwork can be expensive because of the required staff to student ratios, transport costs to outdoor fieldwork sites, the provision or hire of specialist equipment, the employment of skilled professionals from external organisations, or the maintenance of skills by staff (Munge et al., 2018). The simplification of outdoor programs to reduce some of these costs is one potential means of

reducing costs. For example, a program could focus on bushwalking alone rather than on multiple activities, or the program may focus on local environments to reduce transport costs. There are usually ways that the cost of fieldwork can be reduced without compromising learning outcomes. However, cost-cutting measures must be mindful of safety and the realisation of outcomes. It is important for an outdoor educator to be balanced in considering the cost of their program, and to discuss with administrators that the scrutiny of their costs should be held in comparison with other school-based activities including sports equipment/teams, laboratory supplies, musical equipment for example.

The risk and safety management of outdoor fieldwork presents multiple layers of concern for outdoor educators. The time required to prepare documentation, site check locations for safety issues, negotiate with various stakeholders including managers, local area authorities and government bodies to ensure compliance for the activity to be run, places a considerable burden on the individual tasked with the organisation of the outdoor fieldwork program (Dallat, 2009). This burden is higher when senior leaders and administrators do not understand how good safety and risk management strategies can be used to mitigate outdoor fieldwork risks. Outdoor educators use activities that seem risky to outsiders, but in practice, the risk levels may be comparable to, or even less than, those in other more common activities that do not attract similar scrutiny.

The issue of time presents challenges for outdoor educators. It includes concerns about time away from other activities or study for students, time in developing the logistics for outdoor fieldwork programs, unpaid time running outdoor fieldwork programs, and time that is not available to undertake other tasks. In schools, for example, the outdoor education teacher can find they are spending time at nights, on weekends and in holiday periods running preparation activities for students or the outdoor fieldwork programs themselves to avoid clashes with timetabling and taking students out of classes that are perceived to hold higher value (Munge et al., 2018). This arrangement of outdoor fieldwork on weekends and in holidays may be what is necessary to establish an outdoor fieldwork program, but it has implications for that outdoor educator and the valuing of the program within the school. The management of outdoor fieldwork can become all-consuming for the outdoor educator, to the detriment of other tasks that may well aid career progression and work-life balance.

An understanding of some of these challenges within an organisation will help outdoor educators to improve their programs. It is crucial to take a step back to look at the organisational environment and culture and therefore comprehend what outdoor fieldwork can achieve. Our task is to build organisational literacy regarding outdoor fieldwork. However, it is not only a crowded curriculum, and risk aversion that creates obstacles for outdoor educators, barriers to innovative and effective outdoor fieldwork can also come from those inside the profession.

## 32.4 Challenging the Traditions of Outdoor Fieldwork

*“But this is how we have always done it.”* This statement can be a troubling catch cry for educational, administrative, organisational and even safety reasons. Some outdoor education colleagues in our organisations may resist change in unhelpful ways. Some traditions are difficult to relinquish, some program sites have been utilised for a long time by specific people. Senior outdoor educators may act as gatekeepers to these traditions and locations. Emerging outdoor educators should expect resistance to new program ideas due to the embedded traditions within their school or organisation. Overcoming these barriers may require extensive negotiation, high levels of planning and personal organisation, clear arguments for changes, and generous doses of both humility and persistence.

Impactful outdoor fieldwork is not always best served by doing what we have always done. Rightfully so, educational practices change, safety strategies evolve, development of equipment occurs, and community expectations change. The educational psychologists Gagné and White (1978) argued that outdoor fieldwork provided an individual with learning that was active and memorable within a defined context and was likely to lead to better retention and understanding of the concepts and skills involved. Gagné and White provided some boundaries to this statement, and they argued that participating in fieldwork is not sufficient to guarantee the permanence of learning. There must be appropriate teaching and learning strategies used to facilitate the learning process and the realisation of curriculum learning objectives. Some approaches to outdoor fieldwork have become ritualised and show little evidence of curriculum innovation, adaptations to changes in student context and characteristics, and an understanding of emerging pedagogies.

Reflection on safety practices has been key to improving practice. In Australia, there have been a number of research projects that have sought to improve the understanding of accidents in outdoor education fieldwork. Brookes (2019) has taken the approach of studying documents available in the public domain to understand fatalities better. Research at the University of the Sunshine Coast (Dallat et al., 2018) has taken a systems-theory approach to analyse accounts of outdoor education incidents submitted to a national incident database by practitioners. Despite the differences between these two approaches, the recommendations are similar: diligence is required at all levels of an organisation to make sure that safety practices eliminate or reduce the risks to student safety while participating in outdoor fieldwork. Both approaches have encouraged outdoor educators to: learn from past incidents; avoid finding simplistic solutions that fail to acknowledge the complexity of past incidents; and be vigilant in the pursuit of safer practices.

As organisations assess the cost and time associated with outdoor fieldwork, there has been a growing sense that augmented and virtual reality could provide students with experiences similar to authentic outdoor fieldwork but without the need to leave the buildings or campus. Technology innovation has led to an increase in the use of virtual, remote and augmented outdoor fieldwork (Thomas & Munge, 2017). These methods provide virtual access to sites not previously accessed due to

risks (Stokes et al., 2012), aid access for students with disabilities (Healey et al., 2002), and offer the opportunity to visit unique sites with restricted access. Hills and Thomas (2020) and Thomas and Munge (2017) critique technology and its role and use in outdoor education. They identify issues of overuse or reliance on technology to the detriment of learning. Virtual fieldwork does not necessarily help students to understand the characteristics of the environment associated with the weather, terrain and other natural features. Hills and Thomas (2020) and Thomas and Munge (2017) propose that the use of technology should be aligned with, and support, the educational purpose of the outdoor fieldwork.

There has been a growing body of literature in outdoor education that highlights social justice issues in outdoor fieldwork. The ‘whiteness’ of outdoor education is painfully apparent to anyone with the courage to look. In many cases, outdoor education fieldwork has not considered Indigenous ways of experiencing and knowing places. Female authors and researchers have increasingly expressed concerns about gender inequities in outdoor education (Warren & Breunig, 2019). People with disabilities also continue to experience discrimination when it comes to the way outdoor fieldwork is designed and facilitated. A key issue that has been identified by Warren and Breunig (2019) is that of intersectionality. In this respect, the interconnected nature of a participant’s social and political identities such as race, class, gender and sexuality often create overlapping and interdependent systems of disadvantage and discrimination.

## 32.5 The Messiness of Outdoor Fieldwork

For outdoor educators, it is rewarding to facilitate experiences that are well organised, effective and efficient – where learning outcomes are realised and demonstrated through pre-determined assessment tasks. However, that is not always the reality in outdoor fieldwork. For example, differences in weather can affect group experiences positively or negatively. While it is appropriate to aim for good organisation, the achievement of skills, and attainment of knowledge, we must also embrace the educationally ‘messy’ work of outdoor fieldwork (Thomas & Munge, 2020). Learning is not always tidy, and outdoor educators must develop the patience to allow students to grapple with learning new content and accept that not every experience will be a peak experience, and that not every learning activity will produce intended learning outcomes. By its very nature, experiential learning requires us to be agile with, and respond to, the uncertainty of student-centred learning. However, we do need to have an awareness of when to step in to be more directive and lead components of the learning journey more autocratically. We also believe that outdoor fieldwork experiences must have a level of ‘agreeableness’ (Dewey, 1938, p. 27) and engage students in a way that makes them want to continue learning.

As outdoor educators, our ability to embrace uncertainty and messiness is easier to talk about than do. It requires a high level of self-awareness for facilitators not to become disillusioned in the search for perfection (Thomas, 2019). It may be



perceived as embarrassing to arrive late with a group, or to allow your group to get lost. Nevertheless, sometimes this is exactly what a good experiential learning program will do: allow students to experience the consequences of their actions. If emerging outdoor educators always rush in to ‘save the day’ and help their students to overcome adversity, we are not allowing them to own their experience and the outcomes. This acceptance of the messiness of outdoor fieldwork requires outdoor educators to have a keen commitment to the philosophy and values of experiential learning, and an understanding of when our practice is slipping out of alignment with how we want to lead or educate. We encourage outdoor educators to be intentional and focus on making sure that the learning activities they design and facilitate effectively contribute to the aims of the program while taking a flexible and reflexive approach to implementation.

### **32.6 Personal Challenges of Outdoor Fieldwork for Outdoor Educators**

Outdoor fieldwork allows outdoor educators to be outdoors, practising a key aspect of their professional identity through engaging with students and crafting authentic experiences. However, sometimes the working conditions can create personal challenges for outdoor educators. Research by Thomas (2001) on the working experiences of 225 outdoor educators in Australia found that “long work hours, time away from home, and difficulties maintaining relationships were commonly experienced problems for many respondents” (p. 23). In this research, Thomas encouraged employers and employees to develop a better understanding of the issue of burnout and preventative strategies to avoid it. There needs to be more career planning to help outdoor educators pursue long-term occupational aspirations.

Outdoor fieldwork, and especially journey-based programs, can present issues for outdoor educators related to their nutrition and health. Munge et al. (2019) studied the nutritional practices of outdoor educators working on journey-based programs in Australia. They found that the repetitive nature of menus, lack of choice in meal provision, deficiencies in the nutritional value of some menu choices, and inadequate provision for alternate dietary requirements each presented issues for outdoor educators’ nutritional health. If there was inadequate food provision or dietary requirements were not met, outdoor educators often had to supplement their meals with food brought from home, or they opted to go without. Another area of concern was food safety when cooking with and for large groups of participants. Attempting to maintain appropriate hygiene on programs and feeling comfortable with eating meals prepared by others also raised concerns for outdoor educators’ health and wellbeing.

Managers and leaders in schools and organisations that use outdoor fieldwork have a responsibility to support the health and wellbeing of their staff by developing an understanding of the personal challenges outdoor educators face. The research

mentioned above by Thomas also interviewed a small sample of ten managers in Australia and found a range of strategies in use to build supportive working communities (Thomas, 2002). Each organisation developed strategies to help employees thrive, but there was no overarching solution to all the challenges. Anecdotally, recent discussions on social media in Australia suggest that for some outdoor educators, concerns about inadequate financial remuneration persist – particularly for those outdoor educators working in not-for-profit organisations.

## 32.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed the role and purpose of outdoor fieldwork, and outdoor fieldwork challenges at both the organisational and personal level. We have argued that outdoor fieldwork is a critical component of effective outdoor education. However, outdoor fieldwork also presents numerous challenges for outdoor educators. We encourage emerging outdoor educators to think critically about the value of hands-on, experiential learning in the outdoors so that the vital contribution of outdoor fieldwork is not lost.

### Reflective Questions

1. Reflect on the outdoor fieldwork experiences you have had. What were the elements that made them memorable and engaging? What enabled learning and prompted you to engage in similar activities again?
2. Reflect on an outdoor fieldwork program that you have experienced and utilise Biesta's concepts of a good education to discern: What was the something to learn, what was the reason for learning it, and why were the people chosen to teach you?
3. What challenges are there when constructing and facilitating outdoor fieldwork for cohorts from diverse backgrounds? How can we be responsive to diversity when developing outdoor fieldwork for different student cohorts?
4. Write a short (500 words) case study on an outdoor fieldwork location considering the place-based knowledge linked to environmental, activity, safety and stakeholder components of the location and ask someone you respect for feedback.
5. What are some strategies that may help develop the knowledge of outdoor fieldwork literacy within your current or future organisation?

### Recommended Further Reading

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# Correction to: Worldviews, Environments and Education



Kathleen Pleasants and Noel Gough

**Correction to:**  
**Chapter 3 in: G. Thomas et al. (eds.), *Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education, International Explorations in Outdoor and Environmental Education 9*,**  
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The original version of this book was published with an error in Chapter 3 wherein the line should read, “We are mindful that the artefacts that comprise our views of reality and nature are socially constructed and do not exist independently of human agency and activity” instead of “... do exist independently of human agency and activity”. This has been corrected now.

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The updated version of this chapter can be found at  
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